

October 2016

# How Schools Enact Equity Policies: A Case Study of Social Justice Leadership

Allison L. Segeren

*The University of Western Ontario*

Supervisor

Goli Rezai-Rashti

*The University of Western Ontario*

Graduate Program in Education

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree in Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education mandated that all school boards in Ontario develop and implement equity education policies, as specified in *Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools* (2009). This dissertation documents the enactment of Ontario's Equity Strategy in one district school board and three schools in Ontario.

Analysis of education policy in local contexts must account for the influence of globalized policy discourses including performativity, accountability, and marketization. Policy sociology and policy enactment theory served as a conceptual framework from which to understand the everyday actions of school board staff and school leaders engaged in equity policy work. Through a qualitative, case study approach, interviews were conducted with six staff members at the school board and four school leaders to document their work enacting the equity policy.

Findings revealed that a historical commitment to social justice and an organizational unit devoted to equity work facilitated the enactment of the equity policy at the board. The tenacious commitments of social justice-oriented school leaders made equity work possible at the school level. The analysis of policy documents and the case study at the school board and within schools illustrated an instrumental framing of equity, intrinsically tied to educational outcomes, embedded in student performance indicators. Ontario's Equity Strategy is a symbolic policy that lacked accountability mechanisms and adequate resources necessary for systemic enactment. These policy barriers drastically narrowed the possibility for equity work.

**Keywords:** equity; education policy; enactment; Ontario; outcomes; leadership; social justice; context; policy entrepreneurs; policy critics

## Acknowledgements

Before entering the Faculty of Education at Western University, I searched the faculty profiles for an academic match. I found so much more than an academic mentor in Dr. Goli Rezai-Rashti. First and foremost, as a supervisor, your expertise and mentorship have brought this dissertation to completion. But more so, we have cultivated a relationship as colleagues. From your guidance on scholarship applications, to conducting interviews together, and opportunities to co-publish, I've found my voice and stride as an academic in large part to your guidance and support.

I must personally thank Dr. Wayne Martino for his keen eye and insightful comments during each stage of the dissertation. I've been inspired by your depth of knowledge, creativity as a researcher, and unbridled enthusiasm as a teacher. Since stepping foot into your Qualitative Methods course, I count myself lucky to be one of your students.

A special thank you to the Graduate Office at the Faculty of Education. To Melanie and Alyson: you made being a graduate student at the Faculty of Education infinitely easier, always available to answer questions and solve problems at the drop of a hat. All future students at the Faculty of Education are in the most capable hands.

Finally, my deepest gratitude to the participants in this study who shared their time and experiences to make this thesis possible. I am honored at the brief but raw conversations that we shared. I hope I have done your story justice. The schools you work in are better places with you around.

## **Dedication**

This thesis is dedicated to my family.

To my partner Karl: Thank-you for your never ending support and love. With you at my side, I can accomplish the unimaginable.

To my daughter Fiona: I come to the end of this journey as a mother. You make me believe that another world is possible.

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is introductory. A description of the topic of the research, including the purpose statement and guiding research questions are presented. Second, by drawing on current literature in the field of policy sociology and equity in education and situating the study in the context of neoliberal restructuring of education in Ontario, the significance of the study is rationalized. This chapter concludes with the conceptual framework that guides the study, drawing on critical theories of policy as text and discourse, policy enactment, policy as numbers, and Nancy Fraser's theorizing on the causes and remedies for social injustice.

### Topic

In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education mandated that all school boards in Ontario develop and implement equity education policies, as specified in *Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools (2009)*. It is important to investigate how PPM No. 119 (2009) is being enacted in a select school board in Ontario. Policy enactment helps explain what Ball (2001) refers to as creative non-implementation; that is, how some policies are acted on and applied to practice while some policies are sidelined. Furthermore, policy has both intended and unintended consequences and policy enactment studies illuminate the often neglected and unintended consequences of policy processes.

A wave of educational reform has been circling the globe since the early 1990s and has left much critical scholarship in its wake. The academic literature in the field of policy sociology in education has exhaustively documented the negative impacts of educational reform on educational equity, both in policy and practice, in states and regions around the

world. Education sociologists have documented the pernicious effects of standardization, high-stakes testing, and school choice on teachers and students, particularly marginalized and disadvantaged students. As we enter a period of post-standardization in education, schooling systems around the world are gravitating towards the use of performance data as the gold standard against which to hold individuals (students, teachers, principals) and systems (schools, districts) accountable. Lingard, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) summarize the key aspects of this neoliberal form of accountability, arguing that “comparative performance measures have been constructed as central to a vertical, one-way, top-down, one-dimensional form of accountability with restrictive and reductive effects on the work of principals and teachers, and on the school experiences of students and their parents” (p. 544). The testing regimes of international organizations, most notably the OECD’s PISA, now exist alongside national and regional testing systems, resulting in a global panopticism (Lingard, Martino, & Rezai-Rashti, 2013). According to Novoa and Yariv-Marhsal (2003) governance through comparison means that ‘the national eye’ governs through ‘the global eye’. According to these authors, “the attention to *global* benchmarks and indicators serves to promote *national* policies in a field (education), that is imagined as a place where national sovereignty can still be exercised” (p. 426). The rescaling of accountability, and the use of numbers as a tactic of governmentality, has led to a re-articulation of equity in education.

It is within this comparative context that the emergence of exemplary education systems, such as Ontario, is possible. Most troublesome is the recent linking of equity initiatives to academic excellence. One need look no further than recent OECD reports that champion Ontario as a *high-quality-high-equity* education system, and a model of educational reform (OECD, 2011). This study explores how neoliberal forms of accountability, intimately

ties to the growth and uses of data for evidence-based policymaking, are shifting conceptualizations of educational equity and the implications for policy enactment as a result. Such performance driven measures of equity are problematic in so far as they “set aside considerations of how other important socio-economic and demographic variables interlock and overlap, with significant consequences for certain visible minority populations – both boys and girls” (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013, p. 594). This study provides a disruptive case study of the Ontario context needed to dispel the common sense notion of Ontario as a model of success and the propagation of *high-quality-high-equity* model of educational reform.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to provide insights into the enactment of *PPM No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools (2009)* in one district school board in Ontario. This policy enactment case study explores the ways in which the provincially mandated equity and inclusive education policy statement is being enacted in one district school board and three local schools in Ontario.

### **Research Questions**

The following questions guide the study:

- In what ways do socio-cultural, historical, economic, and political contextual factors mediate the ways in which school boards in Ontario enact equity policies?
- How do policy actors enact equity policies in specific contexts given the constraints of human and material resources?
- What philosophical conceptions of equity are embedded in the Ontario Ministry of Education’s equity education policy and the school board’s locally-developed equity education policy?

## Significance

The neoliberal orthodoxy in education has resulted in a subjugation and marginalization of policies and practices framed by the values of social justice and equity (Grimaldi, 2012). According to Grimaldi:

neoliberal discourses of human capital, individualization, school improvement, performativity and standardization impedes any contextualized, multidimensional and critical approach to social exclusion as well as the pursuing of any egalitarian outcomes, be they (re)distributional, cultural or associational outcomes. (p. 1131)

Neoliberal globalization extols the virtues of excellence, efficiency, and accountability as important educational values, resulting in a marginalization of equity considerations. It is not that equity policies do not exist; rather, their underlying assumptions, objectives, and implementation plans have shifted. This study documents the re-articulation of equity in neoliberal times. Given the incompatibility between neoliberalism and social justice in education, it is increasingly important to document how further neoliberal reform of education can be resisted and subverted.

Policy sociology recognizes that the impacts of neoliberal globalization on educational equity are not homogenous. The subjugation and marginalization of equity and social justice discourses in education policy is mediated by local contexts. Ozga (1987) explains that policy sociology in education should aim to connect the macro-context of neoliberal restructuring to the micro-context of the schools. Similarly, Lingard and Rawolle (2011) call on critical policy analysis to “research and theorise this emergent global education policy field and the way it affects national policy and policy processes” (p. 490). This study contributes to the field of policy sociology in education by exploring how neoliberal restructuring is affecting the policy discourses of equity and inclusion and re-articulating their meaning in numbers in Ontario’s education policy landscape.

The enactment of policies introduced by national and provincial governments is mediated at the local level, influenced by local histories, geographies, cultures, and politics; “implementations, interpretations, and the practices at the local level [are] dependent on the complex histories, cultures and agencies of individuals present in each specific local setting” (Rezai-Rashti, 2003, p. 3). As Rezai-Rashti (2003) argues, “the task ahead is to find out how these reforms are practiced at the local level and their implications for students, teachers, administrators, and for those who are actively seeking an education system based on the principles of equity and social justice” (p. 3). This research addresses this call by exploring how school board personnel and school leaders enact equity policies in the context of increased pressures towards neoliberal reform. This study connects the macro-level analysis of neoliberal restructuring and related policy initiatives and texts at the Ontario Ministry of Education to the everyday work of school leaders. Social justice-oriented school leaders are important agents working towards greater equity in schools (DeMatthews, 2015; Furman, 2012). The re-articulation of equity education policy in Ontario has implications for their work. The field of social justice leadership is nascent with research forays into the dispositions, experiences, and challenges that school leaders face as social justice leaders. There is very little research that explores the impacts of neoliberal policy discourses and the demands of performativity and accountability on school leaders, especially those seeking to lead for social justice. This study also makes a critical contribution to the educational leadership field by focusing on the experiences of school leaders to understand what enables and constrains their social justice work in schools during a period of neoliberal reform.

## Neoliberal Globalization and the Subjugation of Equity

Policy processes are context-dependent; hence, it is necessary to begin by describing the macro-context of education policy making in Ontario. Specific attention is paid to the impacts of neoliberal restructuring on Ontario's education system under the leadership of Conservative Premier Mike Harris (1995-2003) and Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty (2003-2013) and to the history of the development and implementation of equity education policies in Ontario. The discussion of the contemporary and concurrent reform movements in education must be situated within the context of neoliberalism, what Rizvi & Lingard (2010) argue is the dominant social imaginary of globalization. Neoliberal globalization "promotes markets over the state and regulation and individual advancement over the collective good and common well-being" (Lingard, 2010, p. 141). Neoliberal globalization is constructing what Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue is a global policy field in education: "the processes that now frame education policy are often constituted globally and beyond the nation-state, even if they are still articulated in nationally specific terms" (p. 3). While nation states are ultimately responsible for developing and implementing education policies and running national education systems, we must recognize the pressures of neoliberal globalization in shaping the types of education policies and pedagogies that are available to the architects of national education systems. The global policy field in education is resulting in a certain degree of policy convergence around performativity, accountability, standardization, assessment, choice, and market mechanisms; however, convergence is not homogeneity, and policy processes, though globally informed, are also mediated by national and local politics, histories, and cultures.

## Neoliberal Reform: Ontario Style

The globalizing policy discourses described above first began to exert significant influence in Ontario during the Conservative provincial government of Mike Harris under the banner of the *Common Sense Revolution* which “emphasized the reduction and rationalization of education expenditures, increased government control of teachers’ working conditions and compensation, and quality control through increased accountability for local spending and student learning outcomes in relation to centrally prescribed goals and standards” (Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2006, p. 51). Policy priorities in the 1990s reflected the neoliberal reform agenda characterized by reduced government spending, privatization, and increased accountability for public services. The *Common Sense Revolution* in education took shape through key pieces of legislation including *Bill 104: Fewer School Boards Act* (1997), *Bill 160: The Education Quality Improvement Act*, (1997), and *Bill 74: The Educational Accountability Act* (2000). As a whole, these pieces of legislation marked the solidification of the neoliberal agenda for education in Ontario, characterized by a focus on standardization of curriculum and assessment practices, the amalgamation of school boards, and the centralization of governance with ultimate power and control residing at the Ministry of Education (Rezai-Rashti, 2003, 2009). Joshee (2007) describes the tenure of the Conservative government as the “bleakest period in recent history” characterized by “tax cuts, less spending on education, educational reform, and an end to policies such as employment equity” (Joshee, 2007, p. 171).

In 2003, with the election of a Liberal Government, the neoliberal reform agenda was reinforced through various policies and initiatives. Rather than reversing the neoliberal restructuring of education in Ontario, policies and initiatives introduced by the Liberal



government further entrenched neoliberalism. Rezai-Rashti (2009) argues that there have been “no substantial structural changes in the everyday practices of schooling. The reorganization of the education system institutionalized by the former Conservative government is now so entrenched that the potential for any substantial changes to the system are limited” (p. 318). However, public opinion and international organizations are far less critical in their appraisals of former Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty’s reign in Ontario. Colloquially referred as the Education Premier, McGuinty’s education agenda focused on student achievement and increasing graduation rates through programs such as Student Success and Specialist High Skills Major. According to Charles Pascal, in an editorial for the Toronto Star in January 2013, “McGuinty’s education accomplishments are different but truly outstanding, with more than 90,000 additional students graduating from high school, over 125,000 more elementary students reading and writing at a higher level of proficiency and full-day kindergarten for 250,000 kids to boot” (Pascal, 2013). Positive reviews of McGuinty’s commitment to education between 2003 and 2013 are found in the academic literature as well as the headlines. Ontario has been portrayed internationally as a province with a *high-quality-high-equity* education system. In practical terms, this means that academic excellence has not been achieved at the expense of equity or inclusion (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012; Luke, 2011). Despite these celebratory discourses of academic excellence and social equity “current policies of educational restructuring have significantly reduced equity activities and the institutional mechanisms to adequately address equity issues” (Rezai-Rashti, 2003, p. 4). The neoliberal accountability paradigm has led to a narrow framing of what counts as evidence of equity and the construction of equity as an instrumental policy value to increase student achievement and close achievement gaps (Martino & Rezai-Rashti,

2012, 2013). It is necessary to interrupt the “celebratory discourses of equity and multiculturalism that have come to characterize the ways in which Ontario is currently being marketed, based on its performance on PISA measures, as a high quality world-class education system” (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2013, p. 606). This research responds to this call.

### **The History of Equity Education Policy in Ontario (1993-2009)**

Despite differences in the political ideologies of successive conservative, liberal, and social democratic governments, the evolution of education policy has been remarkably consistent; according to Anderson and Ben Jaafar “all the governments, for example, initiated and supported policies that have led to increased accountability through curriculum, assessment and reporting of student progress, provincial testing of student performance, and regulation of teacher professionalism” (p. 3). While the influence of neoliberal globalization on education policy in Ontario has remained consistent, the domain of equity education policy has been characterized by extreme fluctuation between the New Democratic Party (NDP), Conservative, and Liberal governments. A historical analysis of equity education policy in Ontario illustrates that policy divergence, more so than convergence, characterizes the Ontario experience.

In 1993, Ontario’s first ever social-democratic government, the NDP, developed an antiracism policy formally titled *PPM No. 119: Development and Implementation of School Board Policies on Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity* (1993). This policy mandated that school boards develop and implement their own antiracism and ethnocultural equity education policies. PPM No. 119 (1993) took a systemic policy approach to educational equity addressing different areas of institutional functioning, including “curriculum, learning

materials, student assessment and placement, hiring and staffing, race relations, and community relations” (Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2007, p. 9). To support school boards with policy development but also to make them accountable for equity work, the Ministry also established an Equity Unit (Rezai-Rashti, 2003). The tenure of the NDP government was short-lived and their government was overturned in 1995, replaced with the Progressive Conservative government of Mike Harris. This change in government resulted in a complete overhaul of policies and programs related to equity; according to Anderson and Ben Jaafar (2007),

the Conservatives shut down an Anti-Racism Secretariat created by the NDP, and its counterpart in the Ministry of Education, abandoned policies aimed at increasing gender equity in administrative posts in education and deleted references to pro-equity goals from future curriculum policy documents. (p. 14)

Rezai-Rashti (2003) argues that the election of the Progressive Conservative Party in 1995 had dire consequences for PPM No. 119; “the monitoring of the boards’ implementation of the policy on Anti-racism and Ethnocultural Equity ‘just died’” (p. 6).

In 2009, under a Liberal government, the Ontario Ministry of Education updated and re-released PPM No. 119 (1993), now titled *PPM No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools (2009)*. The Ontario Ministry of Education stated that “recent immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, boys, and students with special needs” are at risk for lower levels of educational opportunity and achievement (OME, 2009c, p. 1). Ironically, the updated equity and inclusive education policy is inclusive of a wide range of different student groups, reflecting an approach to social justice rooted in a cultural politics of recognition without adequate resources for implementation or mechanisms of economic redistribution. Dumas (2009) is critical of this recognitive approach that celebrates diversity rather than interrogating

structures of power that are unequal: “the celebration of difference becomes synonymous with, or the catalyst for, social justice, rather than a crucial component” (Dumas, p. 90).

Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, and Martino (2016) argue that Ontario’s equity policy represents a case of misrecognition: “in focusing on identity politics and specific groups as disadvantaged by the education system, the policy is able to completely sidestep deeper, more controversial issues of wealth and power redistribution” (p. 12).

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework for this study draws on a number of diverse but related theories. Ball’s (1993) concept of the *toolbox* as a set of “diverse concepts and theories” is employed in this study. Ball argues that policies are complex social issues and that analysis of them often requires more than one theory. He explains that “the complexity and scope of policy analysis – from an interest in the workings of the state to a concern with contexts of practice and the distributional outcomes of policy – precludes the possibility of successful single theory explanations” (p. 10). For the purpose of this study, I draw on theories in the field of policy sociology in education advanced primarily by Jenny Ozga, Bob Lingard, and Stephen Ball. From their perspective, policy has textual as well as discursive meanings and enactment is understood as being context-dependent. More specifically, this study also draws on theories of governmentality and policy as numbers articulated by Nikolas Rose to conceptualize the ways in which policy realities are increasingly represented through numbers. Finally, to theorize the philosophical conceptions of equity that are embedded within policy texts the political philosophy of Nancy Fraser and her framework of social justice are also used.

### **Policy Sociology**

The conceptual framework for this study draws on many theoretical approaches within the domain of policy sociology. There are numerous theoretical approaches to policy analysis that have each developed in their own unique geographical, historical, political, and social contexts. The policy sociology tradition emerged in the United Kingdom during the Thatcher years and was a response to the general marginalization of and disdain towards the sociology of education.

Policy processes and analyses are never value-neutral activities (Ozga, 1987; Prunty, 1985). On the contrary, policy texts represent the interests and validate the knowledge of some, but also, policy processes are accessible to and work favourably for some. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010) summarize, policy sociology considers “who are the winners and losers with regard to any given policy and whose interests the policy serves” (p. 52). Policy sociology, then, is overtly political, seeking to interrogate the exclusionary nature of policy processes. Politics infiltrate policy processes at every stage of the policy cycle from problem recognition and agenda-setting to the development of a particular policy text and ultimately its implementation and evaluation. Policies do not just flow from one stage of the policy cycle to another; rather “policy is developed in a more disjointed, less rational and more political fashion” (Taylor et al., 1997, p. 25). The ‘critical’ in critical policy analysis speaks to the need to problematize and deconstruct the taken-for-grantedness of policy texts and processes. An important task for the critical policy analyst is to interrogate how policy problems are constructed, by who, and what policy solutions are proposed as a result. An alternative social imaginary of education in a globalized world requires engagement with critical social theory that is capable of “critiqu[ing] domination and subordination, promot[ing] emancipatory

interests, and combin[ing] social and cultural analysis with interpretation, critique, and social explanation” (Anyon, 2009, p. 2). This study illuminates how policy processes might support instead of undermine the values of social justice.

### **Policy as Text and Discourse**

It is impossible to dispute that policy texts exist. In a banal sense, policies are written texts, interpreted by their readers (Ball, 1993). Ball (1993) elaborates on this simplistic distinction arguing that policies are “representations which are encoded in complex ways...and decoded in complex ways” (1993, p. 11). Encoding refers to the political struggles and compromises that characterize the production of any policy text from problem identification to the proposing of policy solutions and in the actual wording of the policy text. But, the authors of policy texts are not in a position of control over the meanings that will be attached to their texts. The process of decoding acknowledges the role of the histories, experiences, and resources of various actors who interpret texts and attach meaning to them. Processes of *interpretation*, an initial reading and making sense of the policy, and *translation*, putting texts into practice, are fertile ground for struggles over the meanings that will be attached to policy texts (Ball, Maguire, Braun & Hoskins, 2011a,b). To capture the complexity of decoding, Ball (1993) argues that policies are “contested and changing, always in a state of ‘becoming’, of ‘was’ and ‘never was’ and not quite” (p. 11).

The strength of Ball’s definition of *policy as text* is its ability to underscore the relevancy of the actions taken by policy actors and stakeholders – an influence that is often sidelined in more traditional, state centric definitions of policy. In underscoring the ability of actors to interpret, translate, reconstruct, and negotiate during the policy process, Ball accounts for the agency of policy actors in policy processes. However, policy is more than

just a text. Ball (1994) reminds us that “policies do not normally tell you what to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed, or particular goals or outcomes are set” (p. 19). Policies are able to strategically maneuver people, resources, ideas, and values to get their work done by operating as and through discourse.

Policy as discourse highlights the role of political struggle in placing specific issues on the policy agenda, in formulating possible solutions, and deciding on a specific course of action for implementation. Foucault investigated the nexus between power and knowledge, what he termed discourse. According to Foucault, “there are manifold relations of power which permeate, characterise and constitute the social body, and these relations of power cannot themselves be established, consolidated nor implemented without the production, accumulation, circulation and functioning of a discourse” (1980, p. 93). Through discourse we can understand how knowledge comes to be regarded as truth and how these truths govern us as individuals and as a society through normalization. More simply, discourse is about “what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak when, where and with what authority” (Ball, 1993, p. 14). According to Ball, to understand how policy processes work in practice requires an appreciation of the ways in which policies “exercise power through a *production of ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’, as discourses*” (1994, p. 14).

Foucauldian accounts of power inform Ball’s understanding of how policy operates on and through policy actors. Foucault (1977) formulated a theorization of power that paid tribute to the productive, relational, and circulating elements of power as opposed to traditional understandings of power as coercion, repression, or exclusion. Foucault was adamant that power is productive: “power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains

of objects and rituals of truth” (p. 194). According to Ball, “policies typically posit a restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations, so that different people can and cannot do different things” (1993, p. 13). Therefore, enactment processes cannot be conceptualized by constraint or agency alone, but by examining the changing relationship between the two. A discursive definition of policy illuminates how policy is productive.

Education policies produce and position subjects; according to Ball (1993):

**We are** the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows. We do not ‘know’ what we say, we ‘are’ what we say and do. In these terms we are spoken by policies, we take up positions constructed for us within policies. (p. 14)

### **Policy Enactment**

The relationship between policy and practice is clearly a complex one. While somewhat artificial, Ball (1994), explains the distinction between text and practice:

Policy is both text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete in so far as they relate to or map on to the ‘wild confusion’ of local practice. Policies are crude and simple. Practice is sophisticated, contingent, complex and unstable. (pp. 10-11)

Enactment goes beyond implementation, beyond the one-directional flow from text to practice to account for the broad role of context but also the localized interpretations and translations made by policy actors (Ball, Maguire, Braun & Hoskins, 2011a; Braun, Ball, Maguire, & Hoskins, 2011). In their research on policy enactment in secondary schools, Ball and his colleagues argue that enactment “involves creative processes of interpretation and recontextualisation – that is, the translation of texts into action and the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices” (2012, p. 3). Describing enactment, Ball and his colleagues argue that policies are “interpreted and translated and reconstructed and remade in different but similar settings, where local resources, material and human, and diffuse sets of



discourses and values are deployed in a complex and hybrid process of enactment” (p. 6). Processes of enactment are never as straight-forward as policy texts and politicians would have us believe. In contrast, Ball argues that “policies are always incomplete in so far as they relate to or map on to the ‘wild profusion’ of local practice. Policies are crude and simple. Practice is sophisticated, contingent, complex and unstable” (1994, p. 10). Policy enactment helps explain what Ball (2001) calls creative non-implementation; that is, “how it is that certain policies, or strands within policies, become picked up and worked on, why they are selected and who selects them and what alternatives are discarded along the way” (p. 4). Policy has both intended and unintended consequences and theories of policy enactment illuminate the often neglected unintended consequences of policy processes.

In their long-term, qualitative study of educational policy in secondary schools in the United Kingdom, Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) explore how schools enact, rather than implement, policy. At the intersection of theory and empirical data, Ball and his colleagues generate a theory of policy enactment that focuses on: the *contexts* of policy processes; policy *actors and subjects* such as principals and teachers; policies as *discursive strategies*, sets of texts and events that construct wider social processes such as schooling; and *artifacts*, such as policy texts, administrative documents and records, and posters or websites that carry discourses. In sum, the different elements of a theory of enactment conceptualize the “interaction and inter-connected between diverse actors, texts, talk, technology and objects (artifacts) which constitute ongoing responses to policy, sometimes durable, sometimes fragile, within networks and chains” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 3). First, according to Ball and his colleagues, a framework of policy enactment must account for context; how “a set of objective conditions” relate to “a set of subjective interpretational dynamics” (p. 21). In this

sense, policies exist alongside previously articulated values and commitments as well as a history of practice and experience that must be analyzed to arrive at a deep and nuanced understanding of how school enact policies. Second, as Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) argue, policy actors are simultaneously the enactors of policy techniques and subject to the disciplinary power of accountability and performativity discourses. To understand how and why policy texts are enacted in schools requires that attention be paid to the values, beliefs, attitudes, and experiences of policy actors within schools, even when these actors are apathetic or indifferent to a policy initiative. Finally, as Ball and his colleagues (2012) remind us, policy enactment is a process “as diversely and repeatedly contested and/or subject to different ‘interpretations’ as it is enacted (rather than implemented) in original and creative ways within institutions and classrooms but in ways that are limited by the possibilities of discourse” (p. 3). To clarify, discourse refers to “sets of texts, events and practices that speak to wider social processes of schooling such as the production of ‘the student’, the ‘purpose of schooling’ and the construction of ‘the teacher’” (p. 17). Education policy discourses, such as equity, performativity, or standardization influence policy enactment in schools through the material artifacts that both teachers and students engage with everyday in schools.

### **The Governance Turn**

Numerous critical policy scholars in education have pointed to the shift from government to governance as an important contextual factor, both theoretically and methodologically, when researching educational policies (Dale, 2000, 2004; Ozga & Lingard, 2007). Theoretically, the governance turn demands that conceptualizations of policy account for the role of local, national, and global forces as simultaneously and often contradictorily shaping education policy processes. Methodologically, the governance turns means that we

focus our analytic gaze on local phenomenon while situating these localized case studies within the broader context of neoliberal restructuring. Often associated with the theorizing of Roger Dale and Susan Robertson, the concept of governance:

Forces us to reassess and reorient not only the ways that we have conceived of the forms, meanings and the sources of education policy making, but also its scope, ambit and focus. The crucial point here, of course, is that following such studies we can no longer maintain the illusion that education policy is an exclusively national responsibility or enterprise, but that increasingly governance of national education systems is now being redistributed across a range of scales, including the global. (2007, p. 217)

The policy sociology in education literature identifies three interrelated trends in the shift from government to governance: the rise of new public management and the managerialist state that steers at a distance, increased involvement of the private sector and new private/public partnerships, and the emergence of the global policy field in education (Lingard et al., 2012). The shift to governance, with specific regard to the structures and processes of the state, is embodied in a distinct form of public management and administration known as the new public management (Ball, 2008). This form of governance brings market principles into traditional state bureaucracies, emphasizes values such as efficiency and effectiveness, and involves steering at a distance through performance indicators (Lingard et al., 2012; Ozga, 2009). Neoliberal globalization privileges the value of efficiency and effectiveness in educational governance. Good governance is characterized by political transparency, devolution, performance indicators, high-stakes standardized testing regimes, accountability systems, international benchmarking, and public/private partnerships (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

In the context of governance, international organizations are playing a more significant role in educational politics and policymaking. According to Mundy and Ghali (2009),

“intergovernmental organizations with economic development as their primary mandate have steadily risen to supremacy” (p. 722), these organizations include the World Bank, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the European Union (EU). In the early 1990s, the World Bank “housed the largest cadre of education policy staff (mainly trained in the economics of education, it also emerged as the largest single external source of finance for education” (p. 722). The OECD has taken a more prominent and influential position in education policy. Once a think-tank that merely provided advice on economic globalization, the OECD now engages in cross-national comparison of education systems based on student performance on large-scale standardized assessments. Through the Programme of International Student Assessments (PISA), the OECD has become one of the largest producers and disseminators of educational research and statistics in the world. This system of knowledge production is used to mandate educational reform in states around the globe. The OECD’s work in the sector of education has “shifted away from an earlier focus on educational equity, towards a central focus on educational reform in the context of neoliberal globalization” (Mundy & Ghali, 2009, p. 723).

The expansion of the educational policy roles played by international organizations is widely documented from the critical theories of the world capitalist system including world systems theory, post-colonial theory, and the work of Foucault and Gramsci and also from sociological institutionalism (Meyer et al., 1997). Mundy and Ghali argue that while research has produced insights into the role of international organizations as educational policy actors, what is missing is “detailed accounts of the variable and changing effects of international actors on specific domestic educational policy processes” (p. 725). By creating a system of

international policy borrowing through models of educational reform or gold standards to be emulated, the OECD plays a significant role in supporting the infiltration of neoliberal globalization into national education systems. By connecting the macro context of neoliberal globalization and the activities of international organizations to the micro-politics of educational policy text production and enactment, policy sociology helps to probe the influence of neoliberal globalization on the everyday work of school leaders.

In describing the shift from government to governance, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) observe that “national governments are no longer the only source of policy authority, but that the interests of a whole range of policy actors, both national and international, have now become enmeshed in policy processes” (p. 117). Governance, then, also refers to shifts in the forms and processes of government as a result of globalization. However, neoliberal globalization has not resulted in the decline of the state; rather, as Dale (2006) argues “states have at the very least ceded some of their discretion or even sovereignty to supranational organizations, albeit to better pursue their national interests” (p. 27). In theorizing globalization and its effects on educational policy, critical policy scholars acknowledge the new scales of policy production and new policy players. This means that the various contexts of the policy cycle, including the context of text production and the context of policy practice need to be located within the imbrications of the global, national, and local (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The governance turn has re-engineered the relationship between provincial educational ministries who determine policies priorities and local school districts that are responsible for implementing them. While it would seem as though local authorities are vested with greater autonomy as a result of decentralization, the governance turn is best seen as a strategic shift, one that is “highly dependent on the appearance of deregulation, but that is equally marked by

strong central steering through policy technologies” (Ozga, 2009, p. 149). The façade of greater autonomy and control is engineered and maintained through policy technologies, described by Ball (2008) as the “calculated deployment of forms of organization and procedures, and disciplines or bodies of knowledge, to organize human forces and capabilities into functioning systems” (p. 41). Ball (2008) argues that new public management relies on three unique policy technologies - market mechanisms and increased choice in education, steering at a distance management, and performativity. These policy technologies share a common reliance on knowledge and information. As Ozga explains, “the shift to governance is, in fact, heavily dependent on knowledge and information, which play a pivotal role both in the pervasiveness of governance and in allowing the development of its dispersed, distributed and disaggregated form” (2009, p. 150).

### **Policy as Numbers**

There has always been a close relationship between quantification and democracy, and this relationship has been theorized by Nikolas Rose (1991, 1999). According to Rose, “the relation between numbers and politics is mutually constitutive: the exercise of politics depends upon numbers; acts of social quantification are politicized; our images of political life are shaped by the realities that statistics appear to disclose” (1991, p. 673). Rose argues that “democratic power is calculated power, calculating power requiring citizens who calculate about power” (1991, p. 673). Put more simply, the exercise of democracy requires “numerate and calculating citizens, numericized civic discourses and a numericized programmatic of government” (1991, p. 673). Numbers, data, and statistics have been important technologies for governing since the emergence of the liberal democracy and their accompanying bureaucratic administrations (Rose 1991, 1999). According to Rose, the modern democratic

state operates in and through networks of numbers: “numbers are integral to the problematizations that shape what is to be governed, the programmes that seek to give effect to government, and to the unrelenting evaluation of the performance of government” (1991, p. 674). Numbers are also used to lend legitimacy to the actions of government. In the case of education policy, numbers are strategically used to show that policy agendas are set and programs are created based on objective facts as opposed to special interest. Rose (1999) explains “the ‘power of single figure’ is here a rhetorical technique for ‘black-boxing’ – that is to say, rendering invisible and hence incontestable the complex array of judgments and decisions that go into a measurement, a scale, a number” (p. 208).

Policy technologies have simultaneously influenced and relied upon the growing saliency of the evidence-based paradigm in educational policy and practice for their effectiveness. Evidence-based policymaking in education helps support some of the key initiatives of the new public management mode of governance by asking the age old question ‘what works?’ so as to make policy development and implementation more effective and efficient (Luke, 2011; Luke, Green & Kelly, 2010). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) point to the contested nature of educational research theories and methodologies to argue that “some ‘evidence’, derived from certain research, gets utilized, while other ‘evidence’, derived from different research and theoretical and methodological frameworks, is neglected” (p. 49). The policy as numbers discourse influences not only what counts as evidence of equity but what counts as research. The policy as numbers discourse “has led to an increasing reliance on *facticity* which has resulted in an emphasis on using data and numbers in policy-making processes to the detriment of either ignoring or downplaying the significance of more theorized qualitative research-based evidence” (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2011, p. 2).

The use of evidence to inform policy processes is referred to as ‘policy as numbers’ where policy realities are represented through numbers (Ozga, 2009; Ozga & Lingard, 2007; Rose, 1999). The ‘policy as numbers’ turn in educational policy is best conceptualized as a technology of governance within the restructured state to steer educational policymaking and the everyday practices of schooling at a distance through neoliberal forms of accountability. According to Lingard, Creagh, and Vass (2012), “the steering at a distance of the restructured state and rescaled processes of policy production within the broader audit culture operate through a new de-regulated regulatory regime that relies very heavily on numbers, data and data flows” (p. 316). Best understood as a performative-based form of accountability, the policy as numbers discourse uses evidence and data to inform, govern, assess, and legitimize educational policy processes. The policy as numbers paradigm has been given its power to govern through the mass proliferation of performance indicators in all public sectors from education to healthcare (Ozga, 2009). In the realm of education, the OECD has been a key player in the construction and use of performance indicators and comparative measures. For example, through PISA, which measures literacy, numeracy, and scientific literacy, the OECD has constructed a “commensurate space of educational measurements globally...a repository of international expertise in respect of comparative measures of the quality of educational systems” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 133). The policy as numbers phenomenon governs through comparison within but also between states, supported through the publishing of educational indicators and student performance in league tables by school, region, and state.

Policy sociologists have interrogated the policy as numbers paradigm and the power of numbers and statistics to guide education policymaking. The use evidence to address issues of educational equity is limited by naming and classifying (Lucas and Beresford, 2010). The



policy as numbers lens makes it possible to document how and why equity is increasingly linked with academic excellence, eclipsing the intrinsic value of equity and relegating it as an instrument for student achievement.

### **The Politics of Recognition, Redistribution, and Representation**

Nancy Fraser's writing on the causes of and remedies for social injustice provides a theoretical tool to analyze Ontario's Equity Strategy as a social justice claim and to determine the extent to which the policy can remedy educational injustice in Ontario. Specifically, Fraser (1997) distinguishes between cultural injustice and economic injustice and describes related solutions, a politics of recognition or a politics of redistribution. To account for justice claims in a globalizing world, Fraser (2009) has since elaborated on political injustices and the importance of political representation. Below, the three different elements of Fraser's theories are fully elaborated on: policy as a social justice claim, whether educational inequity is a cultural, economic, or political injustice, and whether policy solutions should appeal to a politics of recognition, redistribution, or representation to be successful.

First, equity education policies in Ontario can be understood as one of many responses to demands for greater social justice in Ontario's education system. That educational inequities and injustices exist in Ontario's education system is widely documented in the academic literature, acknowledged by the Ontario Ministry of Education, and serves as the rationale for the PPM No. 119 (2009). Prior to the formal release of PPM No. 119 (2009), the Ontario Ministry of Education observed that some groups of students, most notably "recent immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, boys, and students with special needs" are at risk for lower levels of educational opportunity and achievement (OME, 2009c, p. 1). Ontario's equity and inclusive education strategy, legislatively embodied in

PPM No. 119 (2009), seeks to remedy this situation. Attempting to explain inequity and exclusion in education systems and schools is, in effect, theorizing the material, cultural, and ideological roots of social injustice. Therefore, Ontario's Equity Strategy is considered a response to claims for greater educational justice.

Second, Fraser (1997) argues that in capitalist democracies justice claims have traditionally involved demands for a more equitable distribution of wealth. These socioeconomic injustices referred to as *maldistribution* are generally seen to result from the political-economic structures of the state and are remedied through *redistribution*. Fraser (1997) also identifies a second understanding of justice as cultural. Cultural injustices, referred to as *misrecognition*, are rooted in social patterns of representation. In this case, justice claims involve demands for greater cultural *recognition* and respect. According to Fraser (1997), the distinction between maldistribution and misrecognition is a false dichotomy. It is no longer possible to explain economic disparities in terms of cultural disregard in the same way that it is insufficient to explain cultural misrecognition as stemming from an unequal distribution of resources. Although redistribution and recognition are theoretically distinguishable, they remain practically intertwined; social justice agendas today require attention to both redistribution and recognition in so far as economic disadvantage and cultural disrespect mutually reinforce one another. Here, Fraser is worth quoting at length:

Even the most material economic institutions have a constitutive, irreducible cultural dimension; they are shot through with significations and norms. Conversely, even the most discursive cultural practices have a constitutive, irreducible political-economic dimension; they are underpinned by material supports. Thus far from occupying two airtight separate spheres, economic injustice and cultural injustice are usually imbricated so as to reinforce each other dialectically. (1997, p. 15)

There is an imminent need to reframe justice claims in a globalizing world (Fraser, 2009). The Keynesian-Westphalian frame took for granted the modern, territorially-bounded,

sovereign nation state as the primary mode of political organization. Within this frame, the “who” of justice was always the national citizenry. However, it is increasingly difficult to dispute that “decisions taken in one territorial state often impact the lives of those outside it, as do the actions of transnational corporations, international currency speculators, and large institutional investors” (Fraser, 2009, p. 13). Fraser’s earlier work (1997) focused on the substantive, first-order issues of redistribution or recognition, what she termed the “what” of justice. However, in an era of globalization, Fraser (2009) argues that we are increasingly confronted with the problematic of *framing*, a political issue often neglected in justice theorizing that would help us understand the “who” of justice in a globalizing world. To respond to this new reality, Fraser (2009) adds a third, political dimension, in order to account for the complexity of justice claims in a globalizing world. *Representation* (in addition to redistribution and recognition) helps account for injustices committed within bounded political communities when the voices of members are not heard and they are excluded from political participation as a result. Representation allows us to frame justice claims in a globalized world, where, as a result of the persistence of the bounded polities paradigm, the framing of justice claims is itself unjust.

As a whole, this framework provides insights into how educational justice claims are taken up by policymakers in the development and enactment of equity education policy, illuminating why one approach may seem more favourable and politically expedient than another, what the implications of these different politics are when actively pursued, and with what consequences for different social groups in society. This type of theorizing is exemplified in the work of Dumas (2009) who suggests that “theorizing about redistribution and recognition helps us engage in critical dialogue about which policies and what kind of

politics are *substantively* worth pursuing – that is, our imagination of which remedies will make things ‘right’ or ‘better’” (p. 82). Battles for greater educational equity cannot be reduced to one claim trumping another. Fraser’s theorizing on justice requires the pursuit of recognition, redistribution, and representation as the standard from which to analyze the ideological content and adequacy of current policy approaches to achieving greater educational equity in Ontario.

Finally, policy solutions can be used to affirm or transform social inequality. Fraser (1997) distinguishes between *affirmative* and *transformative* remedies. Affirmative remedies are those that seek to address the outcomes of social inequalities without changing the structures that create and reproduce them. Transformative remedies, in contrast, aim to correct social inequalities by changing the institutional and ideological structures that generate unequal outcomes in the first instance. For Fraser the distinction is not one of gradual or drastic change, nor reform versus revolution. The distinction hinges on the point at which these politics seek to intervene in social inequality; “the crux of the contrast is end-state outcomes versus the processes that produce them” (Fraser, 1997, p. 23). PPM No. 119 (1993, 2009) and other supporting documents illustrate that the Ministry of Education is attempting to move beyond a focus on multiculturalism to “a system-wide approach to identifying and removing discriminatory biases and systemic barriers to help ensure that all students feel welcomed and accepted in school life” (OME, 2009b, p. 3). And yet, PPM No. 119 (2009) does not actually demand that district school boards take a transformational approach to achieving equity. The policy and supporting documents do not advocate for the dismantling of state and market forces that contribute to the configuration of favoured and despised group identities, the redistribution of economic resources to disadvantaged schools and

communities, or the inclusion and representation of students and parents to determine the contours of schooling on their own accord.

By drawing on various theories in policy sociology, the conceptual framework is a robust lens through which to analyze: the work that policy texts do as discourses; the factors that shape enactment, specifically, the role of context, actors, and policy technologies; the increasingly significant role played by numbers in policy, both in terms of constructing policy problems and as reliable ways of evaluating policy solutions; and the ideological content of policies, including the types of philosophies they appeal to.

### **Chapter Summary**

In this introductory chapter, the research topic was described and the rationale for the research study was elaborated on by synthesizing current literature in the field of policy sociology and the sociology of education related to equity and social justice. The conceptual framework for the study was also presented which draws on critical theories of policy including policy enactment and policy as numbers complimented by the political philosophy and justice theorizing of Nancy Fraser.

## Chapter Two: Review of Literature

The purpose of this chapter is to review pertinent and recent literature in the field of policy sociology and the sociology of education related to equity and social justice. The review begins with introductory comments on the global policy field in education and the growing convergence of discourses around educational reform. While pressures for educational reform emanate at the global level, they are mediated by local histories, cultures, and politics; a form of vernacular globalization. Therefore, the second section of the chapter explores globalized policy discourses in education such as standardization and high-stakes testing, accountability, evidence-based decision-making, and choice to document the impacts of these discourses on educational equity through a synthesis of various national-based empirical studies in the United States, the United Kingdom, Europe, Australia, and Canada. The third section of this chapter reviews the academic literature focusing on the impact of neoliberal educational reform on educational values such as quality, efficiency, effectiveness, and equity. There is a growing need to empirically investigate the reframing of equity policies. The fourth section of this chapter reviews the empirical research that has been conducted in Ontario and Canada in the field of critical policy analysis in education, with a specific focus on the historical context of equity and social justice initiatives in Ontario to document what the present study contributes to educational policy research in the Canadian context. The fifth section of this chapter reviews current literature in the field of educational leadership for social justice.

### The Global Policy Field in Education

The field of education has been experiencing a reform epidemic achieved through a litany of policies, documents, initiatives, and legislation (Levin, 1998; Ball et al., 2012).

These policies, in all of their various forms, place many demands on schools and, there is a degree of commonality in the reform themes that emerge across different nation states (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Levin (1998) observes that six common themes are emerging in education policy in nation states around the globe: first, the impetus for reform is generally cast in economic terms and education is tasked with the imperative of enhancing national economic competitiveness; second, reform is seen to be needed in light of an engineered education crisis where school systems are failing the students and stakeholders that they serve; third, reform will not be achieved through the provision of additional financial resources, rather, education systems must be made more efficient; fourth, is the shift from government to governance characterized by the devolution of authority from the state or district to the school-level and the rise of school-based management; fifth, the education reform movement has resulted in the commodification of education and the growing use of markets to distribute educational resources; finally, education reform has emphasized the importance of standards, accountability, and testing as indicators of the quality of an education system.

This epidemic of educational reform has resulted in what Ball et al. (2012), refer to as *initiavitis*; “a series of ‘fast policies’ designed to make the education system open, diverse, flexible, able to adjust and adapt to the changing world” (p. 9). Lingard and Rawolle (2011) argue that globalization is resulting in a rescaling of educational policymaking, such that political authority is no longer vested solely in the national domain but emanates from a global level, what the authors refer to as “an emergent global education policy field” (p. 490). Characterizing this global policy field is a rescaling of politics, the result of “imbrications between national policy fields and the global policy field” (p. 490). The state no longer remains the sole unit of analysis in education policy studies. The shift from government to

governance acknowledges that “national governments are no longer the only source of political authority, but that the interests of a whole range of policy actors, both national and international, have now become enmeshed in policy processes” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 117). This restructuring has altered the relationship between provincial ministries and district school boards responsible for establishing policy objectives and creating accountability regimes and schools who are responsible for achieving these goals and meeting these demands (Ball, 2008). Ball (2008) argues that we are witnessing new links between the context of policy text production and the context of policy enactment that increasingly involves steering at a distance via high-stakes testing and accountability regimes. Better understood as a form of re-regulation not deregulation (Ozga, 2009) where “focus is placed on greater school-based management and autonomy, while also emphasizing increased standards of accountability to meet national goals and enhance international cooperation, international benchmarking and quality assurance systems” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 121). As Ball’s previous research agenda indicates (Ball, 1994, 2008), discursive policy technologies, including standardization, high-stakes testing, accountability regimes, and the marketization of education are not just vehicles for structural reform of education systems themselves, but must be understood as “mechanisms for reforming teachers (scholars and researchers) and for changing what it means to be a teacher” (Ball, 2006, p. 145).

Lingard and Rawolle (2011) call on critical policy scholars to “research and theorise this emergent global education policy field and the way it affects national policy and policy processes through what we might see as cross-field effects” (p. 490). Similar observations and related methodological warnings are made by Ball (1998) who argues that “one of the tensions which runs through all varieties of policy analysis is that between the need to attend



to the local particularities of policy making and policy enactment and the need to be aware of general patterns and apparent commonalities or convergence across localities” (p. 119). The following section reviews empirical literature in the field of policy sociology and the sociology of education to document the impact of hegemonic education policy discourses such as standardization, high-stakes testing, accountability, and choice in the global policy field and how these discourses affect and are mediated by national education systems with a focus on the implications of said discourses on policies and practices related to equity and social justice.

### **Globalized Education Policy Discourses and the Impact on Equity**

In their 30-year longitudinal ethnographic study of educational change in secondary schools in the United States and Canada, Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) identify three different periods of educational change. Hargreaves and Goodson’s periodization is used as a heuristic tool for analyzing the proliferation and convergence of various educational discourses that steer policies and reform initiatives. First, the period of *optimism and innovation* that lasted up until the mid-1970s, where “booming demographics and economic expansion led to reforms and large-scale projects that emphasized teacher-generated innovation and student-centered forms of learning” (p. 29). Second, the period of *complexity and contradiction*, from the mid-1970s into the early 1990s, marked by a decline of social democracy and Keynesian styled public policies. During this period, teachers and school leaders struggled in coming to terms with contradictory reform imperatives such as “portfolios alongside standardized tests, interdisciplinary initiatives with subject-based standards, and distributed leadership coupled with downsized decision making, and many became increasingly exhausted and exasperated as they did so” (p. 30). Finally, from the 1990s

forward, is the period of *standardization and marketization*, characterized by the triumph of economic and cultural globalization and the increasingly significant role played by international organizations in educational reform, “where markets and standardization, accountability and performance targets, high-stakes testing and intrusive intervention are at the heart of almost all reform efforts” (p. 30). On the whole, this third way of *standardization and marketization* has largely crippled the ability of teachers and school leaders to respond to student diversity in educationally just ways (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006).

In 2012, Hargreaves and Shirley updated the different periods of educational change, arguing that we are entering a period of post-standardization in education, a period of *performance and partnerships* (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2012). Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) single Ontario out as the most sophisticated, advanced example of educational reform: “Its conservative agenda of diminished resources and reductions in teachers’ preparation time, high-stakes testing linked to graduation, and accelerating reform requirements exacted high costs on teaching and learning” (p. 16). The authors observe that much changed in 2003 with the election of Liberal Premier Dalton McGuinty as the province “set upon a new course by reversing many previous policies and wedding a continuing and ever-escalating commitment to test-based accountability with a range of initiatives that built capacity for improvement and provided professional support” (p. 17). Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) point to Ontario-styled reforms such as the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, the Student Success initiative, and reduced class sizes as evidence of a sustained commitment to academic excellence and high aspirations for teachers and students. A degree of skepticism and criticality is needed when reflecting on the implications of such oft-cited claims of success in Ontario (see also Luke, 2011). This issue and the need to problematize the portrait of Ontario’s success are re-visited

in the final section of this chapter. While not all scholars would agree with the periodization provided by Hargreaves and Goodson (2006) or Hargreaves and Shirley's (2012) argument for a Fourth Way in educational reform, the discourses these authors identify continue to be the subject of much of the research in the sociology of education and education policy research. The existing literature within policy sociology and the sociology of education has focused extensively on the discourses and processes of standardization, high-stakes testing, performance, accountability, evidence-based policymaking, choice, and the pernicious effects of these reform measures on educational equity and social justice. While it is beyond the scope of this present review to detail all of the empirical research in this field; below, some of the most significant studies and findings, with particular attention to empirical research in the Canadian and Ontarian context, are discussed.

### **Standardization and High-Stakes Testing**

Skerrett (2009), reflecting on the period of standardization, argues that curriculum and instruction have become “more regimented and stringently aligned with high stakes tests” (2009, p. 277). Skerrett (2009) points specifically to an Anglo-centric curriculum, direct instruction, and the tracking and streaming of students by ability as practices that have had deleterious effects on culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students in the United States. According to Skerrett, in this period of standardization, “teachers frequently align their curriculum and instruction to the test rather than employ a range of culturally responsive educational strategies” (p. 280). Despite the fact that her research project was carried out in the United States of America, Skerrett does reference research from Ontario in her concluding discussion of lessons for policy makers, schools, and teachers. Skerrett (2009) notes that while high-stakes assessment are a mainstay in Ontario's educational landscape, the

provincial Ministry “has increased financial and human support for teachers and developed sophisticated systems for stronger schools to help their weaker and similarly placed neighbours in order to narrow the achievement gap” (p. 288). In their longitudinal study of the effects of increasing standardization on racially diverse schools, Skerrett and Hargreaves (2008) found that standardization and high-stakes testing have resulted in the institutionalization of inequality in both the Canadian and American education system by “inhibit[ing] secondary schools’ capacity to respond to students’ diversity in ways that address depth of learning rather than easily tested basic achievement” (p. 937). Skerrett and Hargreaves (2008) also analyzed the impacts of standardization on teachers’ pedagogical practices. They found that standardization has undermined the efforts of what Skerrett and Hargreaves (2008) refer to as “change-oriented teachers” including “young teachers, particularly those with culturally responsive teacher training; ESL teachers; and teachers in humanities, special education” (p. 935). Simultaneously, standardization is reinforcing the pedagogical practices of veteran teachers “who lacked professional training or experience with diversity” (p. 935).

Closely related to the standardization movement in education has been the increasing significance placed on testing of students, with many jurisdictions moving towards high-stakes testing, where the results of tests are linked to graduation rates and school funding. Existing literature within policy sociology and the sociology of education has focused on high-stakes testing in education. The focus of existing literature in the sociology of education has surveyed the pernicious effects of high-stakes testing on curriculum, teachers’ pedagogical practices, and disadvantaged students in the United States of America (Au, 2009; McNeil, 2000; Hursh, 2008; Lipman, 2004, 2011), the United Kingdom (Stobart, 2008;

Gillborn & Youdell, 2000), France (Dobbins & Martens, 2012), Germany (Hartong, 2012), and Australia (Lingard, 2010).

According to Hursh (2013), high-stakes testing has come about as part of “a larger neoliberal agenda to disparage public institutions and educators to justify reducing public expenditures and privatizing schools” (p. 574). Now central to all aspects of education, high-stakes testing is best understood as a meta-policy in school systems (Lingard, Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013). Within this neoliberal regime, individual schools are to blame for society’s economic problems and ironically, simultaneously called upon to fix these problems. In sum, “the relentless focus on test scores over the last several decades suppresses analysis and debate of economic, social, and educational policies” (Hursh, 2013, p. 575). Hursh (2013) reminds us, high-stakes testing regimes are not an objective, effective, or efficient method for evaluating students, teachers, or schools, as the advocates of the testing regimes would have us believe. Nor do they produce the rich, nuanced data that is essential for creating educational reform agendas. In contrast with human-capital rationalizations that argue high-stakes testing will raise standards, enhance educational quality, leading to greater international economic competitiveness, the research in this field is clear: high-stakes testing regimes do not improve educational outcomes, and in fact, have deleterious effects for disadvantaged students (Hursh, 2008, 2013; Lipman, 2004, 2013). These studies reveal the unintended consequences of standardization; rather than raising academic achievement universally, they impede the achievement of educational equity.

In Canada, Spencer (2012) has found that in schools with high numbers of students who are visible minorities or English language learners, “the effects of standardized testing include a range of practices that reinforce inequity and increase social disparity” (2012, p.

132). These practices include narrowed expectations and intensive curricula that privilege hegemonic linguistic and cultural norms. In her study of neoliberal reform in Ontario's secondary schools, Rezai-Rashti (2009) found that standardization resulted in a prescriptive curriculum and reductions in teacher's autonomy as a result of mandated appraisals of teachers' performance. Increasing standardization in Ontario's education system manifested itself through a "results-based curriculum focusing on what students are able to do at the end of the program; and standard discipline oriented (subject) curriculum based on measurable items" (Majhanovich, 2002, p. 165). Furthermore, Majhanovich (2002) argues that although educational reform, hallmarked by standardized curriculum and high-stakes testing, has been promoted under the banner of excellence and quality enhancement, it has had dire consequences on the de-skilling of teachers. Leaving little room for creativity, innovation or autonomy, Majhanovich (2002) argues that "teachers feel that their professionalism and expertise have been seriously diluted; in effect, that they have been subjected to 'de-skilling' of the worst kind" (p. 166).

### **The Politics of Accountability**

High-stakes testing regimes and accountability systems are mutually re-enforcing. Lingard, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) summarize the key aspects of what they refer to as *neoliberal forms of accountability*: "comparative performance measures have been constructed as central to a vertical, one-way, top-down, one-dimensional form of accountability with restrictive and reductive effects on the work of principals and teachers, and on the school experiences of students and their parents" (p. 544). Implicit in their description of neoliberal accountability is the centrality of test scores, league tables, achievement indicators, and a slew of other performance measures. In their co-edited, special

edition of the *Journal of Education Policy*, these authors gathered together empirical research that illustrate the relationship between global and national testing regimes and related systems of accountability. This rescaling of accountability, spurred, in part by the OECD and PISA at the global level, and the related testing regimes within nations and regions, are evidence of a global reworking of national and provincial policyscapes through a politics of numbers.

Through the generation of numerical data in the form of test scores, league tables, and performance indicators the globe has been made legible for governing through the creation of a common space for measurement and comparison (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013). And yet, these national and provincial policyscapes are not homogenous; the rescaling of education politics and policymaking is playing out in ways that are inflected by local histories and cultures, what Appadurai (1996) refers to as vernacular globalization. Below, empirical studies that document the ways in which new accountability regimes are impacting education systems and educational policymaking at the national and regional levels are reviewed.

In the United Kingdom (UK) there is an extensive body of literature on the effects of particular managerialist constructions of accountability (Ball, 2008; Gillborn, 2010; Gillborn & Youdell, 2000; Ozga, 2009). Gillborn and Youdell (2000) conducted case studies of educational reform in three English schools to “expose the everyday, routine practices by which inequalities are reproduced, extended and legitimized” (p. 1). Through empirical fieldwork, the authors concluded that education reform in the UK was characterized by two inter-related trends: “a raising of overall levels of achievement, but a growing inequality of achievement between particular groups based on gender, ethnic origin and social class background” (p. 17). In an age of hyper-accountability and the resultant weight that numbers carry, Gillborn (2010) is critical of deficit-thinking and gap-talk, which use quantitative

approaches to research and statistical methods to conceptualize student disadvantage and inequality that “obscure the material reality of racism” (p. 253). For Gillborn “statistical methods themselves encode particular assumptions which, in societies that are structured through racial domination, often carry biases that are likely to further discriminate against particular minoritized groups” (p. 254). By focusing specifically on how inequality is associated with particular aspects of student identity (race, class, or gender), deficit-thinking and gap-talk discourses pathologize individual students and schools rather than interrogating the wider systemic processes and social relations that give rise to inequality in the first instance. To further theorize and analyze the arguments proffered by Gillborn (2010), Ozga (2009) investigates the relationship between neoliberal governance in education and data production and use. In England, one of the most advanced systems in Europe in terms of such data production and use, “goal governed steering of outputs and outcomes, accompanied by the monitoring of targets” has promoted de-centralized, networked self-evaluations as opposed to more traditional centralized, vertical forms of governance (p. 149).

In the United States, Hursh (2008, 2013) has investigated the evolution of high-stakes testing and accountability regimes in New York since the 1990s. Students’ scores on standardized tests are now used to steer education policy by the numbers at a distance to justify policy changes such as teacher and school evaluation and even to promote an agenda of mayoral control of schools so that professional managers rather than educators are in control of educational institutions (Hursh, 2013). Lipman’s (2004, 2011) empirical research into the impacts of high-stakes testing and accountability regimes in Chicago has exposed the negative impacts of urban school reform on disadvantaged students. In her most recent research, Lipman (2013) argues that education accountability regimes are a mechanism for coercive



urban governance, where the state uses economic crises “to accelerate the expropriation of urban public schools, forced displacement of people of colour, and disenfranchisement of African-Americans, Latinos, and other people of colour” (p. 558).

In Australia, there is a growing body of empirical research on educational accountabilities. For example, Lingard (2010) explores how the introduction of national literacy and numeracy testing programs (NAPLAN) and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority’s recent launch of the *MySchool* website, which publishes the results of these tests, have made possible a national schooling system in Australia. According to Lingard, global comparisons of national school performance represent “a strategic reconstitution of the nation in the face of globalization and through the OECD’s PISA, is a simultaneous construction of commensurate global space of measurement and comparison” (p. 132). In a more recent study exploring the impacts of NAPLAN in Australia, Lingard and Sellar (2013) conceptualize performance data as *catalyst data*, “that encourage various stakeholders to ask questions about performance in the delivery of government services and, by implication, to make changes based on answers to these questions” (p. 635). Lingard and Sellar document how NAPLAN is increasingly high-stakes, linked to funding in many provinces in Australia, with perverse, anti-educational effects. In theorizing back to Lingard’s writing on the emergent global policy field in education (Lingard and Rawolle, 2011), Lingard and Sellar (2013) argue that this global space has led to an intensification of testing within national and provincial education systems in Australia.

### **Accountability Policies in Ontario and Canada**

On the whole, there is less research on the impacts and unintended consequences of accountability regimes in Canada, and specifically Ontario. Much of the research that exists

falls into one of a few categories: research on the historical development of accountability systems, comparative research on accountability regimes in Canada's provinces, and research on the use of accountability for school improvement. Much of this literature is conducted in the disciplines of educational administration or educational policy studies.

First, there are numerous research studies that explore the rise of accountability systems, specifically, the development of the Education Quality and Accountability Office in Ontario (EQAO), the Ministry of Education organization responsible for administering large-scale assessments (Volante, 2007). Prior to the 1990s, Ontario had virtually no history of large-scale assessment. This all changed in 1995 under Harris' Conservative government with the creation of the EQAO (Volante, 2007). According to the EQAO's mandate, the main objective of large-scale assessment was "to provide data for both accountability purposes and improve teaching and learning" (Volante, 2007, p. 4). Volante (2007) asserts that assessment-based reforms and accountability regimes have not been uniformly embraced by the majority of Ontario's teachers or their unions: "many educators within the province view provincial assessment with a suspect eye and dispute the taken-for-granted assumption that external testing will lead to system improvement" (Volante, 2007, p. 6). And yet, there is still immense pressure from the provincial Ministry and district school boards for data-driven decision-making, evidence-based policy-making, and the general intrusion of numbers into the social processes of schooling. Meanwhile, research points to the limitations of EQAO data to inform educational reform in Ontario (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012, 2013).

According to Volante, EQAO is fraught with "flawed assumptions, oversimplified understandings of school realities, undemocratic concentration of power, undermining of the teaching profession, and unpredictable disastrous consequences for our most vulnerable

students” (p. 11). One of the problems with large-scale assessment in Ontario “is that their results are typically reported in a manner that far outstretches their abilities” (Volante, 2007, p. 10). Over the past 10 years, a small but growing body of literature is exposing the negative implications of testing and accountability regimes on teachers’ pedagogical practices and students’ experiences of schooling (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012, 2013; Rezai-Rashti, 2009; Webb, 2005). However, “the lack of corresponding research from high schools suggest more work is required, particularly since the OSSLT is used as a high-stakes graduation requirement” (Volante, 2007, p. 9).

Second, there are a number of comparative policy studies of accountability systems in Canada’s provinces and territories. In Canada, every province engages in external and large-scale testing for benchmarking of schools and districts and to improve school effectiveness (Volante & Ben Jaafar, 2008). Because education in Canada is a provincial and territorial responsibility there is variability in the history, development, policies, and practices associated with accountability regimes in various regions (Klinger, DeLuca & Miller, 2008). In their study comparing performance based accountability models across Canada’s provincial and territorial jurisdictions, Ben Jaafar and Earl (2008), found that “each jurisdiction continues to invest substantial resources to develop and implement individual PBA [performance based accountability] systems” (p. 719). Ben Jaafar and Earl (2008) argue that while each provincial and territorial Ministry of Education claimed that accountability systems improve student achievement and school practices; “they make this claim in the absence of empirical evidence comparing the influence of different models on practice” (p. 719).

Finally, a growing body of literature in the field of educational administration and

leadership is attempting to illuminate the connection between large-scale assessments as accountability instruments and school improvement planning (Earl & Fullan, 2003; Volante & Cherubini, 2010). Earl and Fullan (2003) argue that data has immense potential to inform large-scale reform and is therefore, impossible to avoid. Their research in England, Manitoba, and Ontario found that “some leaders are becoming convinced that they need to pay attention to data to focus and clarify their decisions... leaders have expressed both their reservations and their hopes for the use of data in school planning and change” (Earl & Fullan, 2003, p. 393). What is needed, Earl and Fullan argue, is a move from *accountability as surveillance* to *accountability for improvement*. This shift, they argue, will require educational leaders to have a sophisticated understanding of and ability to manipulate data. But as we have seen with the rise of international comparisons of student achievement on standardized tests, the OECD’s PISA for example, such a shift to a focus on improvement involves equally insidious forms of regulatory surveillance that are implicated in discourses of quality assurance and performance management. A great deal of empirical research argues that large-scale assessments as an accountability measure is one of the best policy levers to spur improvements in elementary and secondary education (Barber, 2004; Earl & Torrance, 2000). Specifically in Ontario, Volante and Cherubini (2010) explore how teachers and school administrators use large-scale assessment data to draw and revise school improvement plans, finding that “few educators, particularly at the secondary level, are using large-scale assessment results in a sophisticated fashion for data-integrated decision-making” (p. 1). In concluding their study, the authors recommend that “direction must be provided to enhance educators’ use of large-scale assessment data” (p. 22). These and other findings are problematic in so far as they do not interrogate the underlying assumptions behind the use of

large-scale assessment and accountability regimes and their regulatory effects; rather they seek ways to make these regimes more effective, efficient, and useful. The problem with accountability regimes, when envisioned in this way, is that they are increasingly the sole indicator used to evaluate system effectiveness (Volante, 2007). For example, Ontario “has adopted a myopic view that overemphasizes provincial assessment scores” (Volante, 2007, p. 16). Scholars have also written on alternative forms of accountability, based on more comprehensive indicators of educational quality and success (Volante, 2007); however, these visions have yet to take real root or gain any political clout despite the inherent flaws with performative accountability.

From a sociological perspective, there is far less research that documents the pernicious effects of accountability regimes on educational equity, although this body of literature is growing. In British Columbia, Fallon and Paquette (2008) conducted a critical policy analysis of *Bill 34: The School Amendment Act* which “imposed a set of policy changes that re-presented and reconfigured issues of equity, social justice, and quality education within notions of choice, efficiency, accountability, autonomy and a free-market approach” (p. 2).

Following the critical tradition, the authors contextualize the British Columbia reform package by noting that the changes introduced in Bill 34 converge on principles of neoliberalism, most notably, public choice, accountability, institutional devolution, functional flexibility, and competitiveness. Overall, the focus of their study was on the dynamics of policy processes, including the “individuals, interest groups, and organizations – involved in influencing and defining, through their narratives what public education in BC ought to be” (p. 1). Not explored in this study were the impacts of accountability regimes on teachers and students.

In Ontario, Spencer (2012) has investigated how the provincially mandated system of accountability has “constructed social practices and relations, and how it constituted agents in schools as the subjects of reform” (p. 132). Using governmentality as her orientation to the empirical data, Spencer argues that the rationality of accountability operates through policy technologies such as the high-stakes Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (Spencer, 2012). In the context of how high-stakes standardized testing impacts on school leadership, Spencer’s research found that high-stakes testing and accountability policies have resulted in significant changes in the practices of school administrators. According to Spencer, “administrators have moved into new management roles as, increasingly, there time is devoted to tasks for monitoring, accounting for, and reporting on the administration of policies concerned with performance and outcomes, such as standardized testing” (2012, p. 132).

The scholarship of Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2012, 2013), also in the critical policy analysis tradition, explores the impacts of neoliberal reform; most recently, how performative accountability regimes shape the experiences of teachers and marginalized students (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2012, 2013). Also drawing on theories of governmentality, policy as numbers (Rose, 1999), and the construction of categories in use (Lucas & Beresford, 2011), Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) offer a particularly timely critique of the gender achievement gap discourse in Ontario. Illustrating the hegemony of performative accountability systems, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) argue that the construction of categories for defining educational equity, such as boys as the new disadvantaged group, have negative implications for educational equity. For example, redistributive forms of justice are overlooked and emphasis is placed on axes of personal identity rather than the existence of systemic inequalities. Contrary to the celebration of Ontario has a *high-quality-high-equity*

education system by the OECD, a trend elaborated on below, Martino and Rezai-Rashti illustrate how “performance driven measures and framings of equity set aside considerations of how other important socio-economic and demographic variables interlock and overlap, with significant consequences for certain groups” (2013, p. 594).

As Hargreaves and Shirley (2012) argue, we are in an age of post-standardization, characterized by public/private partnerships and performative accountability models. More empirical research is needed on these emerging forms of accountability, specifically their consequences for educational equity and social justice, especially in Ontario and Canada. At the conceptual level, this research is one way of re-opening debates in educational policy about testing regimes and accountability systems and the importance of introducing robust, qualitative accounts of the impact of these policies on educational equity to imagine new forms of educational accountability. While the negative impacts of performative accountability on teachers and students has been explored, what has not been as thoroughly investigated is how new forms of accountability in the global policy field are impacting on school leaders’ understandings of equity and how these shifting perceptions influence the enactment of equity policies in schools.

### **Evidence-Based Policy: The Policy as Numbers Phenomenon**

Accountability systems are increasingly becoming technologies of improvement and reform. Taken together, this emerging evidence-based paradigm helps support some of the key initiatives of the system of new public management and educational governance by asking the age old question “what works?” to make policy development and implementation more effective and efficient in a globally competitive, knowledge-based economy. In its most basic iteration, the evidence-based paradigm is a response to claims that “educational and social

policy should be based on scientific evidence rather than a specific political view, philosophy, religious belief, or social ideology” (Luke, Green & Kelly, 2010, p. ix).

Proponents of evidence-based policymaking view the education system as an unruly, hostile child that is “being dragged, kicking and screaming, into the 21st century” and finally being transformed by the scientific revolution that resulted in monumental gains in agriculture, medicine, and technology. Robert Slavin (2002), for example, laments that “applications of the findings of educational research remain haphazard, and that evidence is respected only occasionally, and only if it happens to correspond to current educational or political fashions” (p. 16). Therefore, in attempts to further advance and entrench evidence-based policymaking Slavin (2002) advocates a specific type of evidence, “rigorous research demonstrating positive effects of replicable programs on important student outcomes [which] would lead to more and better research and therefore more funding” (p. 17). Summarizing and criticizing these trends Luke (2011) identifies a “transnational push to use highly selective versions of educational research and empirical evidence to buttress ideologies around markets, about standards, around parental choice, and around teachers and unions, teaching and professionalism” (p. 373).

Ball (2008) argues that new managerialism, markets, and performativity are “the three central technologies of governance within education within this neoliberal education policy regime” (p. 316). The policy as number phenomenon is linked to the categorization and hence hyper-visibility of certain educational phenomena and certain populations. At the global level, according to Rizvi & Lingard (2010), the OECD has been central to sponsoring the adoption of governance by numbers, specifically through its collection, organization, classification, and application of evidence, gathered from surveys and student test-scores on



PISA, to control educational reform aligning it with neoliberal globalizing pressures that are masqueraded as necessary best-practices in a globalized knowledge economy. Grek (2009) has noted that there is a national and global scale involved in governing by numbers and highlights the role of the OECD in establishing a comparative turn in the governing of education policy by numbers across Europe. While the way in which PISA processes and results are taken up in national contexts vary, for example the PISA surprise in Finland, the PISA shock in Germany, or PISA promotion in the UK, Grek concludes that “PISA clearly seems to constitute an important node in the complex task of governing European education” (p. 35). Around the globe, the OECD is a key player in advocating evidence-based educational policymaking as an important reform strategy, contributing to global policy convergence around its use: “significant multinational organizations, such as the OECD and the World Bank, have made evidence-based policymaking a priority both in their own work as influential research and policy organizations as well as for their member or client nations” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 4). Thus, according to Wiseman (2010) “evidence-based educational policymaking has become a global phenomenon. This is true in part because of the rise of new public management and particular accountability policies spreading through educational systems around the world” (p. 3). Head (2008) similarly points to the important role played by governments in focusing their funding on specific research disciplines and methods, shaping the relationship between research and policy, determining national policy priority areas, creating knowledge management networks that determine how this knowledge is mobilized. A growing body of research is illustrating the significance of numbers in policy and evidence-based policymaking in the governance turn in education (Grek, 2009; Lingard, Creagh & Vass, 2012; Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2012; Ozga, 2009).

Gillborn (2008, 2010) explores the effects of the policy as numbers phenomenon in England. According to Gillborn (2008), ‘gap talk’ results from the policy as numbers phenomenon and is used in the re-working of policies and categories that construct racial minority students within a deficit model that hides larger more complex structural and historical inequalities. More recently, Gillborn (2010), through critical race theory and chronicle methodology, uses national achievement data to interrogate what counts as evidence of inequality and questions the assumptions made by statisticians about the intersectional relationships between different forms of oppression such as race, class, and gender. Using data from the Longitudinal Study of Young People in England and exploring the case of Black Caribbean youth, Gillborn illustrates how quantitative approaches can also be subjected to and influenced by the biases of researchers themselves. Gillborn eloquently summarizes this trend and is worth quoting at length:

By focusing on how much inequality is associated with particular student identities (including class, gender, race, family structure, maternal education), such research gives the impression that the problem arises from those very identities – rather than being related to *social processes* that give very different value to such identities, often using them as a marker of internal deficit and/or threat. (p. 272)

Gillborn’s theoretical and empirical analyses of deficit thinking and gap talk have been extremely influential in the policy sociology literature and are also taken up in the studies below.

Lingard, Creagh, and Vass (2012) demonstrate the policy as numbers phenomenon in two cases of Australian education policy: the first deals with the category of students called Language Background Other Than English (LBOTE) and the second policy case deals with closing ‘the achievement gap’ for Indigenous students. These two cases demonstrate “the significant semiotic work involved in creating categories that lie at the basis of the policy as

numbers approach and how these categories work, perhaps paradoxically, as misrecognitions while ostensibly seeking to give effect to a policy of recognition” (p. 316). Their research found that the politics of recognition that was employed to identify English language learners and Indigenous students as disadvantaged can in fact operate as misrecognition, denying redistributive policy solutions. Lingard et al. (2012) also highlight the socially constructed nature of categories, such as LBOTE or Indigenous, that are part of the policy as numbers phenomenon and central to evidence-based policymaking. For example, in the case of LBOTE students, Lingard et al. conclude that “while deriving from well-intentioned moves in educational policy discourses, [LBOTE policy] actually misrecognises the category of students with real and pressing language needs” (p. 329). In the case of Indigenous students, a focus on closing the so-called achievement gap sidesteps structural inequalities and their causes “a misrecognition that essentialises the category of Indigenous students and that denies Indigenous knowledges, epistemologies and cultural rights” (p. 33).

Power and Frandji (2010) analyze the publication of performance data through league tables in England and France. They argue that the publishing of disaggregated performance data in this way constitutes a new form of cultural injustice and “compounds the injustices already experienced by disadvantaged communities” (p. 388). Criticism of league tables from researchers, professionals, and practitioners has led to “alternative ways of comparing school performance which seek to valorise the achievements of disadvantaged schools” (p. 386). The authors interpret these alternative mechanisms as a ‘new politics of recognition’ where social justice and equity policies are re-cast as value-added approaches. For example, by adapting new indicators and using advanced statistical techniques, Power and Frandji note that “researchers and analysts can acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of teachers and

pupils working in *relatively* successful schools in disadvantaged areas and reduce the collateral damage of unadjusted league tables” (p. 389). The authors rightly point out the perils of this new politics of recognition, noting that these alternative evaluation models, framed by ‘gap talk’ discourses, displace a politics of redistribution, serving to naturalize inequalities. Like Lingard et al. (2012), Power and Frandji (2010) argue that a focus on recognition “obscures the fact that these schools belong to a political economy of failure. It proposes, in our view mistakenly, that the economic inequalities which result from educational failure are *secondary* effect” (p. 392). As attention is drawn away from systemic disadvantage as the largest determinant of educational success or failure, educational inequality is naturalized and seen to reside in the deficits of students, teachers, and even schools.

In the Ontario context, the policy as numbers phenomenon has resulted in the hyper-visibility of the gendered achievement gap and the so-called crisis of failing boys (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012). Like many of the authors above, Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2012, 2013) argue that the policy as numbers phenomenon in education is contributing to a fundamental misrecognition of the systemic and historical roots of inequality in Ontario’s education system, resulting in obvious instances of policy misrecognition.

In light of these trends in global education policy, it is necessary to reflect on the limitations of the evidence-based paradigm for guiding educational policy processes and reform agendas. As People for Education (2011) remark regarding improved ‘success’ in Ontario:

The question is—is that enough? Is it enough to achieve these measures of success, or do we need to look further at what constitutes true success in a publicly funded education system?...If, as it should, our definition of success in education goes beyond test score results, and instead includes a wide range of competencies that will prepare

students to be successful, happy and contributing citizens, then it is vital that we as a province articulate a more complete vision for education. (p.3)

At a time when politicians, bureaucrats, and educational leaders are urged to use and provide evidence in educational reform, even the OECD admits that there is “relatively little that is known about the reasons for the success of Canadian education as a whole” (OECD, 2010, p.66). Clearly, caution must be taken when leaning heavily on OECD/PISA test indicators and league tables. Such findings point to the need to investigate and question, what counts as evidence of equity under the neoliberal imaginary of education and with what consequences. Furthermore, as Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) remind us, we must ask what data is being used to map educational disadvantage.

### **Choice**

One of the most significant impacts of the growing marketization of education has been policy shifts towards greater choice, for parents and students, across Europe, Australia, and North America (Ball, 2003, 2009). For over a decade, Stephen Ball, the most notable academic investigating the adverse effects of school choice, has analyzed the participation of education businesses in public sector education services, within the United Kingdom (Ball, 2007, 2009). As the leading scholar in this field, Ball (2009), argues that the privatization(s) of education are complex and include three different but inter-related forms of privatization. First is what Ball refers to as the “retailing of policy solutions” such as the selling of professional development, training, and support programs and services directly to schools (p. 84). Second is what Ball refers to as the privatization of policy, where “the representatives of the private sector operate inside of the government and are part of the policy creation community” (p. 89). Third, Ball argues that education businesses have an increasingly global reach in their scope and influence. Ball (2009) argues that “education businesses, like other

firms, are seeking to diversify and internationalise and are continually looking for new market opportunities” (p. 93). Ball’s (2007, 2009) analyses illustrate that privatization in education is not a zero-sum game between the state and capital, but is better characterized as “new forms of public-private collaboration” (p. 97).

Within the paradigm of school choice, students and parents become consumers and clients who are expected to rationally express their choices in the educational marketplace. School choice becomes a “functioning enterprise where parents and employers are seen as consumers and students as clients” (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999, p. 117). Rather than improving education, school choice serves to commodify and fetishize it. It is within this discussion, that Ball (2003) reminds us that it is crucial to consider who benefits from school choice policies, arguing that it is white, middle-class parents who are often the strategic users of such policies. A growing body of literature illustrates the unintended consequences of choice policies in education; rather than ameliorating inequality, such reforms actually exacerbate it, particularly for historically marginalized communities and groups (Ball, 2003; Cairns, 2013; Dehli, 1996, 2009; Dei & Karumanchery, 1999; Gulson & Webb 2012, 2013).

What Ball (2003) terms the “public monopoly on education” (p. 3) is now increasingly criticized for being inefficient, ineffective and in need of reform. Even in Canada where school choice policies are less pervasive and sedimented than in the British or American context, there is a growing body of literature exploring the rise of markets in the Canadian education system (Cairns, 2013; Dehli, 1996; Gulson and Webb, 2012, 2013; Mazawi, 2013).

In Canada, throughout the 1990s, a so-called crisis in education was engineered, as “Canadians were repeatedly warned that their education system was declining significantly; this at a time when falling standards were particularly worrisome, as educational excellence

was considered a prerequisite for national competitiveness” (Cairns, 2012, p. 39). According to Cairns, the discourse of choice has promoted an economic rationalism that allows the values of business to saturate educational policy processes. It is within this context that discourses of school choice emerge, and in Canada, they have taken on many different guises. For example, Cairns (2013) and Wotherspoon (2004) have documented the emergence of public-private partnerships as instances of covert privatization of education. Similarly, Davies (2004) has investigated the politics of educational reform in Alberta, focusing extensively on the emergence of quasi-markets in the field of education. Davies (2004) points out that the rise of private tutoring is one example. These quasi-markets are made possible by politics and policymaking at the provincial and district school board level. In Ontario, Dei and Karumanchery (1999) argue that educational reform during the 1990s led to the marketization of education and a resulting silence on equity. While school choice policies are based on the rationale of the market as an equalizer, Dehli (1996) argues that reform efforts that emphasize greater parental choice, rather than empowering parents and leading to greater educational equity actually results in greater exclusion of disadvantaged students. According to Dehli (1996) this paradigm masks “the vast differences in parents’ capacity to exercise their role as consumers on that market” (p. 76). Similarly, Dei and Karumanchery argue that the “rhetoric of cost-effectiveness and bureaucratic efficiency, the “official” agenda for education shifts focus away from equity considerations in schooling to those of capital, market forces, and big business” (1999, p. 111).

The findings discussed above have been nuanced through the research of Gulson and Webb (2012, 2013) who draw attention to the racialized politics involved in school choice discourses. Based on empirical research conducted in Toronto around the creation of

Africentric schools, Gulson and Webb (2013) argue that the emergence of government funded ethno-centric schools such as “charter schools in the United States, publicly funded ‘private’ schools in Australia, ‘free schools’ in the United Kingdom” are often associated with ethnic or cultural groups “that are ‘minority’ and/or racialised populations in nation-states such as Afro-Caribbean in Canada, Muslim in Australia, and Latino/a in the United States” (p. 169).

Gulson and Webb’s (2013) investigation of the establishment of an Africentric school in Toronto reveals the limits of school choice as a way to redress the marginalization and disadvantage of Black students. Instead, the authors argue that, “neo-liberal education policies which supports choices, like the alternative school programme, are in public education system, reshaping, conflating and branding ethnicity in racialised quasi-school markets” (p. 168). Their study found that school choice policies are deeply altering and reshaping the possibilities and boundaries of a truly equitable education system. In sum, this body of research unanimously points to the negative effects and intensification of market reform on existing educational inequities.

So far, this review of literature has interrogated many of the educational policy discourses believed and currently valorized as avenues through which to make education more equitable and of a higher quality. A common thread in the literature are the findings that discourses of standardization, accountability, and evidence-based policy have failed to deliver on their promise of greater educational equity, while the values of efficiency and effectiveness championed through high-stakes testing and school choice policies are resulting in a marginalization of the imperatives of social justice in education. Save for a few minor exceptions (Taylor & Henry, 2003; Taylor & Singh, 2005), the policy sociology and sociology of education literature has not explored the relationship between equity education



policies and greater educational equity. Because equity is considered to be a universally accepted educational value, it is surprising that there is little research that explores how equity policies are enacted and whether policies and their enactment can have any bearing on or relationship to educational justice. The following section delves deeper into educational equity as a policy value.

### **Shifting Conceptions of Equity**

Since the 1950s, education systems around the world have been concerned with equity; this commitment to equity has been based on economic imperatives as well as the principles of social justice. According to Rizvi and Lingard (2010) educational policymakers “have regarded a better-educated population as necessarily good for the economic development of a nation while, on social justice grounds, they have viewed education as a basic human right, and essential for social cohesion” (p. 140). The term equity is increasingly ubiquitous, and has taken on different meanings in different contexts. In the 1980s, a social democratic framing of equity led to redistributive policies and practices as the principle of ‘to each according to their need’ reigned and financial resources were provided to disadvantaged schools on that basis alone. Throughout the 1990s, the human capital agenda dominated, linking equity in education systems to more cohesive, competitive societies. Recently, equity is being viewed as a market enhancing mechanism, collapsing into one the social and economic domains of education. This section surveys the academic literature that documents the shift from human capital enunciations of equity to the growing marketization of equity in education and the implications of these shifts for teachers’ pedagogical practices, the well-being of students, and communities.

### **Human Capital Rationalization of Equity**

In the current climate of neoliberal restructuring of education systems, many education policies are premised on a narrow conception of educational justice most often taken to mean formal access to schools and other educational services and institutions, avoiding more complex issues such as experience, treatment, and outcomes (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

According to Rizvi and Lingard, this emaciated approach fails to address “the dynamics of educational experience and their social and economic outcomes, as well as the historical conditions that produce inequalities” (p. 141). This argument made by Rizvi and Lingard, in relation to three major policy initiatives, the Millennium Development Goals, gender equity policies in education, and programs that address the digital divide, is echoed by Berliner (2007) in relation to the OECD’s analysis of educational equity through PISA. According to Berliner (2007), PISA’s analysis of equity is very narrow, reflecting an instrumental framing, again taken to mean formal access to educational institutions, hence, it focuses on the equality of opportunity.

In Australia, Sandra Taylor, Miriam Henry, and Parlo Singh have explored shifting conceptions of educational equity in the context of globalization. In their study of *Education Queensland 2010*, an ambitious education reform agenda in the Australian province of Queensland, Taylor and Henry (2003) argue that there is a growing convergence of policy ideas around human capital theory, new public management theory, and growing concerns with social cohesion. It is within these broader social discourses that equity and social justice initiatives and policies are manifesting themselves. For Taylor and Henry (2003), policy tensions “between equity and efficiency and between equality and difference, are not new” (p. 338) and in the context of neoliberal globalization, have significant implications for how

educational equity and social justice are pursued through policy. The authors conclude that *Education Queensland 2010* is a distinctive response to the rapid pressures of globalization that delicately weaves together economic imperatives and social goals: “There is an emphasis on building social capital as well as human capital, and a strong commitment to public schooling” (p. 350).

Two years later, Taylor and Singh (2005) explored how *Education Queensland 2010* was being implemented with a focus on how the tensions between redistributive and recognitive approaches to social justice (Fraser, 1997) are discursively managed. What emerged from their interview-based study with key policy actors in the bureaucracy was that equity issues are differentially framed by policy texts and policy processes in terms of “what language was used; what specific groups were targeted; what programmes were being funded; how outcomes were being monitored” (p. 728). Specifically, policy actors within the Strategic Directions division pointed to the difficulty of using the term *inclusion* as it is often seen to reference special education. Within the Curriculum and Assessment division, it was observed that inclusive education had largely replaced the concept of equity, and was seen as an attempt to be more systematic. Finally, policy actors within Performance and Assessment division often framed equity as performance driven, locating the deficit within the individual student and sidelining other aspects of institutional outcomes. Ultimately, based on their data, Taylor and Singh (2005) concluded that while shifts in language are significant, they “are not in themselves adequate for the structural and fundamental changes that are needed to achieve greater social justice” and in fact, may easily result in “equity issues slipping off agendas or becoming recontextualized as individual differences” (p. 736).

### **The Marketization of Equity**

Beyond the human capital framing of equity as promoted by the OECD, is the increasing role of “the market in defining the ways in which equity should be interpreted, promoted, measured, and governed in educational policy and practice” (Rizvi, 2013, p. 276). As opposed to social democratic understandings of equity built upon notions of trust and dignity, equity and its achievement are increasingly embedded within processes of capital production and accumulation. It is this trend that is at the center of a recent special issue of *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*. Savage, Sellar, and Gorur (2013) argue that shifting conceptions of equity and the rationalization of equity in economic terms need to be carefully analyzed to document their effects on educational governance, policymaking, educational institutions such as schools, as well as educators and students. At the textual level, Smyth (2013) investigates the Australian Labour government’s recent ambitious program of social inclusion through an examination of policy texts. Noting that social inclusion in Australia is increasingly framed as an individual issue or personal trouble, Smyth points to the semantic work done by the word ‘inclusion’; inclusion denotes an individualistic approach to equity, the need to combat the problem of disadvantage by ‘bringing people into the mainstream’. Such a surface-level approach, Smyth (2013) argues avoids any “dramatic tangling with or changing the circumstances or situations causing them to be outsiders in the first place. Solutions are ameliorative in nature, designed to improve the situation rather than fundamentally transform it” (p. 115).

Moving beyond an analysis of policy texts to how such policy agendas play out in schools, Savage (2013) explores the widely accepted yet under analyzed policy tension that secondary schools are capable of being equitable while simultaneously providing tailored,

personalized services to meet different, individual student needs. Ethnographic case studies in two socially and economically disparate secondary schools, revealed that “the flexibility and diversity of equity in policy seems to actually compliment the production of difference and inequality, allowing ‘rich school’ and ‘poor school’ versions of equity to operate in a highly differentiated and marketised system” (p. 198). For example, equity was seen as a way to mitigate the problems faced by students that are positioned in low socio-economic areas. In contrast, equity in the second case was primarily conceived of as equality of opportunity, access to resources, and productivity. Savage (2013) reminds us of the need to clarify or be cognizant of the multiple meanings attached to the discourse of equity; let us, as researchers, not “fall into lazy usages of the term equity or to think that one’s personal imagination of it is necessarily shared by others” (2013, p. 198).

The empirical research studies on school choice by Gulson and Webb (2012, 2013) illustrate the growing marketization of education in the Canadian context. They observe that “in the absence over 20 years of any substantive addressing of Black disadvantage at a systemic level, and with the reduction of equity focus in the new school board, the market becomes the modality for equality” (2013, p. 175). In combination, these studies point to the need to engage in a similar research agenda in the Canadian context, which has yet to be undertaken.

### **Equity and Quality: An Important Policy Tension**

These shifting conceptions of equity have drawn increasing attention towards educational policy debates, specifically the age-old quality versus equality debate.

Policymaking is best understood as struggles over the values and meanings that are attached and represented through policy texts (Taylor, 1997; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997).

Describing these struggles, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) state that “public policies in education, in particular, have to deal with a range of values, such as equality, excellence, autonomy, accountability and efficiency, simultaneously” (p. 72). Policy texts and enactment processes often privilege or rearticulate these values. According to Valverde (1988), the general public and, even more troubling, many educators, believe it is difficult if not impossible to provide quality education to the majority of students while ensuring equality of opportunity and outcomes for disadvantaged students. For Valverde, this is a false and problematic dichotomy: “in fact, excellence in public education cannot occur without equality of education as a prerequisite” (p. 317). Valverde’s identification of the quality/equality (excellence/equity) paradox is also echoed by Savage (1988) who observes that:

one of the major challenges facing educators today is the creation of school systems which are both equal and excellent. Yet a common perception is that educators must make an either-or choice about excellence and equality, and that a major problem of educational policy is to negotiate the conflict between them. (p. 9)

Smith and Lusthaus (1995) attempt to reconcile this debate by creating a “model demonstrating that equality and quality are not only compatible but mutually supportive and enhancing” (p. 378). However, for Smith and Lusthaus, the resolution of the paradox is made possible by the narrow framing of equity as equality of access and conceptualizing quality to mean attainment in relation to some standard.

While Smith and Lusthaus’ efforts in reconciling the paradox are laudable, what is needed is an interrogation of the human capital rationalizations of equity and quality that have become hegemonic in normative debates about educational policy. The human capital rationalization of equity and the growing paradox of quality and equity are explored below in the context of Ontario. However, in exploring this paradox through the case of Ontario, it is important to note the need to critically interrogate the growing significance of quality and

excellence discourses in education. It is not that a quality education and student excellence are not important considerations in educational policy and practice; what needs to be balanced with these concerns is a robust social justice agenda as well. For example, Gewirtz (2000) describes the severe consequences of Britain's quality agenda in schools, drawing attention to the way in which "official versions of quality, characterized by a narrow, economic instrumentality, are being promoted in schools by various forms of quality control that are marginalising broader, more humanistic conceptions of quality" (p. 352). Such a narrow framing of educational quality also has negative impacts on the ability of teachers, students, parents, and the broader community to actively participate in educational decision-making (Gewirtz, 2000).

### **Equity Initiatives in Ontario**

To practically illustrate the shifts in how equity is framed and reframed through and by policy, this review segues to a discussion of the Ontario case. Specifically, this section examines the portrait of Ontario that is painted by the OECD in light of Ontario's success in PISA and role of the OECD in constructing Ontario as a model of educational reform in a global context. Problematically, the OECD has praised Ontario for its ability to strike a balance between equity and excellence. I briefly discuss this trend and its implications for educational policy in Canada and beyond. Before exploring how Ontario's education system is seen on the international stage, however, it is necessary to provide context. The following section begins by exploring the history of past policies and initiatives as well as how equity is currently being framed in Ontario at the provincial level and beyond.

### **The History of Equity Education**

The first section of this literature review documented the severe consequences of

educational reform around the globe but also in Ontario and Canada. Reflecting on the impacts of standardization, accountability, and increased school choice, Rezai-Rashti (2003) argues that such reform discourses “have significantly reduced equity activities and the institutional mechanisms to adequately address equity issues” (p. 4). It is important to note that historically, Ontario has been at the fore in terms of educational policies on equity and social justice (Joshee and Johnson, 2005). This was especially true during the mid 1990s during the tenure of Ontario’s New Democratic Party when the Ontario Ministry of Education formally mandated the development and implementation of an anti-racism and ethno-cultural equity policy, through Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119 (1993).

In her historical analysis of equity education policy in Ontario, Joshee (2007) identified six discourses on diversity and social justice in Ontario’s policy web: identity based, equality as sameness, the business case, rights based, equity of outcomes, and social cohesion. She argues that the *equity of outcomes* discourse is the dominant approach to social justice at the Ontario Ministry of Education evidenced by sustained efforts to increase student achievement and graduation rates. These strategies are also conceptualized as a method for increasing international competitiveness: “the government also has a longer-term vision of student achievement that is linked to economic success. Diversity then is constructed in relation to equity of achievement in school and the economy” (Joshee, 2007, p. 184). Joshee’s findings parallel the research that has been conducted on the shifting conceptions of equity and the policy tensions that exist between equity and excellence. For example, Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, and Martino (2016), argue that Ontario’s Equity Strategy “draws on problematic notions of inclusivity as the basis for defining equity and ironically and paradoxically is influenced by a policy as numbers discourse and regime of neoliberal accountability in the



emphasis that it places on performance and measurement of outcomes” (p. 2). What they describe as the re-articulation of equity education in Ontario in neoliberal times has resulted in “the erasure of racialised minority students who are replaced by the category of ‘recent immigrant’, and the invisibility of social class and redistributive policy mechanisms” (p. 9).

### **Ontario: High-Quality-High-Equity**

The quality/equality or excellence/equity paradox is central to the way in which Ontario is represented on the global stage. Organizations such as the OECD place Ontario on a pedestal, as an exemplary model for educational reform in the global era. In their report *Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education*, the OECD praises Ontario for “high achievement in a diverse context” (OECD, 2010). Ontario has been able to balance high-quality and high-equity in education. Although Ontario did not find itself atop international rankings in the 1980s and 1990s, Dalton McGuinty’s Liberal government made significant strides in the PISA test scores beginning in 2000. The OECD highlights key educational reforms centered on academic achievement, including increasing literacy and numeracy in elementary schools and rising graduation rates in secondary schools across the province, as contributing to Ontario’s success. The Ontario government has created two large institutions that together play a significant role in the data-driven accountability system for education. First, the Conservative government created the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) responsible for developing and administering standardized testing in the province. In 2004, the Liberal government created the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (LNS) charged with the task of improving student achievement in reading, writing, and math. In their historical analysis of equity education policy in Ontario, Rezai-Rashti et al. (2016) observe that “never before in the history of Ontario, for instance, has the collection of

data become such a significant part of a machinery and technology of power in governing education” (pp. 6-7).

One does not have to look hard or far to hear the virtues of Ontario’s education system being proclaimed. On the one hand is the concept of *high-quality-high-equity* that the OECD has used to describe Ontario’s education reform strategy and its successes. The portraiture of Ontario and the PISA-envy it has spawned is possible with the expertise of notable policy advisors or policy entrepreneurs including Michael Fullan and Benjamin Levin. In a reflection of the McGuinty years (2003-2013), Special Advisor Michael Fullan stated that “nine years of steady improvement is impressive....Ontario has unequivocally developed ‘from good to great.’” (p. 1). Fullan references increased literacy and numeracy rates as well as graduation rates when re-committing Ontario to the three goals of public education: high levels of student achievement, reduced gaps in student achievement, and increased public confidence in the education system. On the other hand, these arguments have been further extolled in the literature by educational researchers who point to Ontario as a successful case of reform that can be and should be applied in other contexts (Luke, 2011; Meta & Schwartz, 2011). An example of this is Alan Luke’s 2011 Distinguished Lecture for AERA titled *Generalizing Across Borders: Policy and the Limits of Educational Science*. Luke (2011) argues that in Ontario, highly qualified teacher education candidates and graduates, ongoing professional development, a less prescriptive curriculum, a low emphasis on standardized testing, and a strong commitment to social democratic principles and a publicly funded education system are just some of the factors that are leading to the success of the paradigmatic high-quality-high-equity systems. Luke’s commentary regarding the success of Ontario’s high-quality-high-equity education system remains problematic and contradictory in

so far as it maintains a definition of success intrinsically dependent on test scores and cross-national comparisons.

Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) situate these claims within the broader context of “the multi-scalar dimensions of global/national/provincial policyscapes through a politics of numbers” (p. 589). The praising of Ontario and other celebratory discourses “contributes to a fundamental misrecognition of the historical legacy of inequality that persists in Ontario for specific immigrant and visible minority populations” (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2013, p. 605). It is important to disrupt the celebratory portraiture of Ontario as high-quality-high-equity to document and criticize negative and lasting impacts of neoliberal restructuring and reform.

### **Educational Leadership for Equity and Social Justice**

There is a growing body of literature in the field of educational leadership that explores and connects the work of school leaders and the social justice imperatives within policies (Ryan, 2010; Wallace, 2007). The field of diversity and leadership and the practice of leadership for social justice is a growing body of literature, especially in Canada. In fact, the coupling of leadership and social justice is relatively new; “this is a relationship that is in its infancy” (Ryan & Rottmann, 2007, p. 16). The research in the field of educational administration is beginning to document what scholars have termed social justice leadership (Blackmore, 2009; Furman, 2012; Theoharis, 2004, 2007). Numerous academic journals in the field of educational administration have begun to explore the concept of social justice leadership through special issues. In 2007, a Special Issue of the *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundation* was devoted to “educational leadership and policy approaches to critical social justice” (Ryan and Rottmann, 2007, p. 9). The authors and their contributors

acknowledge the significance of social differences and its impact on experiences of schooling; hence this body of research is often framed by the rationale that “differences associated with culture, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation, gender, and ability can mean the difference between success and failure, enrichment and impoverishment, and hope and despair for students” (Ryan & Rottmann, 2007, p. 10). The underlying purpose of the Special Issue of the *Journal of Educational Administration and Foundation* was to offer alternative conceptions of leadership and policy and to connect these conceptualizations to a social justice agenda. Additional journals in the field of educational leadership have devoted special issues to social justice leadership. One of the most influential journals in the field, *Educational Administration Quarterly*, published a special issue in 2004 titled Social Justice Challenges to Educational Administration. In 2006, the journal *Leadership and Policy in Schools* published a special issue titled International Perspectives on Leadership and Policy for Social Justice. Most recently in 2016, the *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership* published a special issue titled Intersectionality: Promoting Social Justice While Navigating Multiple Dimensions of Diversity.

Scholars in the field have pointed out that this body of research is nascent but growing (DeMatthews, 2015; Furman, 2012; Theoharis, 2004). The existent body of research has explored the orientations and worldviews of principals leading for social justice, the traits and dispositions of school leaders, (Theoharis, 2008), effective practices to support social justice work in schools (Ichihara & Galloway, 2014; Watonga, 2009), and barriers and limitations to social justice leadership (DeMatthews and Mahwinney, 2014; DeMatthews, 2015; Theoharis, 2008;). The field of social justice leadership has defined the nature of and approaches to social justice leadership (Brown, 2004; Furman, 2012; Ryan, 2006; Theoharis, 2004). For

example, Furman (2012) defines social justice leadership as “identifying and undoing these oppressive and unjust practices and replacing them with more equitable, culturally appropriate ones” (p. 194). Furman (2012) identifies six themes in the existing literature about the nature of social justice leadership: action oriented, committed and persistent, inclusive and democratic, relational and caring, and oriented towards a socially just pedagogy. Ishimaru and Galloway (2014) have identified ten equitable leadership practices that are necessary for creating more socially just schools: constructing an equity vision, supervising for equitable teaching and learning, developing organizational leadership for equity, fostering an equitable school culture, allocating resources, hiring personnel, collaborating with communities, engaging in self-reflection, modeling, influencing the sociopolitical context. Wasonga (2009) studied the leadership practices of school leaders leading for social justice and pointed to the significance of shared decision-making and advocacy. School leaders are significant policy actors during the process of policy enactment and become important agents in creating equitable learning environments in their school and potentially resisting or subverting narrow framings of educational equity. Theoharis (2008) analyzed the dispositions of urban principals committed to social justice leadership and found that they embodied “a complicated mix of arrogance and humility, lead with intense visionary passion, and maintain a tenacious commitment to her or his vision of social justice while nurturing and empowering their staff” (p. 12). While there is an emphasis placed on social justice leadership, Furman observes that “empirical research on the actual *practice* of social justice leadership is just emerging, with most of this research in the form of case studies” (Furman, 2012, p. 194). Similarly, Theoharis (2004) argues that the literature in the field of educational administration lacks the real-life models of social justice to show that social justice leadership is not just rhetorical or

theoretical but can actually be practiced everyday. DeMatthews (2015) argues for more research on the experiences of school principals with social justice orientations. Specifically, he argues that “these studies should explore how successful, struggling, new, and veteran principals of various gender, race, and professional experiences apply leadership to establish more socially just schools, handle leadership dilemmas, and navigate difficult and inequitable school districts and accountability policies” (p. 160).

Much of the literature exploring equity policies in schools are located within the educational administration and more specifically the education administration for diversity and social justice fields. This narrow framing of equity, focused on student achievement and academic outcomes, is dominant in definitions of and approaches to social justice leadership (Scheurich, Skrla and Johnson, 2000; Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia and Nolly, 2004). Closing “persistent achievement gaps by race and class” that are seen as unacceptable and deplorable in the 21st century has become the focus of social justice leadership (Skrla, Scheurich, Garcia and Nolly, 2004, p. 133). This purpose differs from the objectives of much scholarship in the field of policy sociology that takes seriously its mandate to problematize policy constructions and interrogate power relations. There is often not a disruptive or alternative vein to such research; rather, the focus is on how to make current educational practices more equitable. For example, De Angelis, Griffiths, Joshee, Portelli, Ryan, and Zaretsky (2007), explore the challenges that principals face when attempting to promote social justice and administer standardized tests. The authors, a combination of academics and practitioners, recognize the injustice of such testing regimes but acknowledge that they are nonetheless responsible for administering current policies.

The present study is particularly relevant in so far as it responds to DeMatthews (2015) call for more studies at the intersection of policy and leadership. Researchers must “explore the impact of local, state, and federal policies on social justice leadership” (DeMatthews, 2015, p. 162). More research is needed on the ways in which education policy mediates social justice leadership: “without more robust understandings of these policies and systems, the relevance of social justice leadership for principals will be limited” (p. 162). This study explores the complex impact of policies on the work of socially-justice oriented school leaders. This study exposed the different experiences of school principals as they attempt to enact equity policy to create more socially just schools.

### **Chapter Summary**

A wave of educational reform has been circling the globe since the early 1990s and has left much critical scholarship in its wake. The academic literature in the fields of policy sociology and the sociology of education has exhaustively documented the negative impacts of education reform on educational equity, both in policy and practice, in states and regions around the world. This review of the literature reveals additional avenues for further research in policy sociology related to equity education. First, is the need for more critical policy research in Ontario and Canada. This review set out to illustrate the obvious gap between the body of critical policy research that exists in the context of the United Kingdom or Australia and in Canada. More research is needed in the Canadian context to understand how regimes of performative accountability influence equity. Instead of research agendas that merely criticize this trend, it is important to imagine alternatives to accountability or how accountability regimes can be re-articulated to focus on educational equity. Second, neoliberal globalization is also re-articulating the meaning of and approaches to educational

equity. For example, while research in Australia has explored the impacts of shifting conceptions of equity, particularly the emerging marketization of equity in education, these topics remain under-investigated in the Canadian context. This research seeks to understand how performative accountability systems are shifting conceptualizations of educational equity and the implications for policy enactment as a result. Analyzing the re-articulation of equity as a policy value in Ontario will work to disrupt the portrait of Ontario as a *high-quality-high-equity* model of reform in the global policy field. Third, there is very little research that explores the complex and contradictory ways that equity policies are enacted and if and how these enactment processes can facilitate greater educational equity. Ontario's Equity Education Strategy, formally released in 2009 has not been studied in the academic literature, particularly the policy sociology literature. A detailed policy enactment study of Ontario's Equity Strategy is greatly needed to better understand the relationship between educational policy and greater educational justice. Fourth, a policy enactment case study of equity policy in Ontario will illuminate the work that school leaders as policy actors engage in. There is little research that explores school leaders' shifting understandings of educational equity and how these understandings mediate the enactment of equity education policies in district school boards in Ontario. School leaders are important policy actors with tremendous potential to influence equity at the school-level. Research that documents their understanding of equity and how these understandings and dispositions influence equity initiatives is needed.



### Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the methodological approaches that guided the collection and analysis of data in this study. An important consideration throughout this chapter is illustrating the interconnectedness of the research problem, theoretical positioning, and methodological decision-making (Anyon, 2009; Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith & Hayes, 2009). In the first section, the purpose of the study and its theoretical framing are briefly revisited. Methodologically, this study is situated within the policy sociology domain. This chapter addresses the objectives of the policy sociology approach, including a historically informed, layered approach to policy analysis that acknowledges the relationships between local, regional, national, and international forces that shape policy processes. The second section reviews approaches to policy analysis, classifying this study as an analysis of policy and more specifically, a policy enactment study complemented by a policy analysis. The third section explains and justifies the selection of case study design as the best methodological approach to address the questions and concerns identified above. Case study design informs methodological decision-making such as sampling strategies and data collection procedures that are also presented in this section. The fourth section of this chapter describes the steps taken during the analysis of collected data. Particularly relevant is the use of Anyon's *theoretically informed empiricism* and the image of kneading the theory-data dough. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the strategies that were used to establish trustworthiness and the limitations of the study.

#### Where Purpose, Theory and Method Meet

Much of the current research on qualitative methodology points to the importance and fluidity of the relationship between the research purpose and questions, theoretical framework,

and methodological design. For example, with regard to qualitative research design and methodology, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue that there must be “an appropriate fit between research problem and methods adopted, together with an historically informed reflexivity” (p. 51). Likewise, Koro-Ljungberg et al. (2009) advocate epistemological awareness, a process whereby the researcher must articulate their epistemological and theoretical positioning and ensure that this positioning informs all decision junctures in the research study. According to these authors, researchers must make explicit their epistemologies, theoretical perspectives, and justifications for the directions taken at particular junctures in the research journey so that findings appear consistent and justified rather than random, uninformed, convenient, and poorly reported. Similarly, Anyon (2009) argues for an intrinsic connection between theory and research, what she calls a *theoretically informed empiricism*. Anyon (2009) argues that theory and research are in constant conversation with one another: “they imbricate and instantiate one another, forming and informing each other as the inquiry process unfolds” (p. 2). A *theoretically informed empiricism* joins theory, research, and social action, making qualitative research more valuable by connecting the micro context under study to the macro social structures, increasing the critical social explanatory range of interpretations.

### **Positioning the Research**

First, to articulate the fit that Rizvi and Lingard (2010) argue for between the research problem and the methodology, it is necessary to briefly re-visit the purpose of the study. The purpose of this study was to provide insights into the enactment of *PPM No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools* (2009).

Particular attention was paid to the ways in which the provincially mandated equity and inclusive education policy statement is being interpreted, translated, and enacted in a district

school board office and local schools in Ontario. In order to shed light on this broad question, the study focused on: the role of historical, political, and material context in mediating policy enactment; the actions of policy actors at the school board and in local schools in interpreting and translating the Ministry equity policy; and shifting philosophical conceptions of equity that are embedded within Ministry and district school board equity policies.

### **Policy Sociology**

Policy sociology (Ball, 1994, 1997; Ozga, 1987; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) is the meta-methodological approach for the study. Broadly speaking, policy analysis from this vantage point is “concerned with understanding policy content, its related processes and its effects in order to contribute to making things better in educational practice, contributing to progressive social change” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 50). Methodologically, policy sociology is “rooted in the social science tradition, historically informed and drawing on qualitative and illuminative techniques” (Ozga, 1987, p. 144). A review of the literature in policy sociology identifies four methodological considerations that must be taken into account: the historical context, the layering of policy processes, the role of power and politics in policymaking, and the positionality of the researcher. These considerations are elaborated on before detailing the specific approaches to policy sociology that will be used in this study.

First, a historically-informed approach to policy analysis is a cornerstone of the policy sociology framework, and especially important in the context of globalization and the complex ways that globalization is affecting policy processes (Ozga, 1987; Rizvi, 2007). The historical context of the policy under study requires “chronological consideration of what policies have preceded any given policy, and the extent to which the policy represents an incremental or radical change” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 48). The importance of historical

context was integral to Ball et al.'s (2012) theory of policy enactment; "policy is not 'done' at one point in time; in our schools it is always a process of 'becoming', changing from the outside in and the inside out. It is reviewed and revised as well as sometimes dispensed with or simply just forgotten" (pp. 3-4). The role of historical context is especially relevant for the present study as the equity education policy under study is a re-worked, updated version of a past equity policy that had been released by the Ministry in 1993.

Second, policy sociology examines both macro-level and micro-level social orders (Ozga, 1990). According to Ozga it is necessary to "bring together structural, macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies and micro-level investigation, especially that which takes account of people's perception and experiences" (1990, p. 359). Policy sociologists focus their analytic gaze on small, localized case studies of schools and policymakers while recognizing that these cases are set within the broader context of the global policy field where ensembles of practices, ideas, and technologies circulate (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). As the macro-level social order shifts as a result of globalization, a growing body of literature in policy sociology has sought to globalize policy analysis (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). A global policy paradigm is emerging, evidenced by similarities in educational policies in nations around the world. And yet, there is nothing inevitable or uniform about this shift. Rather, globalized policy discourses "are mediated at the national and local levels by particular historical, political and cultural dynamics" (p. 3). Much educational research and policy analysis has a tendency to reify the effects of globalization on educational policy processes. More than just observing that certain policy discourses are the result of globalization, it is critical to explore *how* the neoliberal

policy paradigm has become hegemonic, how this paradigm impacts the actions and experiences of local policy actors, and how it might be resisted and subverted.

Third, policy sociology highlights the role of values as a key element to be analyzed when conducting education policy research (Ozga, 1987; Prunty, 1985; Taylor et al., 1997). According to Rizvi & Lingard (2010), “education policies represent a particular configuration of values whose authority is located at the intersection of global, national, and local processes” (p. 3). Attention to the role of values in shaping policy processes highlights the struggles, contestations, and compromises that shape policy enactment. Policy sociology seeks to uncover whose values are reflected in education policy and whose values are sidelined. Describing these struggles, Rizvi and Lingard (2010) state that “public policies in education, in particular, have to deal with a range of values, such as equality, excellence, autonomy, accountability and efficiency, simultaneously” (p. 72). Policy texts and enactment processes often privilege or rearticulate these values. For example, neoliberal globalization extols the virtues of accountability and efficiency as important educational values, resulting in a marginalization of equity considerations. To be clear, it is not that equity policies do not exist; rather, their underlying assumptions, objectives, and implementation plans have shifted. These shifts can be mapped onto the shifting of educational values in the global policy field (Lingard, Creagh & Vass, 2012). Drawing on Easton’s (1953) oft-cited definition of policy as the ‘authoritative allocation of values’ Prunty (1985) reflects on the importance of an analytics of power when analyzing education policy to understand “not only whose values are represented in policy, but also how these values become institutionalized” (p. 136). Issues of power are central to policy analysis: policy sociology responds to questions such as “in whose interests are the policy made and the analysis conducted” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 50).

Finally, researcher positionality is an important methodological consideration; “the questions of who is doing the policy analysis and for what purposes, and within what context, are clearly relevant for determining the approach to be taken to policy analysis” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 46). Whatever the specific questions being asked, they are always “situated against reflexive consideration of the positionality of the policy researcher” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 52). This section has attempted to fully articulate the theoretical positioning of the researcher while the sections that follow will substantiate how said positioning influences methodological design.

### **Approaches to Policy Analysis**

In this section, the general approaches to policy analysis that guided the methodology for the study are explored beginning broadly with the distinction between analysis *of* policy and analysis *for* policy and then moving to the typology of qualitative policy studies presented by Maguire and Ball (1994). Below the description and rationale for the analysis *of* policy approach is presented and more specifically the types of policy study - enactment study and policy text study.

#### **Analysis of Policy**

The education policy literature makes a distinction between analysis *for* policy and analysis *of* policy. Analysis *for* policy is a practical exercise, aimed at informing policy development and implementation, and often commissioned by governments and educational bureaucracies. The latter, analysis *of* policy, is characterized as an academic endeavor, seeking to explore “why a particular policy was developed at a particular time, what its analytic assumptions are and what effects it might have” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 45). Furthermore, analysis *of* policy does not take as a given the particular problems which policies

construct. Often analyses *of* policy begin with the objective of deconstructing the policy problem and the historical context from which it emerged. The purpose of this study is to understand and explain how policy enactment is taking place in local sites by documenting who is involved, how, and why. A particularly relevant aspect of the study is to explore shifting conceptions of equity in a context of neoliberal accountability and how this paradigm is shaping the enactment of the equity policy. Therefore, this study aims to problematize the recent linking of equity and quality in the Ontario context and the valourizing of Ontario as a *high-quality-high-equity* education system (OECD, 2011).

Beyond this simplistic dichotomy, Maguire and Ball (1994), identify three different qualitative orientations to policy analysis in education: *elite studies*, focusing on the experiences of senior policy makers; *trajectory studies*, documenting policy processes from the phase of agenda-setting to evaluation; and *implementation studies*, more recently termed *enactment studies* (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) add a fourth, *policy text studies*. This study uses two different orientations: a policy enactment study and a policy text study. These two different approaches are elaborated on below.

### **Policy Enactment Study**

This study is conceptualized as a policy enactment study. Education policy enactment studies focus on “the context of policy practice and use a variety of methods including interviews, observations, document analysis and sometime ethnographic case study work” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 59). According to Maguire and Ball (1994) enactment studies are concerned with “the interpretation of and engagement in policy texts and the translation of these texts into practice” (p. 280). This study relies heavily on Ball et al.’s (2012) approach to policy enactment research in secondary schools, emphasizing the way in which policies are

interpreted, translated, mediated, and recontextualised in local contexts. Policy enactment theory emphasizes policy as a process that is shaped by local context and policy actors.

While traditional implementation studies view policy as a one-directional, top-down activity, policy enactment begins by conceptualizing policy as a process “as diversely and repeatedly contested and/or subject to different ‘interpretations’ as it is enacted (rather than implemented) in original and creative ways within institutions and classrooms” (Ball et al., 2012, pp. 2-3). In contrast to the static vision of policy implied in implementation research, Ball and colleagues conceptualize policy enactment as a “dynamic and non-linear aspect of the whole complex that makes up the policy process, of which policy in school is just one part” (2012, p. 6). Policy enactment research accounts for the important role of context in mediating policy processes (Ball et al., 2012; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Contextual dimensions, such as “different cultures, histories, traditions and communities of practice that co-exist in schools” are important in understanding how policy is enacted (Ball et al., 2012, p. 5). Central to an enactment study approach is meticulous analytic attention devoted towards the actions of policy actors who are at once the enactors of policy texts and also the subjects of the disciplinary techniques of policy. Ball (1994) emphasizes the agency of individual policy actors as central to understanding how policies are enacted:

Policy as practice is ‘created’ in a trialectic of dominance, resistance, and chaos/freedom. Thus, policy is no simple asymmetry of power: Control [or dominance] can never be totally secure, in part because of agency. It will be open to erosion and undercutting by action, embodied agency of those people who are its object. (p. 10-11)

In describing policy enactment, the words interpretation and translation are carefully selected to indicate that “policy writers cannot control the meanings of their texts. Parts of texts will be rejected, selected out, ignored, deliberately misunderstood” (Bowe, Ball, & Gold,



1992, p. 22). Inherently defining the process of enactment is contestation and struggle over values; some interpretations of policy texts are mapped onto and shape enactment, others do not (Codd, 1988). These struggles over values and the actors engaged in these struggles are located at the center of the inquiry to understand how the context of text production and policy practice influence enactment.

### **A Policy Analysis of Policy Texts**

It is impossible to dispute that policy texts exist. In a banal sense, policies are written texts, interpreted by their readers (Ball, 1993). Ball (1993) elaborates on this simplistic distinction arguing that policies are “representations which are encoded in complex ways...and decoded in complex ways” (1993, p. 11). Encoding refers to the political struggles and compromises that characterize the production of any policy text from problem identification to the proposing of policy solutions and in the actual wording of the policy text.

Policy text studies are based on the observation that the “contemporary world of consumer capitalism and new global media has become text saturated and that text and language have become central to contemporary politics and policymaking” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 60). The policy text study is useful in “highlighting how policies come to be framed in certain ways – reflecting how economic, social, political and cultural contexts shape both the content and language of policy documents” (Taylor, 1997, p. 28). Issues of educational in/equity are a case in point, where policies are sometimes framed by anti-racist, multicultural, inclusive, equality, or equity discourses. Taylor (1997) argues that these differences in terminology are significant and “reflect the particular historical and cultural context, and have implications for the ways in which particular concepts are used and understood” (p. 28). Apple (1993) reminds us that “concepts do not remain still for long. They have wings, so to

speak, and can be induced to fly from place to place. It is this context which defines their meaning” (p. 49). Policies and other texts are transferred from their context of production and interpreted and translated in their context of reception. Rizvi & Lingard argue that “school and classroom practices, which have different logics and which thus ensure policy as ‘palimpsest’, literally a new text written over a partly erased older text” (2010, p. 61). This approach captures the multiple readings and writings of policy as it moves from text to practice, from the context of production to the context of enactment.

### **Research Design**

The two approaches to analysis of policy discussed above, the policy enactment study and the policy text study, necessitated a two-pronged design for the collection and analysis of data. First, case study research was conducted in one school board in Ontario to investigate the enactment of the equity education policy. Ethical clearance was required for this study and obtained through Western University’s Ethics Board (Appendix A). Second, a policy analysis of Ministry of Education documents and policies as well as district school board documents and policies was undertaken to document the shifting conceptions of equity within Ministry and school board policies. A policy enactment study lends itself particularly well to a case study design. School board and school-based research was undertaken, guided by case study methodology, to investigate the enactment of equity education policies with a particular focus on the role of context and the experiences of policy actors as factors that influence the enactment of education policy.

#### **A Case Study of Policy Enactment**

Case study design guided the collection and analysis of data in this education policy enactment study. Yin (2009) proposes a two-fold definition of case study: first, case study is

an empirical inquiry aimed at investigating a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context; and second, case study inquiry relies on multiple sources of data to aid in triangulation. Case study research demands that the researcher “explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information, and reports a case description and case themes” (Creswell, 2013, p. 97).

Yin (2009) argues that case study is a preferred research design under three conditions: first, when “how” or “why” questions are being asked; second, when the researcher has little control over the event being studied; and finally, when the phenomenon being studied is situated “within a real-life context” (p. 2). First, case study design should be used when the research is centered on a desire to gain an in-depth understanding of a single case or multiple cases situated within real-life context. In other words, case study design is most effective when the purpose of the research is explanatory. The purpose of this enactment study is analytic and explanatory as opposed to evaluative. The enactment of the equity and inclusive education policy in a school board in Ontario is the phenomenon this study seeks greater understanding of, with particular attention given to the “interaction between diverse actors, texts, talks, technology and objects (artifacts) which constitute ongoing responses to policy” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 3). Finally, policy sociology and policy enactment theory highlight the role of local context in shaping how policies are enacted. Chaos and contradiction, more so than logic and order, characterize the process of education policy enactment. A methodological design that also embraces contextual complexity was needed to theoretically and methodologically account for such nuances. Hence the reason why the case study approach was chosen.

### Selecting the Case

Stake (2005) argues that the case must be understood as a bounded, patterned system. Bounded by both time and space, the enactment of Ontario's Equity Strategy was the case in this study. Ontario's Equity Strategy includes the formal equity and inclusive education policy statement (PPM No. 119, 2009) as well as supporting documents from the Ontario Ministry of Education to assist in its implementation. Released in Ontario in 2009, PPM. No. 119 mandated that "all publicly funded school boards will review and/or develop, implement, and monitor an equity and inclusive education policy" (OME, 2009b, p. 3). The Ontario Ministry of Education required district school boards to "have an equity and inclusive education policy in place by the beginning of the school year 2010-11 (September 2010)" (OME, 2009c, p. 11). PPM No. 119 (2009), the formal policy associated with Ontario's Equity Strategy, tasks district school boards with developing and implementing their own equity education policies.

Initially, the research proposal for the study identified that the case would be the enactment of the equity policy in local schools, set against the school board's interpretation of PPM No. 119 (2009). The proposed research argued that because this study was concerned with providing insights into how PPM No. 119 (2009) is being enacted, the case in this study is the enactment of equity education policy at the school level. Within this design, three different case study schools were selected for the study, with each school becoming a case study in its own right, focused on explaining how the policy is enacted given the specific context of the district school board's interpretation of PPM No. 119 (2009). The enactment of the policy situated at the level of each particular school was the intended focus of the case study analysis, and the district school board was seen as an important contextual layer that

informed the analysis of local specificities of policy enactment. However, as fieldwork began, specifically with officials at the school board, it became abundantly clear that the school board itself was an important site for the enactment of the equity education policy. The Equity Office at the Board was the primary organization tasked with enacting the equity education policy by organizing and carrying out equity initiatives in various schools across the board. Given that PPM No. 119 (2009) formally tasked school boards with developing and implementing equity education policies, the experiences of policy actors at the Board became the focal point of the case study. However, it is also important to document the trickle-down effects of policy into practice. For this reason, three case study schools were also selected for this study. The schools that were selected within the Board constituted embedded cases. Additionally, within each school, policy actors such as principals and vice-principals were conceptualized as embedded sub-units of analysis. This embedded design, as opposed to a more holistic design was chosen to accommodate the complex and often chaotic nature of policy enactment.

The enactment of PPM No. 119 (2009) at one school board in Ontario is best understood as an instrumental case used “to understand a specific issue, problem, or concern and a case or cases are selected to best understand the problem” (Creswell, 2013, p. 98). The instrumental case study approach is used when “a particular case is examined mainly to provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization” (Stake, 2005, p. 445). Although analyzed in-depth, the case plays a supporting role, to understand the phenomenon of education policy enactment. Easily the most frequently cited limitation of case study research is its lack of generalizability (Stake, 1995; 2005). While case studies are not generalizable to other contexts, Yin (2009) argues that they can make a contribution to the theoretical

propositions that frame the study. Institutional variation through purposeful sampling was intended to aid in the transferability of findings to similar contexts as well as theoretical contributions to policy sociology and policy enactment.

Purposeful selection of the cases was used to ensure the selection of a school board that was currently in the process of enacting the provincial equity education policy (Patton, 1990). Purposeful sampling means “selecting information-rich cases for study in depth... through which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of research” (Patton, 1990, p. 169). When conducting a single case study, Creswell (2013) recommends selecting a critical case that allows for “maximum application of information to other cases” (p. 158). Such purposefully selected critical cases yields the data needed to answer the research questions. Ontario is a diverse province where some district school boards have a longer history and greater experience with equity policy initiatives. The district school board chosen for the study was selected based on the following criteria: English-speaking, public school board; currently enacting the equity policy; previous experience with equity initiatives; and serving a large, diverse student population. Once the school board for the study had been identified, three schools within the district school board were purposefully selected to serve as case study schools. The case study schools chosen for the study were purposely selected according to the following criteria. First, following interviews conducted at the Board, the recommendations of staff at the Equity Office were used to identify case study schools. Second, existing contacts within the school board that have been established by the Supervisor were used to purposefully select case study schools. As a research assistant on these projects, a familiarity with key schools had previously been developed and these schools were targeted first.

### **Textual Analysis of Ministry and District Equity Education Policies**

Ball's conceptualization of policy as "text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended" (1994, pp. 10-11) provides the theoretical basis for the particular analytic approach to policy texts at various institutional levels. An important element of this study is to highlight the educational values and philosophical iterations of equity that are embedded within the equity policy statements developed and enacted in a district school board. A policy text study compliments the enactment study by accounting for the role of policy texts in mediating policy enactment. The policy text study facilitates an understanding of how policies translate abstract ideas and values "into roles and relationships and practices within institutions that enact policy and change what people do and how they think about what they do" (Ball, 2008, p. 6). The policy text study involved a textual analysis of Ministry-level and district school board equity policies and supporting documents to identify the philosophical and ideological conceptions of equity that are embedded within the texts with an eye towards how the discourses of neoliberal accountability are shifting definitions of and approaches to educational in/equity.

Equity and inclusive education policies were collected at two institutional levels in Ontario. First, at the provincial level, PPM No. 119 (2009) and its supporting documents released by the Ontario Ministry of Education were collected. Second, locally-developed equity and inclusive education policies at the Board were collected. Finally, to explore the intertextuality of equity and inclusive education policy, complementary policies were collected to document how policies cluster together, forming "mutually reinforcing sets which can in some instances 'over-determine' enactment" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 7). This multi-levelled textual analysis strategy highlighted the tensions that characterize the relationship

between the provincial Ministry of Education and district school boards and how this relationship is negotiated during policy enactment.

### **Data Collection Methods**

According to Yin (2009), the complexity of the phenomenon under study requires that case study researchers collect data from multiple sources to aid in triangulation. The case study's unique strength is its ability to deal with a wide variety of evidence – verbatim transcripts, field notes, documents, and artifacts. In fact, the collection of a wide variety of evidence is demanded in critical policy analysis (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Yin (2009) describes six common sources of evidence that can be collected when doing a case study: direct observations, interviews, archival records, documents, participant observation, and physical artifacts. This study relied on the following methods of data collection: semi-structured interviews and document collection.

#### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 participants to “allow us to enter into the other person’s perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). Emphasis was placed on collecting interview data from school board officials as they are most often involved with writing local policies and designing enactment plans. Interviews were conducted with six staff at the Equity Office in the Board. Only two staff members at the Equity Office refused to participate in the study. Following initial contact with the coordinator of the Equity Office, other staff members at the Office were identified and willing to participate in the research.

At the school-level, interviews were conducted with the vice-principal or principal in each of the three case study schools. Ball, Maguire, Braun, and Hoskins (2011b) remind us that “policies ‘drip’, ‘seep’ and ‘trickle down’ into practice” (p. 620). Interviewing school



leaders aided in documenting the dripping and seeping of policy into practice, making the study more valuable by illuminating the nexus between policy and practice. While the enactment of the equity education policy at the school level was not the focus of the case study design given the constraints identified above, considerable effort was made to ensure that the experiences of school leaders within three different schools were captured, documented, and analyzed.

A recruitment email was used when making initial contact with potential participants (Appendix B). A letter of information was provided to each participant and a consent form was signed (Appendix C). All interviews lasted for approximately 60 to 90 minutes, were audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. An interview protocol of approximately ten questions, formulated from the research focus, was used (Appendix D). The following chart presents the pseudonyms, positions, and years of experience for each participant in the study.

**Table 1: The Participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Years of experience</b>	<b>Professional Background</b>
Deborah	Head of Equity Office	20	Teacher, Vice-principal, Principal
Tamara	Curriculum specialist	25	
Ryan	Curriculum specialist	17	Teacher, Lecturer/researcher
Caroline	Curriculum specialist	3	Teacher
Jane	Student outreach coordinator	5	Teacher
Cindy	Student outreach coordinator	5	Social worker
Nathan	Principal at School 1	20	Teacher, Principal
Sandra	Vice-principal at School 1	15	Teacher, Vice-principal
Lauren	Vice-principal at School 2	20	
Nadine	Vice-principal at School 3	15	Teacher, curriculum specialist at the Equity Office, Vice-principal

Snowball sampling was used to identify “cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information rich” (Creswell, 2013, p. 158). Here, cases of interest referred to additional members of the Equity Office identified by the coordinator and co-workers or vice-principals and principals identified by staff at the Equity Office. Due to the political nature of equity work and the perception of surveillance that is often associated with equity initiatives, few school-based leaders were willing to participate in this study. This fact was reinforced during interviews with Equity Office staff who explained they were not surprised that I had great difficulty in recruiting schools and school leaders who would be willing to participate in the study. As an outsider in this setting, staff at the Office were instrumental in helping me to gain access to schools. It was necessary to rely on snowball sampling to gain access to participants and sites that I would not have otherwise had access to.

### **Document Collection**

First, documents, including reports and policies, were collected from the Ontario Ministry of Education. These documents served to describe the overall context within which the enactment of equity education policy was taking place. Second, documents, reports, and policies related to equity and inclusion were collected from the Board.

### **Storing Data**

In order to ensure that the data and the identities of the participants were protected, all data, including audio files, transcriptions, and field notes, were duplicated, names masked, and stored in a locked filing cabinet. A master list of the types of data that were gathered was also created to ensure that all data was easily identifiable and locatable (Creswell, 2013).

## Data Analysis

In this section, the framework for analysis, Anyon's *theoretically informed empiricism*, is presented and the specific steps that were taken when analyzing data are discussed. A *theoretically informed empiricism* was selected as the overall analytic approach in this study. A central image of the task of analysis is kneading the theory/data dough, "working it into rich and heady brew" significantly extending and enriching the yield of our empirical work (Anyon, 2009, p. 9). The stages of data analysis are described below with specific attention paid to the ways in which theory was brought into conversation with the empirical data.

At a practical level, case study research concludes with deriving meaning from the case, especially in an instrumental case study (Creswell, 2013). This study is not concerned with informing or prescribing the enactment of equity education policy in Ontario; rather, analysis was aimed at building patterns (Stake, 1995), offering explanations (Yin, 2009), and developing theory (Yin, 2009). These three purposes of the phase of data analysis are all equally significant. Hence, the phase of data analysis is complex. This study adopted the data analysis spiral presented by Creswell (2013) in order to achieve these three different objectives of analysis. As was the case with policy sociology, there is no single recipe for analyzing the data one has collected in a qualitative study. Creswell's (2013) use of the data analysis spiral captures his assertion that "the analysis process conforms to a general contour" (p. 182). The image of the data analysis spiral is also useful for capturing the interconnectivity and fluidity of the various steps in the process of data analysis that characterizes qualitative research. In describing the data analysis spiral, and the researchers' place within it, Creswell is worth quoting at length:

the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytic circles rather than using a fixed linear approach. One enters with data of text or images and exits with an account or narrative. In between, the researcher touches on several facets of analysis and circles around and around. (p. 182)

Creswell's data analysis spiral includes five different stages: organizing the data; reading the data; describing the data, including coding the data; interpreting the data, a making sense of various codes; and representing the data. These five stages are elaborated on below.

### **Organizing the Data**

The first stage in analysis was organizing the large volume of data I had collected into appropriate files. First, interviews were transcribed into text files. Second, hand-written field notes were organized into a second file. Third, policies and documents that were collected were printed and organized. While this first step in the process seemed mundane, it was essential due to the sheer volume of data that had been collected. I was cognizant of Patton's (1980) warning that: "I have found no way of preparing students for the sheer massive volumes of information with which they will find themselves confronted when data collection has ended" (p. 297). It was only once the large volume of data had been organized, that it was possible to begin to read and make sense of the data in order to create an overall picture of how enactment was taking place at the Board and in each of the schools.

### **Reading the Data**

Once the data had been organized, it was important for me to get a sense of the overall picture that the data was attempting to paint. In describing his own approach to this step of analysis, Creswell (2013) explains that in "looking over our field notes from observations, interview transcriptions, physical trace evidence, and audio and visual images, we disregarded predetermined questions so we could "see" what interviewees said" (p. 184). My goal during this step of the analysis was to explore the data as a whole and to identify major organizing

ideas. This was done through total immersion in the data. I read and re-read each of my transcripts and the policies creating memos in the margins and jotting thoughts and observations in a research journal.

### **Classifying the Data into Codes and Themes**

Creswell (2013) explains that this loop of the spiral is “the heart of qualitative data analysis” (p. 184). Description of the context, including the setting, people, places, and events plays a central role in the analysis of case studies. The overall goal in this step was to create a detailed description of the entire case, including its context and its participants or key policy actors. I created a description of policy enactment at the Board and a vignette of policy enactment for each of the three case study schools. In this stage, forming codes and ultimately themes was the primary task. The first step in this loop, *coding*, involved “aggregating the text or visual data into small categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigning a label to the code” (Creswell, 2013, p. 184). A short list of approximately twenty to thirty codes, was developed. This study used *invivo* codes “names that are the exact words used by participants” (Creswell, 2013, p. 185). *Invivo* codes were used because they privilege the interpretations and translations made by policy actors at the Board and within schools. Codes were then grouped together into broader units of information. A *theme* consisted of several codes aggregated to form a common idea that facilitated an extraction of larger meaning from the data. Approximately ten themes were identified during this stage. During the stage of classification, I relied on the creation and use of charts for the Board and for each school to identify themes that were common across each of the participants and within each of the settings in the study.

### Interpreting the Data

The phase of interpretation “involves abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data” (Creswell, 2013, p. 187). The overall aim of the analysis stage was to develop *naturalistic generalizations*, “generalizations that people can learn from the case either for themselves or to apply to a population of cases” (p. 200). In describing the two related spirals of classifying the data and interpreting the data, Stake (1995) describes the related processes of *categorical aggregation*, where the researcher identifies a variety of instances in the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge and *direct interpretation*, requiring the researcher to focus on a single instance and draw meaning from it. According to Creswell (2013), these two stages are “a process of pulling the data apart and putting them back together in meaningful ways” (p. 199). During the stage of interpretation, I reflected on the conceptual framework in light of the case study descriptions, vignettes, and identified themes. Theories of policy enactment (Ball et al., 2012) were useful for creating an overall description of the case and identifying important factors that explain how the equity policy was being enacted. Reflecting my research positionality in policy sociology, I worked to analyze the relationship between the macro context and the micro context, situating the experiences of policy actors within the context of neoliberal restructuring and performative accountability. The policy as numbers phenomenon (Lingard, 2011; Ozga, 2009; Rose, 1999) and the politics of recognition and redistribution (Fraser, 1997) provided useful theoretical tools for analyzing the philosophies of equity embedded with the texts and how these conceptualizations impacted the practice of equity in schools. Particular analytic attention was given to how equity was being re-articulated and how this shift influenced the actions of staff at the Board and school leaders who were enacting the equity education policy.

### **Representing the Data**

Finally, it was necessary to consider how to represent the findings and conclusions of the study. According to Creswell (2013), the representation loop involves several steps: first, identifying the purpose of the case study and the approach that was taken; second, an extensive description of the case and its context; third, a discussion of the emergent issues or themes that illustrated the complexity of the case; and fourth, assertions and conclusions that have been arrived at through analysis are presented. The three chapters that follow are my attempts at representing the wealth of data that was collected. These chapters paint an in-depth picture of the case of policy enactment at the Board and within three schools. Adopting the recommendation of Stake (1995), I used vignettes to open each of the cases. These vignettes helped the reader to understand the time and place of the study itself and were adopted from my field notes during data collection. In presenting my findings, I relied heavily on the use of narratives and direct quotations from the transcripts to capture the experiences of policy actors who are directly engaged in interpreting and translating equity education policies in their unique contexts.

### **Establishing Trustworthiness**

When interpreting and presenting qualitative data, the researcher needs to keep in mind that the ultimate purpose of a study is to inform the reader. Thus, clarity and validity of research findings are extremely important. The term trustworthiness is often used in qualitative research to refer to the overall quality of the research as opposed to validity or reliability. Guba and Lincoln (1981) propose four criteria for establishing trustworthiness: *credibility*, *transferability*, *dependability*, and *confirmability*. First, *credibility* broadly refers to the level of confidence one has in the accuracy of research findings. Second, *transferability*

is the degree to which research findings will have applicability in other contexts.

Transferability will be achieved through Anyon's task of theorizing back. While case study findings are not entirely generalizable to other contexts, this study contributed to theories of policy enactment. Third, *dependability* refers to the consistency of research findings. Despite the fact that qualitative research is often less concerned with the consistency of data as an indicator of its trustworthiness, any inconsistencies found within the study must be explained. Additionally, policy enactment theories emphasize contradictions and incoherence. In these instances, contradictions in the data are theorized. For example, in situations where participants' views were seen as outliers to the data, these are identified. Finally, *confirmability* measures the extent to which the findings of the research study are neutral. Qualitative research rejects the existence of an objective reality or knowledge; yet, it is necessary to demonstrate that the subjective claims of the researcher emerged directly from the data. Thick descriptions of the case and long quotations from the transcripts are used to demonstrate confirmability.

This study validated findings through the process of crystallization as a unique form of triangulation (Richardson, 2000). This process acknowledges that there are more than three sides from which to understand the world and the findings of research. Richardson (2000) proposed the image of the crystal: "crystals grow, change, alter...Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities *and* refract from within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions" (p. 934). The use of crystallization allows for the deconstruction of the traditional notion of validity, an inherent advantage that creates a more complex understanding of the research findings. According to Richardson, through the paradox process of crystallization, "we know more and doubt what we know...we know there



is always more to know” (p. 934). This research study employed multiple methods that served as the sources of crystallization. Furthermore, there was consistency in themes that arose from staff at the Equity Office and the school leaders.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented the methodological approaches that guided the collection and analysis of data in this study. This study is situated within the policy sociology domain drawing on an analysis of policy approach to investigate the re-articulation of equity education policy in Ontario and the high-quality-high-equity discourse. The case study design used interviews and document collection. Creswell’s (2012) data analysis spiral, embedded within Anyon’s (2009) theoretically informed empiricism informed the analysis of data.

### Chapter Four: Policy Analysis of Equity Policies

This purpose of this chapter is to analyze the equity and inclusive education policies and related documents from the Ontario Ministry of Education and at the District Board of Education (the Board). An important task in this study is to highlight the educational values that are embedded within Ontario's Equity Strategy (2009). Rizvi and Lingard (2010) explain that "seldom are values completely abandoned, but some values are foregrounded while others are masked or re-articulated, given a weaker meaning" (p. 76). The policy analysis in this chapter illustrates that equity in education is being redefined under the neoliberal social imaginary, embracing market-oriented principles of performance and accountability.

The analysis in this chapter illustrates a diluted vision of equity when considered alongside historical conceptualizations of equity education in Ontario. In 1993, the Ontario Ministry of Education required that all school boards in Ontario develop and implement antiracism and ethnocultural equity policies through *PPM No. 119: Development and Implementation of School Board Policies on Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity* (1993). This policy was one of the first instances where issues of educational equity appeared on the Ontario Ministry of Education's radar (Chan, 2007; Dei, 2003). The Ministry advocated for a systemic approach to equity acknowledging the limitations of an education system that was European in perspective and the importance of removing barriers for racial and ethnocultural minorities. PPM No. 119 (1993) specifically addressed issues of curriculum, language, assessment and evaluation, harassment, discipline, and hiring practices (McCaskell, 2005). Additionally, the policy was supported with financial and human resources from the Ministry of Education, most notably the Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Branch (Rezai-Rashti, 2003). Ontario's more recent Equity Strategy (2009), analyzed in this chapter, does not

represent a rejection of the value of social equity entirely, but rather a re-articulation of its meaning and prescribed practice, influenced by neoliberal policy discourses of performativity and accountability.

The analysis presented in this chapter is informed by Ball's understanding of policy as discourse. Policy texts are significant for the ways in which they present particular constructions of a problem and propose solutions. Ball (1994) explains that when analyzed as a discourse, policies "exercise power through a production of 'truth' and 'knowledge'" (p. 14). This chapter analyzes the policy discourses contained within Ontario's Equity Strategy to investigate the policy problem, policy solutions, and implementation strategies. Students at-risk for lower levels of academic achievement become the targets of the equity policy and efforts to close the achievement gap become the substance of equity work. Additionally, the Ministry's policy approach hinges on ambitious implementation timelines with limited resources to support implementation. Ultimately, the analysis in this chapter provides evidence that Ontario's Equity Strategy is a symbolic policy; a political response to pressures for change with ambitious and abstract goal statements, broad and unrealistic implementation timelines, and inadequate resourcing and funding (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

### **Ontario's Equity Strategy**

Three documents collected from the Ontario Ministry of Education, taken together, make up Ontario's Equity Strategy: *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* (The Strategy Document), *Policy/Program Memorandum 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools* (2013) (PPM No. 119), and *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (The Guidelines Document). The first document,

the Strategy Document presents the Ministry's vision of equity policy, including the construction of at-risk students as the policy problem and closing the achievement gap as the policy solution. The second document, PPM No. 119, describes the requirements of the Ministry's equity policy and the practices that will be pursued to achieve greater educational equity. The Guidelines Document provides implementation timelines and resources to school boards.

### **Realizing the Promise of Diversity**

The first document, released on April 6, 2009, titled *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy* constructs a particular vision of equity education for the province of Ontario, including a framing of the problem of inequity, its causes, and a vision of equity and inclusive education. In the Strategy document, the Ontario Ministry of Education constructed a crisis discourse of "at-risk students" as the catalyst for pursuing equity education. The document states that "recent immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, boys, and students with special education needs are just some of the groups that may be at risk of lower achievement" (OME, 2009c, p. 5). At-risk students and lower rates of academic achievement are the problems that Ontario's Equity Strategy aims to address.

Educational equity is constructed as a policy solution to the crisis of student achievement. According to the Strategy document: "to improve outcomes for students at risk we must actively seek to create the conditions needed for student success" (p. 5). The condition for student success is greater equity in the education system. The Strategy document formally expressed the Ministry's vision that equity education be pursued in tandem with the three core priorities for public education: increased student achievement,

reduced gaps in student achievement, and increased public confidence in the education system: “an equitable, inclusive education system is fundamental to achieving these priorities, and is recognized internationally as critical to delivering a high-quality education for all learners” (p. 5). Within the Strategy, equity is a policy mechanism designed to raise student achievement:

Embracing diversity and moving beyond tolerance to acceptance and respect will help us reach our goal of making Ontario’s education system the most inclusive in the world. We believe – and research confirms – that students who feel welcome and accepted in their schools are more likely to succeed academically. (p. 2)

As part of the policy solution, the Strategy document explains that an equitable and inclusive education system is one in “which every student is supported and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning” (p. 10). The definition of equity and inclusive education in the Strategy document reflects a linking of equity and excellence and the Ministry makes this clear when they state that “equity and excellence go hand in hand” (OME, 2009c, p. 6). Equity and inclusive education in Ontario has been all but reduced to ensuring equitable outcomes by closing achievement gaps.

In addition to the privileging of the value of excellence, Ontario’s Equity Strategy is also an example of the marketization of equity underpinned by economic motivations (Rizvi, 2013). The focus on student achievement and closing the achievement gap is constructed as a way to promote international competitiveness. Ontario’s diversity is cast as an economic resource: “to realize the promise of diversity, we must ensure that we respect and value the full range of our differences. Equitable, inclusive education is also central to creating a cohesive society and a strong economy” (OME, 2009c, p. 5). Equity is re-articulated in the neoliberal context as a strategy to boost student achievement and, by extension, economic competitiveness. The pursuit of academic excellence and educational equity as an economic

strategy is an example of what Rizvi (2013) refers to as the marketization of equity: “the increasing role of the market in defining the ways in which equity should be interpreted, promoted, measured, and governed in educational policy and practice” (p. 276). Through the marketization of equity in education, neoliberalism extends its influence beyond the realm of policy into a tactic of governance. Brown (2015) conceives of neoliberalism as “a governing rationality that disseminates market values and metrics to every sphere of life and construes the human itself exclusively as homo economicos” (p. 176).

The analysis of the Strategy document illustrates that equity is pursued for its instrumental value as opposed to its intrinsic value. This focus on student achievement reflects an *equity of outcomes* discourse that has become a hegemonic approach to social justice at the Ontario Ministry of Education: “outcomes are being defined in terms of literacy and numeracy and the government also has a longer-term vision of student achievement that is linked to economic success. Diversity then is constructed in relation to equity of achievement in school and the economy” (Joshee, 2007, p. 184). Focusing on student outcomes, as defined through student test scores in literacy and numeracy or graduation rates, eclipses other aspects of social justice rooted in social democratic as opposed to market-oriented principles. When viewed as an example of the policy as numbers turn, the focus on student achievement in Ontario’s Equity Strategy is a powerful instance of policy misrecognition (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2013). Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) argue that misrecognition results in

a displacement of a politics of redistribution and a failure to attend to racial inequality in terms of bleaching a more considered textual analysis of schooling and the reality of the impact of material disadvantage on student participation and achievement in schooling. (p. 590)

More recently, Rezai-Rashti, Segeren and Martino (2016) explain that reform strategies in Ontario, citing the equity policy as an example, focus on numbers and closing the

achievement gap “rather than on addressing structural inequities and the polemics of maldistribution afflicting the education system at this present time” (p. 13). Dimitriadis (2012) reminds us that “the classification of knowledge is power-laden process revealing some things and hiding others” (p. 56). Student achievement data is used to target particular groups of students at the expense of other groups who remain invisible under the equity policy. For example, Rezai-Rashti et al. (2016) observe that “the reconstitution of equity is most evident with the erasure of racialised minority students who are replaced by the category of ‘recent immigrant’, and the invisibility of social class and redistributive policy mechanisms” (p. 9, see also chapter 5 in Lingard, Martino, Rashti & Sellar, 2016).

By targeting particular groups of students as at-risk for lower levels of educational achievement, the Ministry is not required to pursue economic redistribution or provide additional resources to high-needs schools. Instead, initiatives aimed at boosting student achievement, such as numeracy or literacy programs, targeted to particular student groups, are the primary focus of the equity policy. These types of solutions are far more politically expedient. This particular construction of social injustice and proposed remedy are embedded in a politics of recognition with a limited potential to actually transform the unequal relations of power at the root of social injustice. By drawing on a politics of recognition, Ontario’s Equity Strategy represents an inadequate policy response to the issue of educational equity, one incapable of achieving greater social justice in schools.

### **Policy/Program Memorandum 119**

The second document, released on June 24, 2009, is the official policy statement issued from the Ministry of Education, formally titled *Policy/Program Memorandum 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools*

(2009). This policy required that “all publicly funded school boards will review and/or develop, implement, and monitor an equity and inclusive education policy in accordance with the requirements set out in this memorandum and in the strategy” (OME, 2009b, p. 3). This document contains the Ministry’s policy requirements, providing direction to school boards in developing their own equity education policies.

As the official policy statement from the Ministry of Education, PPM No. 119 (2009) explains that educational equity will be achieved by “identifying and eliminating discriminatory biases, systemic barriers, and power dynamics that limit the students’ learning, growth, and contribution to society” (p. 2). To address this broad goal, the policy statement contains a series of specific requirements. First, PPM No. 119 (2009) legislatively replaced the Ministry’s policy on antiracism and ethnocultural equity from 1993 and intentionally broadened its scope to address additional factors of discrimination, such as “race, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, gender, and class” and how these factors “intersect to create additional barriers for some students” (p. 2). The policy statement mandates that board policies take “these intersecting factors into account” (p. 2). PPM No. 119 uses the discourse of *inclusivity* of a wide range of identity categories that impact a student’s experience in the education system. PPM No. 119 acknowledges the social construction of difference around numerous axes including race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, and linguistic, religious, ethnic backgrounds. Fraser’s (1997) theorizing on social injustice offers a useful philosophical tool for analyzing equity policies as responses to demands for greater social justice. Fraser (1997) distinguishes between maldistribution and misrecognition. Cultural injustices, referred to as misrecognition, are rooted in social patterns of representation. Justice claims involve demands for greater cultural recognition and respect.



Maldistribution refers to the uneven distribution of resources where justice claims demand redistribution of wealth and resources. These bivalent identities “encompass political-economic dimensions and cultural-valuational dimensions” (Fraser, 1997, p. 19) and require both a politics of recognition and redistribution if they are to be adequately and more justly responded to.

Second, PPM No. 119 (2009) required that boards take a system-wide approach to equity and inclusive education. To ensure that school board policies related to equity and inclusion are “system-wide” in their scope, PPM No. 119 identified eight areas of focus that school board policies on equity and inclusion must address: board policies, programs, guidelines, and practices; shared and committed leadership; school-community relations; inclusive curriculum and assessment practices; religious accommodation; school climate and the prevention of discrimination and harassment; professional learning; and accountability and transparency (OME, 2009b). Fraser (1997) distinguishes between affirmative and transformative remedies to socioeconomic and cultural injustices. Affirmative remedies attempt to remedy social inequalities without changing the social structures that create and reproduce them. The Ministry of Education is attempting to move beyond a single emphasis on cultural politics to “a system-wide approach to identifying and removing discriminatory biases and systemic barriers to help ensure that all students feel welcomed and accepted in school life” (OME, 2009b, p. 3). PPM No. 119 (2009) represents the possibility of a transformative approach to social justice by advocating a system-wide approach that acknowledges and addresses the intersectionality of discrimination. However, the policy itself is rife with contradictions, and does not make transformative demands on the Ministry or on school boards. For example, the policy statement provides only limited resources from the

Ministry of Education that would serve to remedy historical and present-day maldistribution. The policy also makes no such demands of school boards to specifically allocate additional resources to high-needs schools. While the intentions of the policy represent transformative possibilities, the policy mechanisms lack the substance needed to achieve them.

### **Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation**

The Ontario Ministry of Education released a resource document to support school boards in developing and implementing equity and inclusive education policies titled *Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (OME, 2009a). This document provides actionable items and implementation timelines for all educational stakeholders, specifically the Ministry, school boards, and schools, to assist these stakeholders with policy implementation. The Guidelines document calls for action from all organizational levels of education in Ontario and established specific policy-related responsibilities for the Ministry, school boards, and schools. The Ministry's main task is to provide "direction, support, and guidance", school boards are required to "develop and implement an equity and inclusive education policy" and each school is required to "create and support a positive school climate that fosters and promotes equity, inclusive education, and diversity" (OME, 2009a, p. 14). School boards are the main organizational entity charged with enacting equity policy. This policy trickles down into schools with a specific focus on school climate. The Guidelines document establishes actionable items for each level of educational governance including the Ministry, school boards, and schools.

The Ministry also provided a four-year timeline for completing equity policy development and implementation. This timeline was intended to give school boards adequate time to develop and implement an equity and inclusive education policy and to encourage

school boards to meet the Ministry's deadline of September 2009 for policy development and 2010 for policy implementation. In year 1, the Ministry was to provide \$4 million to school boards to develop and implement a policy and school boards were to begin developing their equity policy. In year 2, the Ministry was to support school boards by developing a program, Managing Information for Student Achievement (MISA) and boards were to have their equity policy developed. The MISA initiative was created to "increase both provincial and local capacity to use data and information for evidence-informed decision-making to improve student achievement" (OME, 2016). In year 3, school boards were to begin the implementation of their equity policy by working with schools to create school improvement plans that address the eight areas of focus within PPM. No 119. In year 4, school boards were responsible for providing training opportunities to all staff and for establishing processes to monitor and report on the equity policy that include student performance indicators. It should be noted that the Ministry is only involved with equity policy development and implementation in the first two years. Resources are not provided in subsequent years when programs and procedures need to be established as part of policy implementation. The Ministry does not provide the necessary material resources required for active and sustained enactment of equity education policies. For example, it is difficult for school boards to enact new programs or hire the additional equity staff needed for Board-wide, school-based equity work. Given the lack of financial resources from the Ministry, not all boards will have the same capacity for equity work.

To bridge this gap, the Guidelines document does provide non-financial resources for school boards in developing, implementing, and monitoring equity education policies. The 94-page document included "practical strategies and advice, along with examples, templates,

and web links that boards can use to inform policy review and ongoing development, implementation, and monitoring” (OME, 2009a, p. 8). In this way, the Ministry plays a supportive role rather than a leadership role. Part of this supportive role involves knowledge mobilization. According to the Guidelines document, the Ministry will conduct and disseminate research on “promising practices in equity and inclusive education” (OME, 2009a, p. 8). Given the lack of resources provided by the Ministry, a great deal of policy enactment will depend on the existing capacity within a school board. The action plan makes significant demands on school boards who are responsible for many different policy related tasks including writing policy, developing programs, supporting schools, monitoring progress, and evaluating policy effectiveness with data from performance indicators. Rezai-Rashti et al. (2016) point to the contradictions of Ontario’s Equity Strategy that is “influenced by a policy as numbers discourse and regime of neoliberal accountability in the emphasis that it places on performance and measurement of outcomes with limited attention to the required resources for the enactment of such an equity policy” (p. 2).

The Guidelines document also describes how school boards and schools are held accountable for enacting the equity policy. Schools are required to submit school improvement plans to the school board for reporting and monitoring progress. According to the Guidelines document, school leaders are responsible for “a school improvement process that uses comprehensive, valid, and reliable data to help identify the root causes of barriers to student achievement” (OME, 2009a, p. 33). School boards were required to create strategic multi-year plans to document their equity and inclusive education policy. According to the Guidelines document, “the plans should focus on identifying and removing any barriers to student learning in order to reduce gaps in achievement and provide a respectful and

responsive school climate” (p. 34). To create transparency in regards to the enactment of the equity policy, school boards were also responsible for informing the community of the enactment of the equity policy. The Director of Education is required to post an annual report documenting the Board’s progress “towards embedding the principles of equity and inclusive education in all aspects of board operations. The report should give details of the steps taken to improve student achievement and reduce achievement gaps, and the results obtained” (p. 34). Despite calls to create public transparency and confidence in the education system through communication and consultations with various stakeholder groups, there is virtually no input or representation from students, parents, or local communities regarding the equity policy.

Lingard et al. (2013) have documented the “neoliberal versions of educational accountability with restrictive and reductive effects on the work of principals and teachers, and on the school experiences of students and their parents” (p. 544). The dominant test-based form of accountability, a form of vertical accountability, negates the space for a horizontal accountability, “of schools to their communities or communities to their schools” (p. 544). This highlights the importance of a politics of representation in education to ensure that the voices of multiple stakeholders, especially students, parents, and communities, are included during the policy process. The accountability mechanisms contained in Ontario’s Equity Strategy is another example of the policy as numbers phenomenon. Reporting on the progress of equity through the use of performance indicators is an example of evidence-based policy making and the dominance of the equity of outcomes discourse at the Ministry of Education. There are limits to defining equity or inequity based solely on student performance data. Lingard et al. (2013) have noted the distorting impacts of numbers-based

governance, of which Ontario's Equity Strategy is an example, in that it "deflects accountability and policy responsibility concerns away from governments, and onto schools and teachers" (p. 544). Similarly, Rezai-Rashti et al. (2016) observe that the Ministry of Education "essentially abnegates its responsibility for ensuring any sort of accountability with regards to addressing equity matters by requiring the individual school boards to develop and implement the equity policy" (p. 16, see also Lingard, Martino, Rezai-Rashti & Sellar, 2016; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2012, 2013). Limited institutional support from the Ministry of Education to support policy enactment and weakened accountability mechanisms are illustrative of the devolution of responsibility in regards to educational policy governance: "individuals become responsible for matters that the state once dealt with, or put another way, individuals rather than institutions become the targets and objects of policy texts" (Rezai-Rashti, Segeren & Martino, 2015, p. 13). The responsibility for equity education in Ontario has been downloaded onto school leaders such as principals and vice-principals instead of on institutions such as the Ontario Ministry of Education.

### **Equity Policy at the Board**

In the second section of this chapter, the analysis of equity education policy documents at the Board illustrates the hegemony of the neoliberal re-articulation of equity. The *equity of outcomes* discourse and the policy as numbers approach to social justice has trickled down to school boards. The analysis of the Board's policies illustrated that these documents contain many of the same policy discourses found within the Ministry's Equity Strategy.

#### **The Equity Policy**

The Board developed an equity policy a decade prior to the release of Ontario's Equity Strategy. The objective of the equity policy was "to establish the Board's commitment to

ensuring that fairness, equity, and inclusion are essential principles of our school system” (equity policy). The Board’s equity policy constructs discrimination in the education system as a policy problem, noting that certain groups of students experience inequitable treatments based on “individual and systemic biases” related to “race, colour, culture, ethnicity, linguistic origin, disability, socio-economic class, age, ancestry, nationality, place of origin, religion, faith, sex, gender, sexual orientation, family status, and marital status” (p. 1). There is an economic motivation to address this problem. The policy states that “this inequitable treatment limits their future success and prevents them from making a full contribution to society” (p. 1).

Adhering to the requirements established in PPM No. 119 (2009), the Board’s policy solution recognizes the intersectionality of discrimination. To address these different aspects of discrimination, the equity policy identifies five areas of commitment or “pillars of equity”: anti-racism and ethnocultural equity; anti-sexism and gender equity; anti-homophobia and sexual orientation equity; anti-classism and socio-economic equity; and equity for persons with disabilities. In accordance with the directives contained within PPM No. 119, the equity policy pursues a system-wide approach to equity by specifying different areas of institutional focus including curriculum, employment equity, hiring practices, community involvement, financial and human resources for staff and students, and institutional mechanisms for complaints and conflict resolution. As an approach to equity and inclusive education, the Board’s equity policy addresses all aspects of discrimination as per the Ontario Human Rights Code and also advocates a system-wide approach including different areas of institutional functioning. In this way the Board’s equity policy meets the requirements detailed in PPM No. 119 (2009).

In reflecting the *equity of outcomes* discourse, the Board's equity policy describes the instrumental role that equity plays in regards to student achievement: "we believe that equity of opportunity, and equity of access to our programs, services and resources are critical to the achievement of successful outcomes for all those whom we serve, and for those who serve our school system" (p. 1). In the same way envisioned within Ontario's Equity Strategy, equity is pursued as a way to raise student achievement and reduce gaps in student achievement. The Board's equity policy reflects a policy as numbers approach, where equity is defined and measured by student performance data. However, the Board's outcomes-based approach to equity is broader than the position articulated by the Ministry of Education. Outcomes are not merely related to educational achievement. The policy states that "inequitable treatment leads to educational, social and career outcomes that do not accurately reflect the abilities, experiences and contributions of our students, our employees, and our parent and community partners" (p. 1).

### **Caring and Safe Schools**

Ontario's Equity Strategy mandated that schools create and maintain a positive school climate. To ensure that they were meeting this requirement, the Board developed a caring and safe schools policy to guide the work of school leaders such as vice-principals and principals. The objective of the Board's caring and safe schools policy is "to affirm the Board's commitment to creating school learning environments that are caring, safe, peaceful, nurturing, positive, respectful and that enable all students to reach their full potential" (p. 1). Schools must work to foster a positive school culture in order to support student achievement. Climate includes the environment, values, and relationships within a school to ensure that students feel safe, included, and accepted.



The caring and safe schools policy contained many of the same policy discourses found within the Ministry's equity policy and the Board's equity policy. First, the caring and safe schools policy, like the equity policy, is framed as a policy mechanism to address student success. The policy expresses the Board's belief that "all students have the right to learn and achieve success and acknowledges the impact of school climates on students' success" (p. 1). This is another example of the hegemony of the *equity of outcomes* discourse at the Ministry of Education and its influence over education policies developed in school boards. Second, schools were held accountable to the Board through school improvement plans. The collection of data was an integral part of this accountability scheme. The policy stated that "school climate surveys must be conducted every two years to review procedures and revise existing school improvement plans" (p. 2). The school leaders in the study explained that school improvement plans were one of the few ways that schools were held accountable to the Board for the equity policy. The equity policy and the safe and caring schools policy illustrate the significance of the policy as numbers approach to equity and the entrenchment of the neoliberal values of excellence and efficiency at the Board and within schools.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has detailed the textual manifestations of the re-articulation of equity in Ontario's educational policy landscape. This re-articulation is characterized by neoliberal priorities such as academic excellence and economic competitiveness resulting in an outcomes-based approach to social justice in schools. Equity policies at the Ministry and at the Board reflected similar discourses. Both policies make specific reference to the instrumental role that equity plays in regards to student achievement. Low levels of student achievement and gaps in student achievement are used to create a perceived crisis of

educational quality to which greater equity is constructed as a response. Embedded in the policy as numbers paradigm, equity education policy at the Ministry and the Board reflects the *equity of outcomes* discourse of social justice. The equity of outcomes discourse, characterized by the image of the at-risk student and an achievement gap, become official knowledge at the board and in schools, substantiated with student performance data. This official knowledge is then used to target equity programming to particular school and student groups. In responding to this engineered crisis of student achievement, both policies have a broad focus and are inclusive of a wide range of identity factors and how these different axes of discrimination intersect with one another to create inequities for students. In terms of policy requirements, both policies advocate for a system-wide approach to equity that takes into account many different aspects of institutional culture such as curriculum, assessment, hiring practices, community relations, and accountability. Paradoxically, however, the necessary financial support from the Ministry of Education is absent from the policy documents. In fact, their role is specifically described as one of knowledge broker and disseminator. In this way, individual school boards, schools, and ultimately school actors become responsible for cultivating greater educational equity.

This re-articulation of the value of equity within policy documents has political implications for the practice of education. First, Ontario's Equity Strategy is a case of policy misrecognition that "eschews important questions of intersectionality, particularly with regards to race, culture, ethnicity and social class" (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013, p. 607). As Rezai-Rashti et al. (2016) argue, a focus on "test scores, outcomes, and performance of students" results in "limited attention to and recognition of structural and systemic inequities that are present in the education system" (p. 3). Second, the approach to equity represented in

Ontario's Equity Strategy is an example of the downloading of responsibilities onto individuals. Systemic social issues, such as equity, that were once the domain of the state now fall under the enterprise of local institutions such as schools and the individuals that inhabit them, notably school leaders. The practices that stem from the policy documents analyzed in this chapter are explored in the following two chapters. The findings of the case study of enactment at the Board and in schools document how these discourses influence the everyday practices of school board staff and school leaders as they enact the equity policy.

## **Chapter Five: Equity Policy Enactment at the Board**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the case study of policy enactment at the Board. Interviews were conducted with six staff members at the Equity Office, the organizational unit responsible for enacting the equity policy at the Board. This chapter is divided into three sections: in the first section the contextual factors that mediated the enactment of the equity policy are described; in the second section, the roles that Office staff occupied while enacting the policy are presented; and the final section of this chapter discusses the barriers to policy enactment.

Although policy enactment theory often focuses on enactment at the school level, Ball, Maguire, Braun & Hoskins (2011a) explain that “the school is not always sensible as the unit of analysis for policy research, and what we mean by ‘the school’ in such research is typically partial and neglectful” (pp. 636-637). In this case, the school board is the unit of analysis because it is the institutional unit charged with enacting the equity policy as per the requirements of PPM No. 119 (2009). However, the intention of the work being done at the Board is to influence the daily activity of schooling by providing guidance to teachers and mentorship to students, often at the request of school leaders such as principals or vice-principals. These trickle-down effects of policy into local schools are explored in the next chapter through three embedded case studies of policy enactment at schools within the Board.

### **The School Board**

The Board is a large board in Ontario with many students, teachers, support staff, and schools. The Board is highly diverse in terms of language, religion, and socio-economic status. For example, there are many English language learners at the Board and many students who require religious accommodations. The Board has an Equity Office that is

responsible for planning, organizing, and hosting equity-related activities and programs. The administrative office is what you might expect; a multi-floor building, built around the 1970s, with many smaller offices and meeting rooms located inside. I conducted my first interview at the Equity Office with the coordinator. Subsequent interviews were also conducted in this building. Despite the dark, dull atmosphere of these buildings, the conversations proved enlightening and engaging. In fact, most interviewees expressed their distaste for the institutional surroundings, noting that they spend most of their time in the schools across the Board where they work with administrators, teachers, and students. Some of the interviews were conducted in spaces that participants identified as safe, where they could be open and honest—in homes or libraries between school visits. I was honored, as an outsider, to be welcomed into these personal spaces where genuine conversation took place.

### **The Context of Policy Enactment**

Policy is shaped by a variety of contextual factors that work to constrain and enable enactment. Based on their research, Ball and colleagues developed a typology of context that “systemically collates and maps different aspects of context” under the following headings: material context, situated context, professional cultures, and external pressures (Ball et al., 2012, p. 17). The typology presented by Ball and colleagues is used to structure this section of the chapter and account for the different aspects of context that influenced the enactment of equity policy at the Board. It is important to note that these categories are heuristic devices used as organizational headings. The themes presented within these categories were taken verbatim from the interview transcripts.

### **Material Context**

The material context refers to the physical aspects at the Board and includes factors such as buildings, budgets, staffing, technology, and other infrastructure (Ball et al., 2013). The organizational structure of the Equity Office at the Board is discussed in this section, including staffing and job descriptions. Budgetary considerations are a significant element of the material context but are situated as a barrier to policy enactment discussed later in this chapter.

The Equity Office was the organization at the Board responsible for enacting the equity and inclusive education policy and to ensure “that fairness, equity, and inclusion are essential principles in our schools, and are integrated into all policies, programs, operations, and practices” (website). The mission of the Office included three areas of focus: inclusive curriculum, student engagement, and professional development. According to the Equity Office website, “we work to develop inclusive curriculum that reflects our diverse student population; develop plans for student engagement; and provide professional development for our teachers and staff to help all students succeed” (website). There were different staff that worked at the Equity Office. First, a coordinator was responsible for management-related duties and daily operations. Second, curriculum specialists (CSs), were responsible for professional development with principals, vice-principals, and teachers. Third, student outreach coordinators (SOCs) worked with students.

The curriculum specialists (CSs) organized workshops and professional development opportunities for teachers. Many of these workshops focused on *addressing discrimination* and *changing mindsets*. Addressing discrimination and changing mindsets were important themes in the enactment of equity policy at the Board. Based on the requirements of the

Board's equity policy, many of the workshops focused on addressing systemic discrimination. For example, one CS described that acknowledging discrimination was often the focus in workshops with school leaders and teachers: "I like to talk about understanding and acknowledging historical and present day discrimination and realities... so that the work of equity is acknowledging those barriers, working to remove those barriers and to remedy the impacts of discrimination, both past and present" (Ryan, p. 7). CSs typically sought to address discrimination by working with school leaders and teachers to *change mindsets*: "It's changing mindsets... you're dealing with the mindsets of educators. So we're talking about changing attitudes, values and beliefs... So a lot of our work is around people unpacking their own biases and assumptions" (Deborah, p. 9). All of the CSs described how challenging this type of work is:

You can have people in a session who are very upset. You can have people who are angry. You're dealing with issues of power and privilege and for some people this is the first time they're even heard of these issues. So it can be difficult for people and we appreciate that. (Deborah, p. 10)

Despite how challenging this work is, the CSs noted that equity workshops have the potential to shift schooling practices. For example, one CS reflected on a conversation with a teacher: "So when I no longer see that kid as the kid from the poor community who has, you know, has a ceiling in terms of ability and intelligence. You know, to somebody who has unlimited potential and genius and I can access that through building a caring relationship" (Ryan, p. 12). The CSs worked to enact the equity policy across the Board by addressing the discriminatory attitudes and practices of administrators and teachers.

In contrast to the CSs who worked directly with school leaders and teachers, student outreach coordinators (SOCs) worked with students. Many of the SOCs described their role as *supporting* students: "supporting marginalized, vulnerable students predominately in the

urban diversity schools which would be the schools...that are more risky” (p. 5). Students were supported through workshops that were organized by the SOCs. Student workshops were safe spaces where they could talk about difficult experiences or issues they were facing in school: “creating spaces to have...courageous conversations because the topics that we discuss in class, I would say 90% of teachers, or most teachers, are not comfortable discussing...So our role is to sort of go in and support in creating like an open and safe space where students can have dialogues” (Cindy, p. 6). A crucial aspect of supporting students was *advocacy*. In some instances the SOCs would advocate on behalf of students. For example, an SOC described their role: “...to consult with students, to create recommendations, to essentially be the middle person between them and the airs that be at the top. It’s our job to give students workshops around areas of race, class, gender, all of the anti-oppression spectrum” (p. 7). In other instances SOCs taught students how to self-advocate: “I learned about that with [SOC] so now I can complain about it. Before I didn’t complain because I didn’t know what it was. I just thought well, don’t take it so seriously, it’s just a joke. But we’re taught you know that it’s never a joke” (Cindy, p. 12). The SOCs enacted the equity policy by providing a support system for marginalized students in the Board. A key element of student support was empowering students to advocate for themselves.

There was *collaboration* amongst the CSs and SOCs. One SOC explained:

So if an instructional leader gets called into a secondary school... we’ll try to do some form of a student focus group in that consultation in that school so that at one of the professional development sessions the instructional leader can say this is what the qualitative data that we’re getting from some of your students about how they feel regarding school climate. (p. 9)

The organizational structure at the Equity Office resulted in more targeted professional development for teachers that was informed by the experiences of students within schools.



There was also collegiality between the Equity Office staff. Participants expressed the importance of the personal relationships with colleagues and support from colleagues that was crucial during periods of stress or doubt. For example, one SOC described fellow colleagues as the reason for staying on the job:

I've lasted this long in this job because of the people I work with.... We are a support system. We work well together. And I can tell you, if it wasn't for them – and I'm being dead honest with you – if it wasn't for them, I would have been gone a long time ago. (Jane, p. 18)

The Equity Office was the organizational unit responsible for enacting the equity policy. This Office had knowledgeable, experienced, and committed staff that worked with school leaders, teachers, and students to address discrimination, change mindsets, and advocate for students. There was collaboration and collegiality amongst the Office members that supported equity work across the Board. Despite this organizational structure, human and financial resources were nonetheless in short supply. This lack of resources for policy enactment is discussed as a barrier to policy enactment later in this chapter.

### **Situated Context**

The situated context refers to aspects of context that are “historically and locationally linked” to the Board and the schools (Ball et al., 2013, p. 21). In this section, the Board’s historical experience with equity initiatives is discussed as a contextual enabler of policy enactment. Despite the historical legacy with equity work at the Board, human rights complaints and lawsuits leveled against the Board created a reactive culture where school-based equity work was used as a risk management tactic.

The Board was purposefully selected for its long institutional history with equity initiatives. For example, the Board’s equity policy had been developed prior to the release of Ontario’s Equity Strategy. All interviewees discussed the Board’s historical commitment to

and experience with equity. Deborah explained how “our equity policy came into being in [year]” and the Equity Office at the Board had been “active for many many years” (Deborah, p. 2). These commitments and experiences were something that the Board personnel were proud of: “we are far better than most of the other boards in terms of our equity progress. We’re not perfect. But at least we’re tackling some issues and that’s way better than other boards can say” (Jane, p. 18). While this institutional history was a significant theme raised by Board personnel, there were outliers to this trend. It was noted that despite this long history, no systemic changes had actually been made: “We were doing this 30 years ago. It didn’t work 30 years ago, excuse me, why are we doing it now? The numbers are worse than they were 30 years ago” (Tamara, p. 12). This interviewee expressed that despite a historical legacy with equity initiatives, these policies were not adequate in addressing social injustice in schools.

The racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity at the Board had resulted in human rights complaints and legal action against the Board. Diversity in the local context at the Board affected how the equity policy was enacted. Nearly all of the personnel at the Equity Office described the legal precedence to equity initiatives at the Board that influenced policy enactment. The history of the Equity Office itself was rooted in human rights complaints and lawsuits. For example, one participant described how the Equity Office was established as a result of legal actions:

almost anything that happens related to [equity] comes out of lawsuits. So [the board] gets slapped with an institutional racism lawsuit and the Human Rights Commission would sanction that these are the steps that you have to take. So the Equity Office sort of became established out of a lawsuit. (Cindy, p. 7)

The equity policy was used to protect the Board against human rights complaints:

so equity policy exists, they're obligatory. They protect the board against complaints. They prevent people from going directly to human rights commissions to complain because they're always directed back to the organization and the only time you can do direct is if there isn't an existing policy. (Tamara, p. 24)

In this litigious environment, equity initiatives at the Board were used as *risk management* tactics. The Equity Office was called upon to enact workshops or training when critical incidences had taken place in schools:

I think if this gets out, you know, if this homophobia incident gets out, if this teacher called this student the N word and there's been nothing done to address this in the school, then I, as the head, am going to be in trouble so I feel like it's very liability risk management in terms of why we're invited into spaces to do the work that we do. (Cindy, p. 12)

Many of the equity initiatives at the Board, especially workshops for school leaders and teachers, were organized in *reaction* to a crisis. A curriculum specialist described this process: "call an urgent meeting. Let's put together a plan. Everybody get in the room now. And it's like this reactive nonsense that like it never addresses the root causes" (Ryan, p. 22). Other Office personnel described how equity work is often *reactive* and viewed their role as a problem-solver: "I'm called in to put out fires... sometimes it's reactive" (Caroline, pp. 22-23). Staff at the Office were critical of this reactive approach, advocating for a proactive approach to equity: "what a lot of people aren't stopping to realize...if we had more equitable and inclusive programming, personnel, more awareness, before crises happen because we wouldn't get to that point in the crisis to begin with" (Jane, p. 9). The creation of the Equity Office and the development of the equity policy were the result of legal challenges and human rights complaints. As a result of this history, the Board took a reactive approach to equity initiatives, seeking to manage schools where discriminatory attitudes and practices were prevalent or after serious incidences had taken place.

As a result of its urban location and diversity, the Board had a long history of equity work. The Board is considered a forerunner in Ontario in terms of addressing equity issues. This experience and institutional commitment supported the enactment of the equity policy. However, human rights complaints and legal actions against the Board resulted in a reactive approach to equity characterized by school-based workshops and programs that were viewed as risk management tactics.

### **Professional Culture**

The professional culture of an educational institution includes the ethos, values, and commitments of its members. According to Ball and colleagues, boards and schools “have distinct sets of professional cultures, outlooks and attitudes that have developed over time and inflect policy responses in particular ways” (Ball et al., 2013, p. 27). The professional culture at the Board and in schools mediated the enactment of the equity policy.

The members of the Equity Office had a range of diverse educational-related experience and had been working at the Office for various lengths of time, ranging from eight months to six years. Most of the members at the Equity Office spoke about experiencing *discrimination* first-hand in their own educational experiences that contributed to their decision to pursue equity work in their professional careers. For example, one interviewee, described his early years: “my friend group was particularly mostly black, right, and I self-identified as black and people identified me as black and I got all the racial slurs... so that’s how I began to conceive of myself” (Ryan, p. 4). Similarly, another interviewee described experiencing racial discrimination growing up: “I was the black girl in theatre and music...based on stereotypes and assumptions of who we feel should fit into music and theater, I was teased. I was not black enough. I was not this enough. I was whitewashed”

(Jane, p. 2). A handful of the Office members also had family histories of or experiences with *activism* at an early age. One interviewee recalled “having a father who’s very involved in, you know, activism” (Ryan, p. 4). Similarly, another interviewee recalled being taught how to self-advocate from her mother: “So my mom taught me how to be a loudmouth from a very young age so I knew how to say discriminating against me because of my socioeconomic status and I’m going to contact the trustee and the superintendent and let them know that you’re discriminating against me because of my class” (Cindy, p. 3). These early, personal experiences were influential in the equity-related work that participants pursued later in life. In addition to personal experiences, the Office staff were knowledgeable and highly qualified. Many of the staff at the Office had multiple post-secondary, graduate degrees in education and social work. The staff at the Office also had diverse and lengthy professional backgrounds including teaching, educational administration, social work, and equity-related work. Through these experiences many of the Office staff had cultivated their own equity lens. According to one member: “my conception of equity has expanded a lot... it has become my lens” (Ryan, p. 3).

These experiences resulted in a commitment to making schools more socially just places for students. All of the staff at the Equity Office were committed to social justice and equity work. The coordinator described the commitments of the staff members: “my [CSs] as well as my [SOCs] they’re committed and passionate about their work” (Deborah, p. 10). Staff in the Equity Office often worked long hours: “it’s not uncommon for us to work until 6, 7 sometimes. We had a teleconference the other day at 9 pm” (Caroline, p. 36). In addition to working long hours, staff members often covered for one another to ensure that school-based work was always being done: “At the end of the day, if one of us is sick, another one will take

on more, which, realistically we don't have to, but we don't want students to suffer" (Jane, p. 19). Despite the long hours and emotional demands of the job, many staff members expressed job satisfaction: "I enjoy, I really enjoy working here with the teachers and the students on these critical topics" (Ryan, p. 13). The professional culture at the Board supported the enactment of the equity policy. Through personal backgrounds, educational qualifications, and professional experience the staff at the Equity Office had all cultivated an equity lens and were deeply committed to social justice work in schools.

The unique culture within schools was a significant factor that shaped the enactment of the equity policy. The Office staff explained that issues around school culture and school climate were a focus of their work. According to Cindy: "we're called into schools to deal with school climate and school culture... Everything is based off of creating a more inclusive, understanding, tolerant school environment" (Cindy, p. 7). Creating a positive school climate was a priority for the Equity Office and this guided much of their school-based work. The relationship between the Equity Office and schools across the board was very political in nature given the highly contentious and emotional nature of equity issues. Many Office members explained that the administration team at a school was the ultimate gatekeeper to equity work in the school: "it depends on the culture of the school" (Cindy, p. 23). Jane described the power of the administration team: "It's as simple as that. If you don't get in by the admin, you're not in. So that's the trouble with the role" (Jane, p. 12). Given the power of the administration team at a school, access to schools was by *invite only*: "so part of the role is supporting schools by invite. So I just have to make that clear" (Ryan, p. 8). The disposition of the administration team in a school determined the possibility for equity work.

All of the members of the Equity Office explained that schools were either receptive to or very critical of equity initiatives. The dispositions of principals and vice-principals were key factors that shaped how the equity policy was enacted in schools. *Leadership* was identified as a key factor that enabled equity work in schools: “Leadership is huge, leadership can help move the equity agenda forward” (Cindy, p. 12). The CSs and SOCs described how some schools were deeply engaged with equity work. In these schools equity was a priority: “if particular schools where you have an admin and a teacher group and a student council that cares about equity and wants issues to be discussed, work will be done” (Jane, p. 12). In contrast, schools that were not interested in addressing equity issues were often not welcoming spaces for personnel from the Equity Office. In these types of schools, members of the Office were skeptical of the degree to which equity had really trickled down into schools: “there’s such a large gap in terms of... how the work has trickled down. We appreciate and value all of the administrators that are on board but when we walk into schools, it’s like the equity police are here” (Cindy, p. 18). In these instances, equity initiatives were often seen as *whistleblowing*: “The schools that tell us they’re fine are usually the schools that are the worst. That’s been my observation. Because we’re fine is just usually the word for we don’t want equity hound dogs, whistleblowers, coming into our school” (Jane, p. 14). In these schools, principals and vice-principals were often seen as *resistors* to the implementation of equity work within schools:

Principals don’t want to have the dialogues, some of them because of their own pedagogy and practice, others because they know staff are going to be resistant and staff are going to complain and voice their discomfort, their unhappiness with the conversations. So a lot of times we’re just not invited into the spaces. (Cindy, p. 11)

Caroline described how principals and vice-principals were often resistant to workshops that address issues of power and privilege:

People don't want us to talk about equity... People don't want those power dynamics to change... I will have the administrator or whoever is hosting say please don't talk about this even though that might be an important part of the conversation. (Caroline, p. 38)

The lack of a willingness to address broader issues of power and privilege was raised by another CS as a barrier to equity work across the board:

too many people aren't prepared to be courageous. Right. To be courageous, to question, to challenge, when these kinds of things happen, right. They're worried about their own position, their own career, their own whatever... That's what is boils down to for me. They're just not willing to disrupt. (Ryan, p. 18)

The administrative team of a school, particularly the principal and vice-principal, played a significant role in enacting equity initiatives within their school. This theme is also reflected in the school-based case studies in the next section.

### **External Pressures**

The external context refers to “pressures and expectations generated by wider local and national policy frameworks” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 36). Policy sociology seeks to examine how broader trends in the global education policy field are inflected in local sites. External pressures, especially those towards the use of student achievement data, significantly impacted the Board's approach to equity education.

Since 2010, the Board was involved in collecting student achievement data. In 2010, the Director of the Board created a task force to examine student achievement. The Task Force involved superintendents, principals, and vice-principals and was created to collect and synthesize data on student achievement in order to make recommendations for how to close the achievement gap. The Task Force released their recommendations in May, 2010 in a formal report. This document was referenced by all members of the Equity Office and significantly influenced their overall approach to equity. The Board was seen as one of the



few school boards in the province to address the controversial issue of student achievement: “[this board] is one of the only institutions that’s brave enough to take that data, to have those conversations... at least [the board] is willing to acknowledge that these are some of the complex issues that are going on in our schools” (Cindy, p. 7).

Based on data collected by the Task Force, certain groups of students were identified as being at-risk and were especially targeted for equity initiatives:

So the groups involved are African Canadians... Aboriginal, Portuguese speaking, Latino, Latina... Middle Eastern... They look at how we can improve student achievement and engagement for those groups... Basically we’re getting – we’re understanding of kids and what their experiences are like in a school and what we can do as a system to intervene and make those experiences better. (Deborah, p. 7)

The Board’s student achievement report focused specifically on racialized students, particularly black students: “Another huge project we’re working on is improving the achievement of black students... we look at achievement rates, we look at engagement, we look at where our students are placed” (Deborah, p. 8). The targeting of particular racialized student groups was viewed as problematic by some at the Office. One SOC was critical of this trend. She described the model minority stereotype:

There’s the model minority marginalized kids. The board will grasp onto any kid – black, South Asian, Philipino, Latina, any kids as long as they’re getting straight As and say look at me, I come from a neighborhood like this and they can say, look at me, I made it. That’s the [Board’s] equity poster child. (Jane, p. 17)

The student achievement report was used in school-based work with administrators, teachers, and students. For example, CSs would target schools with high concentrations of at-risk students:

So we bring teachers who teach at those schools with high populations of those students and we involve them in a PLC [professional learning community] where we use the theoretical framework of culturally relevant pedagogy, and say okay, what are some of the issues...let’s talk about power and privilege, how it plays out in

school...let's talk about our own identities...how would that impact student engagement and achievement. (Ryan, p. 15)

SOCs also targeted their student outreach work to high-risk schools and student populations:

the achievement data is used to help guide some of our equity work, hence why we've had conferences for black students and consultations, conferences for Portuguese-speaking students, conferences for Somali students... we hear the similar qualms, challenges, woes, and recommendations from almost every student group. (Jane, p. 15)

The use of student achievement data was a powerful contextual factor that shaped the equity narrative created at the Equity Office and their daily operations. The focus on student achievement and closing the achievement gap contributed to an outcomes-based approach to equity that was not universally accepted by staff of the Office.

### **The Actions of Policy Actors**

In this section, the specific actions of policy actors are examined. The process of enacting policy depends very much on the actions of policy actors. These actions, and the related positions that policy actors occupy in relation to policy, are diverse and contested. Ball and colleagues (2012) view school board personnel and school leaders as both policy subjects and actors, or receivers and agents of policy. To capture the complex and differentiated responses to policy that school board personnel and school leaders took, this section draws on the typology of policy actors developed by Ball and colleagues (2012). In their own research, they identified eight different policy actors and related types of work that these actors do when enacting policy: narrators, entrepreneurs, outsiders, transactors, enthusiasts, translators, critics, and receivers. This typology is used as a heuristic device to structure the detailed description of policy actors' work that emerged from the interview data. Not all of the different actors identified by Ball and colleagues (2012) were revealed in the data. Instead, it is important to note that policy actors took on multiple and at times

conflicting positions in relation to policy. The interview data revealed four common policy positions that Office staff occupied: narrators, entrepreneurs, enthusiasts, and critics.

Verbatim quotations are used to substantiate the categories used in this section.

### **Narrators**

One of the key stages in policy enactment is deciphering policy texts and deciding on courses of action. Board personnel at the Equity Office played key roles as policy narrators, making meaning of the Board's equity policy. Ball et al., (2012) explain that the task of policy narration involves constructing an institutional narrative that will inform policy work, creating an institutional vision to guide other members of the institution. The "filtering out and selective focusing" performed by Office staff creates a "story about how the school works and what it does – ideally articulated through an improvement plot" (p. 51). The Board staff created an institutional narrative that informed their school-based equity work and that could be transferred to school leaders and teachers through workshops and professional development. Two themes formed the Board's institutional narrative: *student needs* and *culturally-responsive pedagogy*.

The Office staff referenced the equity policy text when describing the purpose of their work. They described the existence of systemic biases and barriers in the education that create inequities and disadvantage for some groups of students. According to one member: "systemic institutional practices, cultures, that continue to create barriers... equity is acknowledging those barriers, working to remove those barriers and remedying the impacts of discrimination both past and present" (Ryan, p. 7). The staff at the Equity Office consistently explained that equity meant responding to *student needs*. When asked what equity meant to them, or how they define equity, all participants made a clear distinction between equity and

equality: “equity means looking at each person and looking at the needs that they have and it means essentially not treating everyone the same. You’re meeting them where they’re at” (Deborah, p. 3). The description of equity as a *needs-based* approach was integral to the institutional narrative developed at the Equity Office.

A second theme in the institutional narrative created by the Equity Office was a *culturally-responsive pedagogy*. This theme was based on the recommendations of the student achievement task force and was used to inform the workshops, seminars, and other initiatives organized by the Equity Office. According to one CS: “the board has adopted culturally responsive pedagogy as our framework...” (Cindy, p. 38). The coordinator of the Office explained:

whether it be related to race, gender, class, sexual orientation, we have to deal with them in an age appropriate way, but it’s something we need to make sure is embedded in our curriculum and we have to help teachers...so they all get trained in culturally responsive pedagogy, making your curriculum relevant and responsive to kids. (Deborah, p. 6)

This particular vision of equity and inclusivity guided the work of the CSs and SOCs and was transferred to school leader, teachers, and students through workshops and consultations in their work as policy entrepreneurs and enthusiasts.

### **Entrepreneurs**

Ball et al. (2012) explain that policy entrepreneurship is one of the most “intriguing but uncommon” policy roles and that entrepreneurs are “exceptional but significant” (p. 53). The case study of policy enactment at the Board level illustrated that entrepreneurship is strategic work. Entrepreneurs are “charismatic people and persuasive personalities and forceful agents of change” who “champion and represent particular policies” (Ball et al., 2011, p. 628). Deborah, the Office coordinator, embodied the traits of a policy entrepreneur. As the

leader of the Equity Office, she liaised with members from the Ministry, Directors at the Board, and was responsible for constructing an equity narrative and engaging in equity initiatives. In this way, her work was very political, satisfying the demands of the Board's hierarchy but also working alongside other staff at the Office "to build a critical mass for change and bring off policy enactments" (p. 53). As the leader of the Equity Office, Deborah worked creatively with different policies, examples of good practice, and resources "to produce something original... a set of positions and roles and organizational relationships which 'enact' policy" (p. 628). She created the organizational structure which constructed the possibilities and limitations for the school-based equity work that CSs and SOCs engaged in. Ball et al. (2012) summarize the strategic work of policy entrepreneurs: the translation of policy texts "into and through structures and roles and tactics and techniques" is a "very sophisticated form of policy enactment that involves creativity, energy and commitment" (p. 54). Alongside Deborah's work as a policy entrepreneur, Office staff also acted as policy entrepreneurs when engaging in school-based equity work with administrators, teachers, and students. The Office staff had deep, personal commitments to equity in the education system. By drawing on their own experiences of schooling, advocating for their own children, or their earlier careers as classroom teachers, each of the Office members represented the value of equity in their school-based equity work. Office staff were also viewed as advocates or pushers of the equity agenda by administrators in schools.

### **Enthusiasts**

Simultaneously, school Board staff also acted as policy enthusiasts. The work at the Equity Office involved policy translation, the policy text had to be translated into a particular vision and then into practical activities for schools: "the abstracts or ideals of policy

exhortations or texts are translated into actions, things to do in ‘real’ situations. That is, they are made meaningful and doable, a dual process” (p. 630). Ball et al. (2011) describe the policy enactment work that enthusiasts engage in; they “plan and produce the events and processes and institutional texts of policy in relation to others who are thus inducted into the ‘discursive patterns’ of policy” (p. 630). There are multiple ways in which the CSs and SOCs made policy real, meaningful, and doable.

First, the Office staff worked on Board-wide initiatives and also consulted in schools with administrators, teachers, and students. Through these activities the Board’s equity narrative was translated into practice in schools. The equity narrative constructed at the Equity Office was enacted through Board-wide initiatives or “systems work” for administrators and teachers on different topics. Ryan described various Board-wide initiatives: “we do culturally responsive pedagogy...boys to men is a system-wide mentorship program... there’s a huge issue with ability grouping, and the kids get streamed based on race, class, gender, you name it” (Ryan, p. 11). Board-wide initiatives were often structured as *professional learning communities* (PLC). He described a Board-wide PLC on student achievement they had organized:

So we invite schools that have the highest populations of black students, Roma students, Portuguese-speaking students, Latino students, Latina students... We focus this pilot on these four demographic groups we struggle with. We bring teachers who teach at those schools we involve them in a PLC where we use the theoretical framework of a culturally relevant pedagogy. (Ryan, p. 11)

Second, in addition to board-wide initiatives CSs and SOCs also hosted school-based consultations and workshops. CSs did consultations in individual schools when invited or if a critical incident had taken place. The CSs spent a great deal of time engaged in this type of school-based work: “so I might do a professional learning community with the administrators

around leadership for social justice or I might do a PLC with teachers. Do culturally responsive pedagogy” (Ryan, p. 10). Consultations were intended to build capacity within schools and provide school leaders and teachers with the necessary skills to engage in equity work on their own. School-based consultations were possible with a supportive administrative team: “some school specific work can be impactful if you have a very supportive administration. I come up with a plan with a team of people at the school and then the plan is to execute with the team. It works best when admin is sitting there and we're co-planning” (Ryan, p. 10). The SOCs hosted workshops and held consultations with students. Through these activities, they demonstrated good practice around equity and created original programming to support the enactment of the equity policy. Workshops were one of the ways in which SOCs enacted the equity policy within schools. An SOC described this process as follows: “we support student groups in a workshop format. So those workshops could be related to anything that has to do with equity...that's workshops related to race, gender, class, abilities, homophobia” (Cindy, p. 5). Workshops created the safe spaces that students needed to discuss controversial subjects and topics that were not addressed in classrooms or with teachers. An SOC described these workshops: “it's creating safe spaces to have courageous conversations because the topics that we discuss in workshops 90% of teachers are not comfortable discussing” (Cindy, p. 6). In addition to workshops, the SOCs also organized focus groups with students, often with marginalized students: “Portuguese students, LGBT students, students of African decent, students that are under a lower socioeconomic bracket, different abled students...This is our job to consult with students, to create recommendations, to essentially be the middle person between them and the top” (Jane, p. 7). These focus

groups were used to improve student experiences in schools and inform the workshops or professional learning communities with teachers. A SOC explained this process:

So if an [CS] gets called into a secondary school, a lot of times we'll say okay, what work are you doing with teachers. Normally what will happen is we'll try and do some sort of a student focus group so that at the professional development sessions the [CS] can say this is what the qualitative data that we're getting from some of your students about how they feel regarding school climate. (Cindy, p. 9)

The CSs, through their work with school leaders and teachers, and the SOCs, through their work with students, translated the Board's equity narrative into tangible activities, programs, and resources in schools. In these instances, the Equity Office staff acted as policy enthusiasts: "they speak policy directly to practice, and join up between specialists roles and responsibilities, to make enactment into a collective process" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 60).

Enthusiasts are policy models, influentials, policy paragons, "those who embody policy in their practice and are examples to others" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 59). Through the various professional development initiatives that the CSs and SOCs organized in schools, the equity policy was "translated and enacted through their practice" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 59).

### **Critics**

It is important to acknowledge that not all policy actors supported the Board's approach to equity or found satisfaction in their work enacting the equity policy in schools. In fact, some policy actors described the barriers or challenges they faced in their work. In these instances, the members of the Equity Office were policy critics.

Many Office staff were critical of the culturally responsive pedagogical framework as a method for training teachers: "schools will call in and say we want culturally relevant pedagogical training for teachers, which in itself is a problem model" (Tamara, p. 11). Cindy elaborated:



I have a lot of issues with that. Let's critique it because I still see that as top down. Why are we talking about infusing equity in ways that are vertical rather than horizontal...I feel like using those frameworks and being complicit because I personally don't think that's the best approach. (Cindy, p. 38)

In addition to criticizing culturally responsive pedagogy as the Board's institutional narrative, Office staff were also critical of the Board's commitment to equity issues given inadequate funding and the lack of accountability structures to support their school-based work. One member adamantly stated: "I think what the Board's doing is a load of shit... I can continue the ideological push to have the structures change but I don't have confidence it will" (Tamara, p. 12). All of the Office staff explained that there were inadequate resources, both human and financial, to support equity work in all of the schools across the Board: "I feel frustrated at times because we're spread so thin, I often wonder and worry about the impact, so what impact can we actually make... I'd like to believe it will but I don't know" (Caroline, p. 34). As a result of the inadequate resources and accountability structures, staff at the Office also criticized the Board's approach to equity stating that it wasn't systemic: "Equity isn't as system wide as it could be... it's not happening in all of the schools... and there's so much resistance from staff members across the system" (Caroline, p. 41). Although all of the members at the Office were themselves personally committed to equity and worked within schools to do equity work as policy entrepreneurs, they also questioned the Board's approach to equity and described limitations of the equity policy that prevented greater social justice in schools.

### **Barriers to Policy Enactment**

A series of themes emerged from members of the Equity Office in discussions surrounding the barriers to equity initiatives at the Board. These barriers included inadequate

resources, lack of accountability mechanisms, and limited system-wide change. These barriers constrained the work of the policy actors discussed above.

### **Inadequate Resources**

The enactment of the equity policy was constrained by a lack of material resources including personnel and financial resources. All of the staff at the Equity Office explained that there were not enough personnel and human resources to support equity initiatives at the Board. The size of the Equity Office was described as a barrier to ensuring that equity initiatives were enacted in all of the schools across the Board. According to members of the Equity Office: “we don’t have enough staff to serve this – this is a huge board” (Deborah, p. 10). Because the Equity Office had limited staff engaged in school-based work, staff were responsible for more schools than they had the opportunity to work in. One participant explained: “we’re really stretched thin. And – and – and, that’s the truth. It’s like a ridiculous amount so it’s like hundreds of schools so obviously we never get to all of them” (Caroline, p. 18). This meant that the Equity Office had a limited capacity to do equity work: “So it’s also about capacity...Because I am – my – I have six families of schools, right. And there about – that’s about 140 schools. I can’t serve all of the schools” (Ryan, p. 9). Limited staffing at the Office made some question the commitment that the Board had to addressing equity issues in all schools: “if this is something that’s really supposed to happen in all the schools, why are there only four of us” (Caroline, p. 41).

Inadequate staffing at the Equity Office affected the school-based work that the CSs and SOCs did. Many described that their workshops only lasted for 30 or 60 minutes and as a result, they believed these workshops had a limited impact: “I ask myself what can you really do in an hour? Every now and then when someone feels like having you in. What can you

really do after school?” (Jane, p. 11). Because the professional development workshops or consultations with students were for short periods of time, often outside of the official hours of the school day, the approach to equity was criticized for being *additive*; equity work was an add-on: “a lot of times equity is seen as an add-on, right. So it’s not the important thing” (Cindy, p. 8). As opposed to the “hard” curriculum and instruction that takes place in schools, equity was viewed by many principals and teachers as a “soft” curriculum:

you got to remember that our work – we’re not teaching history, math and science. We’re teaching soft curriculum, right, which is ridiculous to talk about the sexism in that language alone. But, we are teaching what many see as extra-curricular. And when it’s extra-curricular, we don’t get those shinning 9 to 11 hours or 1 to 3 in the afternoons. (Jane, p. 10)

Financial resources were also in limited supply at the Equity Office. One participant explained that the Board was responsible for determining where money would be spent: “[the money] goes to [the board] and [the board] decides how they’re going to distribute that pot of money. So I guess that’s one of the barriers because again, it’s about where the importance is placed” (Cindy, p. 12). Personnel at the Equity Office described how small their operating budget was relative to other Offices:

other Offices, some of them have huge budgets so they can pay for teacher release. You have a budget, so we’re going to pull teachers out for a full day workshop. 100 teachers. And we’re going to pay their teacher release. We can’t do that. We can’t even come close to doing that. We don’t have the money to do that. (Ryan, p. 19)

Because of its high cost, paying to release teachers to participate in equity workshops was one of the most significant barriers to equity work in the Board:

For me to do a PLC [professional learning community] with a school, even if they’re interested...they might say, well, we don’t have the funding to do it because they have – teacher release is expensive. So they have to release teachers to be involved with professional development. (Ryan, p. 19)

It was common for Office staff to question the Board's commitment to equity given the lack of resources: "So the fact that there's so few people in our Office to do work across an entire school board tells you what kind of commitment they have to equity" (Cindy, p. 13). Similarly, "I ask myself, like is – is equity really important – to the board – or are we just here like running on our feet like hamsters" (Caroline, p. 36). Given the perceived lack of commitment that the Board had to equity initiatives, there was concern expressed about the long term security and viability of the Equity Office itself: "if there was somewhere to be cut and they were saying you need to cut whatever, I feel like the Equity Office is probably the most at risk of being cut. I think the only reason we're not cut is because we do band-aid liability stuff" (Cindy, p. 12).

### **No Accountability**

All members of the Equity Office consistently discussed accountability as a significant barrier to equity work across the Board. The Board had satisfied the Ministry's requirement to develop an equity policy text as mandated by PPM No. 119 (2009); however, there were no formal procedures in place for ensuring that schools within the Board completed equity work by creating a positive school climate for students. The lack of policy accountability manifested itself through two prominent themes: first was that the equity policy had *no-teeth* and second that equity work could be addressed as a *checklist*. Personnel at the Equity Office lamented that there was no accountability for the policy: "I understand my responsibility to act on the policy and I have some ideas about how I could do that. There's no accountability. There's no structure to support me taking action" (Ryan, p. 6). Another Office member noted: "it's on paper but from what I know...I don't know of any person or procedure to ensure they've actually been implemented" (Caroline, p. 31). The Board had no formal process for

tracking which schools were implementing the equity policy by promoting a positive school climate.

CSs and SOC's felt as though they had limited influence over what actually happens in schools:

even if I go into a school and I see that some really messed up stuff is happening, and the teachers have some really messed up thinking around their students, you know, there's nothing I can really do about it... those who are the biggest problem...they just disengage...if nobody holds them accountable. (Ryan, p. 17)

The lack of enforcement mechanisms for the equity policy was a major barrier to its implementation and a limitation on its scope. Personnel at the Equity Office explained that the policy had *no teeth*. If enforcement mechanisms were attached to the policy, specifically through the provision of additional powers to the Equity Office, the policy would be more influential: "I think if they gave it teeth. If they gave the unit a set of, powers is too strong a word, but discretion, that other curriculum specialists have" (Tamara, p. 26). Another suggestion to support policy enactment was the creation of actionable items that would support the Board in holding schools accountable for doing equity work: "if [we're] going to have and set out policies for schools to follow, they need to have actionable items. Clear actionable items. Because as you – when you have this policy and these words and it doesn't tell people how to enact them" (Cindy, p. 17).

Members of the Equity Office explained that the lack of formal accountability mechanisms meant that equity initiatives were something that school leaders could easily *check-off* of their school improvement plans. The *checklist* approach was a specific example of how the lack of accountability measures influenced the implementation of the equity policy. Staff at the Equity Office were often called into schools to complete quick workshops or training sessions: "so people will call and say can you come do a lunch and learn. Like 30

minutes at lunch, you know, just do some equity policy with the staff and then that's it. That's a check, right" (Ryan, p. 9). Another Office member explained that they are often called into schools as a formality: "people call me in to do a workshop and it's like a check off [their] list" (Caroline, p. 12). Additionally, when schools pursued these formal equity workshops at the end of the school year it signaled to members of the Equity Office that workshops were nothing more than an obligation as opposed to a commitment: "some schools buy into equity as opposed to those who don't. And it's just a checklist and you know this because you get so many requests in May, right, because that's when I can it off and say, I did my equity training for the year" (Jane, p. 13). Greater policy accountability and enforcement mechanisms were seen as ways to support enactment of the policy at the school-level.

### **Lack of System-wide Change**

Given the barriers described above, it is not surprising that the members of the Equity Office believed that the equity policy was not producing system-wide change. While staff at the Equity Office acknowledged that the Board had taken steps to draft an equity policy, they also expressed concern that the Office lacked a coherent vision and plan for doing equity work in schools. According to one member: "the bottom line is we don't have a strategic plan" (Tamara, p. 19). System-wide change required a sustained commitment from the Board in terms of personnel and financial resources. The lack of resources resulted in a superficial approach to school-based equity work: "you need time, you need to change the job description so it isn't go, go, go. You need time to research, skill develop... You need to give people time to go broad, and more important than that, go deep, because if you go deep you develop a set of principles" (Tamara, p. 25). The objective of the equity policy was to ignite system-wide change, but the Equity Office personnel did not see changes in the practices of everyday

schooling: “a lot of the students who are marginalized and who are being pushed out of the school system it’s because of the practices in the system” (Caroline, p. 32). The Equity Office personnel pushed for system-wide change. One participant stated that “this board has been spinning its wheels and hasn’t done that...I can continue the ideological push to have the structure change and I don’t have a lot of confidence it will if after all this time it’s still in the same place” (Tamara, p. 12). Despite the policy objectives and commitments of personnel at the Equity Office, system-wide change was not taking place.

Members of the Office gave numerous examples of opportunities for system-wide change that had not been capitalized on. One of the SOCs discussed a Student Bill of Rights that had been drafted during a student workshop: “You know, we did a conference of black students back in 2010 or 2011 and drafted what the kids wanted to be known as a Bill of Rights...we crafted recommendations...Those recommendations are still in our archives. They’ve gone absolutely nowhere” (Jane, p. 7). This lack of system-wide change made it more difficult to recruit students to equity workshops and initiatives. Because students were unable to see firsthand the changes that were being made, they had little trust or faith that anything would change for them:

And kids, to really get their buy-in, you kind of have to be able to promise them...they need their gains on investment right away. They need to see something in order to invest their time. And our smiling faces, our caring hearts, that’s one important thing but they want to see change. (Jane, p. 22)

Given the lack of system-wide change discussed above, a common theme amongst the personnel from the Equity Office was *complicity*. The lack of resources and accountability mechanisms, coupled with limited system-wide change left many participants feeling as though they were unable to make a difference. Some personnel questioned whether or not this made them complicit in an inequitable system: “it has made me wonder at times what I’m

doing here, at times if what I'm doing really does have a system impact or if I'm actually part of the problem" (Jane, p. 7). Other participants, rather than questioning their complicity, refused to be complicit:

I just thought, I can't be complicit...I don't think I'm going to last past this year. Not unless something gives. I can, and I have had more of an impact on kids' lives, whether they're in my classes or not, in a school. (Tamara, p. 25)

Given the complexity of the work and the sensitivity of the issues that many participants experienced on a daily basis, there was professional *burnout*: "You can imagine the stories we hear on a daily basis. You can imagine the things we sometimes see on a daily basis...in our group alone...we've had illnesses. Let's just put it that way. We've had burnout. I know myself I was recently on a stress leave" (Jane, p. 7). Another participant expressed: "there's so much fucked up shit, really, that it's like sometime – like, sometimes I come home, I'm like – I'm like screaming and crying, I'm like oh my God, like I don't want to do this anymore" (Caroline, p. 35). Despite the personal commitments and dedication of staff at the Equity Office, barriers to the enactment of the equity policy, including inadequate resources and a lack of accountability mechanisms, hindered the potential for system-wide change and greater educational equity at the Board.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has created a vivid description of how equity education policy was enacted at the Board by exploring the contextual factors that enabled and constrained equity work. There were different factors that enabled equity work. First, the *organizational structure* of the Equity Office at the Board that included highly competent and committed curriculum specialists and student outreach coordinators to work with school leaders, teachers, and students. Second, staff at the Equity Office worked as both policy narrators and policy



entrepreneurs. As *narrators*, they constructed an equity narrative that was used to guide Board-wide and school-based initiatives. As *entrepreneurs* and *enthusiasts*, they advocated and championed the equity policy by creating tangible activities and resources to support school leaders and teachers in enacting the Board's equity policy in their school. They worked tirelessly to address discrimination and change discriminatory school-based practices. Third, the Board's *historical commitment* to and experience with equity work is significant. Office staff were proud of the work they did and boasted that the Board was one of the few in Ontario taking such drastic steps to address social justice in schools.

The case description of equity policy enactment at the Board also identified factors that constrained the enactment of the equity policy. First, as a result of past human rights complaints and legal proceedings, the Equity Office at the Board took a *reactive* approach to equity. Second, political pressures from the Ministry surrounding student achievement data and the Board's own commitment to collecting *student achievement data* and *closing the achievement gap* resulted in an *outcomes-based* approach to equity. Third, the material context at the Board lacked the adequate provision of *resources* to support policy enactment. Fourth, despite textual commitment to policy accountability, there were no formal structures in the Equity Office or at the Board for holding school leaders *accountable* for equity work. Instead, equity was pursued only as something to be *checked off* a school improvement plan. These barriers effectively limited the scope of equity work within the board, preventing *system-wide change* from taking place. As a result, Office staff were *policy critics*, questioning the Board's approach and commitment to equity and social justice. The next chapter presents the findings from three embedded cases of policy enactment in schools.

## Chapter Six: How Secondary Schools Do Equity

This chapter documents the trickle-down effects of the equity policy by exploring how the Board's equity policy was enacted in three different schools. As set out in the requirements of Ontario's Equity Strategy, and according to the Board's *Caring and Safe Schools Policy*, schools within the Board were required to "create learning environments that are caring, safe, peaceful, nurturing, positive, respectful and that enable all students to reach their full potential" (Caring and Safe Schools policy, 2013). Schools, then, were important sites where the enactment of the equity policy took place. Given the highly contested and political nature of equity work at the Board, it was difficult to gain access to schools. Three schools were selected based on the recommendations and referrals of personnel at the Equity Office. Interviews were conducted with the vice-principals or principals in the three different schools. Literature in the field of social justice leadership has identified school leaders as important agents influencing social justice practices in schools. DeMatthews (2015) explains that "social justice-minded leaders have a significant impact, despite educational policies, organizational cultures, and historic structures that contribute to a discriminatory educational system" (p. 139). The school-community context was surveyed and the equity-related initiatives that took place in each of these three schools are described. This chapter is divided into four sections that profile the enactment of the equity policy in each of the three case study schools and concludes with a discussion of school-based policy enactment.

### School 1

At this particular site, interviews were conducted with the vice-principal and principal. This section describes the contextual factors that mediated policy enactment, the types of

equity initiatives that took place at the school, the roles that school administrators occupied as they enacted the policy, and the barriers to equity work that they faced.

As I approach School 1, I can't help but notice the number of high-rise apartment buildings and wonder what it's like living in such small spaces. I'm reminded of my own privilege. Even the visible balconies of the units are crowded with furniture, sheets, and other materials fluttering in the wind. Although I am in the suburban outskirts of a major city, there are no single homes or subdivisions, just a stream of endless high-rise buildings and strip malls. The school itself is perched at the top of a small hill, quite old, although not completely run down. The walls inside of the school's entrance have composite pictures of past graduating classes. I take a quick glance to notice most of the students are from racialized minority groups. The central office is a hive of activity; teachers coming and going, office staff answering constantly ringing phones. The office walls are covered with bulletin boards announcing upcoming events, school initiatives, and there are posters of various sorts. I'm warmly greeted by one of the three secretaries before heading into the office of one of the administrators at the school. During the interviews there are various telephone and pager interruptions. The vice-principal and principal are very involved in the daily life of the school as many teachers and students stop into their offices during our interviews.

### **Context**

The community surrounding School 1 is socio-economically marginalized and racially and ethnically diverse. The geographical location of the school and related student intake were powerful factors that influenced enactment. The vice-principal and principal often referred to "schools like this" or "students like ours" and the "high needs" at the school.

Nathan, the principal at the school, stated that the local community lacked the “political clout” necessary to draw attention from the Board or the Ministry. He explained that parents within the community did not have the social and cultural capital to advocate for their children. For example, the school receives few phone calls or inquiries from parents:

Not one parent calls to complain. If this was a different neighborhood, phone would ring off the hook... One, they don't know who they can call. Two, they don't know if they should call, what they should say... the feeling is if you complain, the teacher will get you... they have a cultural fear that if they speak up they'll be punished. (Nathan, p. 3)

This lack of political clout means that the voices of the community are not heard and the needs of students in the community were not being addressed by the Board or the Ministry.

Nathan explained how this situation translated into inequities for students at School 1:

If students have voice, if people have voice, inequity will have a voice... if you need voice for things to be equitable, and then inherently there's no voice because of inequity, then that will never change. Because those who need to speak aren't speaking now. So how do you give voice to those who are dealing with inequity. (Nathan, p. 14)

The task of providing equitable learning opportunities for students was downloaded onto communities and parents. However, because the parents in the community were not always able to act as advocates for their children, Nathan took up the role as *advocate*:

I have to then sometimes advocate for the kid and so I'm feeling that there's an equity issue where we rely on a system where a parent will make a teacher accountable and a parent will make – have a voice in the school system and all these other things. Those things don't exist up here. So I feel like to be – to be their voice, whether it be for the – primarily for the kids and then for the parents is part of what I need to do for the system to have true equity. You know, and then advocating for the building and for the neighborhood and for it's needs when they don't have a voice. (Nathan, p. 1)

### **Policy Enactment Activities**

The enactment of the equity policy at School 1 manifested itself through activities and programs for students. The vice-principal and principal expressed the importance of creating

*equal opportunities* and *equal experiences* for students at School 1. The different programs that were enacted at School 1 are explored in this section.

The enactment of the equity policy at School 1 focused on providing “equity of opportunity” and “equity of experience” for students: “At the end of the day, to me it’s about equity of opportunity and equity of experience” (Nathan, p. 2). The vice-principal and principal at School 1 sought to make the school culture more positive and equitable by providing students with equal opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities. Given the lack of resources within the local community, the implementation of such programs was seen as a way to create a more equitable learning environment. Nathan explained his motivation: “I don’t want the educational experience in this school to be different than in a high income neighborhood” (p. 7). Providing students with the opportunity participate in extra-curricular activities was an important part of equity work within the school. These programs included sports teams, school dances, and a robotics team. While these might seem like typical extra-curricular activities available at all high schools, these programs had not existed at School 1 previous to the current administration team. Nathan explained:

when our volleyball team wins a championship, to me it’s a big deal because we played by the rules. We didn’t take kids from other schools. We didn’t have any extra money for training... To have a semi-formal with 300 kids go and no issues of alcohol, drugs, no issues of fighting and the kids all come and really enjoy it...our robotics team finishing second in Canada... That means they weren’t disadvantaged by living here. (Nathan, p. 7)

One of the hallmark extra-curricular programs at School 1 was *student leadership camps*. Both administrators described how these camps had been restructured at the school to make them accessible to all students:

So when I arrived in that school, it was like okay. Wait a second. How come only the white rich kids go to this camp...I ran the camp with the help of other teachers. Guess what. Things took off. Now we have a more inclusive environment, lots of kids are

there. Program is more equitable... but no where in that policy does it say make sure your leadership camps are equitable. (Nathan, p. 4)

Vice-principal Sandra explained that the leadership camps at the school had produced *real changes* for their students. The leadership camps were the most important way to build and sustain a *positive school culture* at School 1:

within a year, I think it really changed the school culture.... The kids love being up at camp, any issues that were affecting or impacting kids in the building, it's like they were practically gone. So kids who had never spoken to other groups of kids are now getting along and getting to know each other and understand each other. (Sandra, p. 6)

Creating a positive school culture was a fundamental part of the job description for both administrators. They worked hard to ensure that students wanted to come to school and felt like members of their school community:

I have to manage a school culture. I have to see how the kids see their building, how they perceive it to be safe, unsafe, inequitable, and then deal with all of those factors that are part of the kids' feeling of their school. I don't think other principals necessarily would worry about it. Or that's not my job.... So it's really a personal choice to make it a push. (Nathan, p. 6)

The focus on creating equitable opportunities and experiences for students to access extra-curricular activities had a profound impact on the school culture at School 1. Nathan described how, for him, student narratives were the most important way to gauge the impact of equity work in the school:

So any story where a kid can say I'm glad I live in this neighborhood, I'm glad to go to this school, like I truly had public education's equity played out with me, because I don't wish I lived somewhere else....because any example where they get more there and we get less here is inequitable to me. And so when we can sort of fight that perception and deliver it, then those are our success stories. (Nathan, p. 11)

Ontario's Equity Strategy required that schools create a positive school climate for all students. At School 1, the equity policy was enacted through the provision of equal

opportunities for all students to participate in extra-curricular activities. Providing students with opportunities to participate in these types of activities created a positive school climate.

### **Policy Roles**

The vice-principal and principal at School 1 described their role as policy actors in many different ways. Both of these policy actors were responsible for translating the policy into school-based programs and providing leadership to staff and teachers at the school. This work was evidence of their personal commitments to equity.

As the principal at the school, Nathan was responsible for reading the Board's equity policy and creating a vision or plan for equity work at the school. Nathan described his role as *making the policy real*. Nathan explained that part of his job in enacting the policy was interpreting the policy for his staff and teachers:

The problem with the policy is nobody really knows what they're supposed to talk about, what makes it real. So my job, I think, is to make it real and say that's inequitable. That's equitable. That's wrong. And tie it back then and be the person who explains why that's inequitable. (Nathan, p. 8)

One of the challenges of interpreting the policy was the language within the text. It was overly ideological and philosophical as opposed to practical:

when it comes to equity, I struggle with a lot of what the Ministry and the board are asking us to do. I find it lacking any real sort of substantial advice. Like I find you go to these sessions, you talk about it and it's really just philosophical... when a policy is nebulous and hard to measure it's even harder to implement. (Nathan, p. 1)

Nathan viewed the policy as a political priority from the Ministry and the Board that lacked specific direction or actionable items: "it's another overarching policy that to us appears to be a political statement and it's not real. It's not real to what we do...when it comes to implementing it" (Nathan, p. 4). "Real" policies were those that included specific instructions or actionable items that school leaders could use to change practices within their schools.

Given the multitude of demands facing school leaders and the litany of policies they are supposed to implement, policies that lacked instructions and actionable items were more challenging to implement: “So even if the policy’s a good one it’s very difficult to make it real. And so when you sit in our chair, you have so many policies, you wait for the one that’s real” (Nathan, p. 14). The equity narrative that Nathan created at the school focused on *equity of opportunity* and *equity of experience* for the students at School 1. His vision of equity at School 1 was seeing students participate in extra-curricular activities and academic programs.

Making the equity policy *real*, and translating the policy text into actionable items within the school required strong leadership. Nathan described his role as a leader enacting the equity policy: “you end up dealing – finding inequity and changing it. But that takes time, energy and effort and you need a leader who has the drive and motivation and time to do that” (Nathan, p. 13). Vice-principal Sandra also made equity a priority in the school. Her leadership skills were necessary to support the enactment of equity work by making it a school-wide priority:

I think it just depends on what the leadership in that building values... I have to be the role model... it has to be talked about... it has to be addressed. And if it doesn't come from admin then it just won't. (Sandra, p. 3)

Strong leadership skills were needed to foster an equity lens for staff and teachers in the school. The administrators realized the importance of cultivating support for equity initiatives amongst school staff:

You also have to be patient because in any equity issue there's got to be a continuum. Like you're not just looking at labeling people, you need to move people along and help people get to a better place because you're - you have to buy into the notion that they're all capable of more. They just haven't seen it or felt it yet. (Nathan, p. 6)

Without the support from school staff, or teacher buy-in, equity would not be realized across the school.



Both school leaders were personally committed to equity work. In terms of implementing the equity policy, Nathan explained that “it’s really a personal choice to make it a push... Nobody made me do that. I chose to do that” (Nathan, p. 6). Sandra also had the same commitment to equity: “for me, it’s at the forefront and it’s just because of who I am” (p. 9). The policy text was “made real” and equity programs were enacted because of the personal commitments of school leaders. While the Ministry and the Board developed policies, ultimately, their enactment depended on the existence of *champions* at the school. Nathan described this chain of responsibility and how it influences enactment:

you know, like whenever there is a political reality they have to deal with, it turns into work for us. I need to be a champion... So if my building has a teacher who says I want to do things, great. I’ll support them and enable them. If they don’t, it probably won’t get on my radar. (Nathan, p. 12)

Nathan and Sandra both took up multiple roles as policy actors during the enactment of the equity policy at School 1. While Nathan, as the school principal, was responsible for translating the philosophical statement of the Board’s equity policy into a school narrative, enacting this narrative required leadership and tenacious commitment demonstrated by both Sandra and Nathan in their everyday work.

### **Barriers**

The school leaders at School 1 expressed that a lack of resources and limited accountability mechanisms were barriers to system-wide equity work. There were not enough resources to support the needs of the student population at School 1 from the Ministry or the Board. This was one of the biggest barriers to enacting equity initiatives at the school:

the lack of resources around all those things. Like I don’t – I have – the school budget has shrunk every year I’ve been here, even though the Ministry says they’re spending more money on school. The school’s not seeing it. The inequities around – like I can’t help kids the way I used to help them, for things like lunches and bus tickets and stuff. (Nathan, p. 11)

In the same way that addressing student needs was downloaded onto the local community and by extension school leaders, so too was the task of finding resources to implement equity initiatives: “There’s real challenges here with funds. Getting kids money for camps and events and all that stuff is a challenge. But nothing comes from anywhere else. I have to find it on my own. On my own” (Nathan, p. 6). Sandra explained that there had been a critical incident at the school only months before the interviews took place. Despite this incident, which had gained widespread media attention, additional resources and support were still not being provided to the school:

Ever since then we’ve been promised so many things. We have yet to see any of them, including an extra counselor and a child and youth worker. There are not a lot of resources for a community like this one. (Sandra, p. 10)

Resource distribution across the Board was not *needs-based*, relying instead on parents and communities to voice demands for their children. Both school leaders lamented that parents are increasingly responsible for advocating for their children and for holding schools and school boards accountable. Sandra explained that resources at the Board were not distributed according to needs:

You have parent councils raising thousands of dollars in other communities... And yet their budget is the same as our budget the lack of resources for schools like ours are unbelievable... I can’t get extra money to be able to cover students to go to camp... Resources, the Board, they don’t know how to share them. They don’t know how to allocate them according to need. (Sandra, p. 10)

Furthermore, schools had little discretion in how resources were spent. Instead, the Board provided specific resources to schools even if it wasn’t something that the school had asked for or even *needed*:

it’s not necessarily redistributing it in a way that I have a say of. So my parents, my kids don’t have a voice. Somebody up high is deciding that I’m going to have an

eyeglasses clinic or wifi for the school. That's fine but that might not be what I needed, but I never had a voice. (Nathan, pp. 2-3)

This lack of resources was interpreted as a lack of support for and commitment to equity work:

I get no money from the Board for that program, no money from the Ministry. We have to self-fund... So it's hard for me to look at the policy with any credibility when you're not actually giving me resources or time or permission to deal with some tough issues. (Nathan, p. 4)

Given the lack of resources to support enactment, Sandra questioned the Board's commitment to equity work: "sometimes I wonder if it's even at the forefront of the Board to be honest with you" (p. 11). Despite the inequalities in funding, the school was able to run successful extra-curricular programs. Nathan emphasized that they were able to provide these opportunities and experiences to students without any fundraising from the local community or additional resources from the Board.

The lack of accountability mechanisms was seen as an additional barrier to the enactment of the equity policy. The school leaders explained that the equity policy lacked accountability mechanisms to ensure that principals, vice-principals, or teachers were actually doing equity work. Nathan described how principals were held accountable for equity work by the Board:

if I wanted a promotion, I'd have to talk about equity in my answers... My school plan might go in and somebody might say can you – the equity's missing. Can you throw something in. That's it... I might have to go to a session and listen, sign a form that I was there. That's as good as it's going to get. (Nathan, p. 9)

Board-wide equity training for teachers was seen as an add-on or after-thought. Vice-principal Sandra described workshops with teachers as one example: "even just how they roll it out. The teachers attend a couple of workshops and then they're expected to just come back and implement right. There's no follow-ups. There's no time for people to have those

courageous conversations” (p. 12). Nathan described these mandated training sessions as a *checklist* not a substantive commitment from the Board intended to make a difference at the school level:

Off they would go and I'd go to the session. I'd come back. Checkmark. Done. There's no follow-up, no culture change... So at the end of the day, there might be a mandatory equity session, but no one says it has to be good. No one says it has to be meaningful and no one will know if it changes the way people think. I can check off a bunch of things, but it doesn't actually change culture or practice. (Nathan, p. 9)

Beyond the inclusion of an equity agenda in a school improvement plan or mandated professional development for staff, there were virtually no accountability mechanisms in place when it came to the enactment of the equity policy. Nathan believed that a set of actionable items to guide school leaders to implement the policy would help:

If it was me writing an equity policy, it would look like the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Every school should...Every student should feel...Done. 10 statements. Done. That to me is more real than pages and pages of policy...Policies don't do that. They don't arm the student. They don't arm the principal (Nathan, p. 16).

In sum, the school leaders at School 1 did not believe that the equity policy supported system-wide change:

So the equity policy in my opinion doesn't give me the power to change systems. It doesn't give me the power to find resources. It's like this overarching expectation that I look at and go yeah, that's easy for you to say. But on the ground, we're on our own making it work. (Nathan, p. 5)

Nathan explained that there are many policies and administrative demands on principals:

I always meet people who describe the ideal principal. So you're talking about someone who's in the halls and know the kids and has a pulse of the school and delivers for the kids. But nothing you're doing is allowing that model to exist. In fact, you're hindering it with other things. (Nathan, p. 12)

These formal policies from the Ministry and the Board actually hindered system-wide change:

“the biggest problem with the initiatives the Ministry has, each one are well intentioned, but

they're too controlling, too much paperwork, too much reporting...I feel like they just sort of provide hindrance and don't listen" (Nathan, pp. 12-13).

The school leaders explained that the Ministry lacked an understanding of the daily realities of schooling and the importance that extra-curricular activities make for students. Instead, they focused on student achievement: "the system's lack of awareness... I've never been to workshops where they wanted to talk about extra-curriculars instead of student achievement. I've been in a Ministry session and they look at that stuff as fluff. It's not. It's the life of the school. That's a huge frustration" (Nathan, p. 11). The school leaders also explained that the Board was more committed to student achievement and meeting the objectives of the *student achievement task force*:

They're too myopic...too data driven. I got to raise test scores in this area. I got to raise achievement rates in this course. I got to spend hours to make that happen and then they can say see what a great initiative. We, really, you haven't changed the school, you just changed three or four courses, maybe two or three teachers. (Nathan, p. 12)

Inadequate resources and a lack of accountability mechanisms were barriers to the enactment of the equity policy at School 1. As a result of these barriers, the equity policy was not perceived as a practical solution to the problem of inequity and did not promote social justice in the school.

## **School 2**

At this particular site an interview was conducted with the vice-principal. This section describes the contextual factors that mediated policy enactment, the types of equity initiatives that took place at the school, the roles that the vice-principal occupied as she enacted the policy, and the barriers to equity work she faced.

## Context

Unfortunately I was not able to make a site visit to School 2 at the request of Lauren, the vice-principal, who asked that the interview be conducted off of school property.

Therefore, I had to rely on Lauren's description of the school-community context. She explained that School 2 is located in an affluent community. The student body at School 2 is not highly diverse and most of the students are white. Lauren explained that the student demographics at School 2 are not representative of a typical high school in the Board:

I sort of look at it as a school that doesn't really have a lot of at-risk students. It's not representative of the rest of [the city]. They used to call it More White because it's a very – more white students than you would typically see in a [city] school. It's a fairly affluent community. (Lauren, p. 10)

The affluence of the community and the financial capital of parents meant that there were more extra-curricular opportunities for students at School 2. Lauren described how the affluence in the community translated into more resources and opportunities for the students:

we can afford extra things so for instance we have a competitive cheerleading team, we've got probably every athletic sport you can think of but let's just say cheerleading for instance, the students would have to pay about \$600 per person to be part of that because they travel for competition. (Lauren, p. 10)

Parents were heavily invested and involved in the schooling experience of their children. As a result of the cultural capital of the parents in the community, the administration team at the school received many phone calls from parents: "If a student gets sent to the office, they always text their parent and the parent will show up in the office before the student to tell me how to do my job" (Lauren, p. 10). In contrast to the other case study schools, the affluence of the local community also meant a high degree of parental involvement in the school community.

### Policy Enactment Activities

This section explores the enactment of equity programming at School 2. Specific attention is paid to the types of programs that were enacted as equity initiatives at School 2. Lauren described different programs or groups that operated within the school as evidence of her enactment of the equity policy at School 2. The *Safe and Caring Schools Committee* was the staff organization that worked on equity initiatives. Lauren also described her work with the boys' basketball team and the creation of prayer spaces as initiatives that had been undertaken to create greater equity for students within the school.

Lauren had organized the *Safe and Caring School Committee*, a group that took responsibility for equity work within the school: “we definitely do specific work through our Safe and Caring School Committee” (Lauren, p. 13). She explained that the committee worked to make sure that all of the students in the school are “served and supported” including students on the autism spectrum, gay students, and transgender students. Lauren explained that she used the words *safe* and *caring* instead of equity since they were more palatable for her staff:

when I first went and asked staff why don't we start an equity committee, nobody came. But when I said who would like to be part of a safe and caring school committee to make sure that everyone feels safe and valued, it's the same language but it's not using the word equity and all of a sudden, we had a lot of people. Phenomenal number of strong people who are those same people who are now talking about all of the issues of equity but because we don't use that word, it's just different. (Lauren, p. 6)

One of the specific initiatives that the Safe and Caring School Committee was involved with was *mindfulness* training. Lauren explained that mindfulness training was provided to teachers and staff to cultivate greater equity at the school. Mindfulness training was used to create an equity lens for teachers in the school. The use of mindfulness training is another example of careful language selection to make equity initiatives at the school more palatable

for staff. The mindfulness training was provided to teachers and staff who then supported students with mindful practices:

we're training seventy-five staff around mindful practices which really is ways of getting students to relax, put the rest of their baggage to rest for a while as they're in class and taking ownership of what's going on in the class and having a recognition that it's a safe space and that their voices are gonna be heard and they're actually helping to build the curriculum and it makes it so much more meaningful for them. (Lauren, p. 6)

Despite a committee that had been created specifically to address equity issues, Lauren acknowledged that more work within the school was needed: “we got a lot – got a lot of work to do and it's ongoing” (Lauren, p. 16). This committee of teachers and school staff worked closely with student groups including the Student Justice League and the Gay Straight Alliance.

Although School 2 was located in an affluent community, Lauren realized that there was still inequitable access to extra-curricular programming in the school. There were many extra-curricular activities for the students to participate in and, therefore, it was often assumed by teachers and staff, that all students had access to these activities. Lauren explained that many teachers work with two or three different groups or clubs in the school such as sports teams, French club, or a dance club. Despite widespread teacher involvement in extra-curricular programming, Lauren was unable to recruit a teacher to coach the boys' basketball team:

I think the junior boys' basketball was kind of the last one that people wanted because it was the kids that you will see sitting on the bench in the office. They're the kids that will be pretty easy to have to excuse from your classroom because they're being disruptive...most of those young men are black. And some don't have two parents so it's all of that marginalization. (Lauren, p. 11)

For Lauren, this represented an inequity at the school, and she wanted to find a coach for the basketball team. Lauren went as far as recruiting a community member who had the expertise



to coach the team. She made it her own personal responsibility to supervise the team at practices. Her commitment to the boys' basketball team went above and beyond her duties as a vice-principal:

We'd be there so Monday, Wednesday, Friday morning [for practice] and the, the coaches would say, let's do a movie night Friday, and I'm thinking I want to go home Friday. What am I doing here at 6 o'clock at night and I'd be making them hotdogs and stuff. I'm crazy. But, the relationship I have with those kids is phenomenal that I think it's helped that they if they start to act up and they'll sort of see me and think, okay I guess I probably should behave. (Lauren, p. 12)

Another program at School 2 that Lauren had organized to address equity issues within the school was the creation of a prayer space. She spearheaded the creation of this space after noticing that particular groups of students were signing out of classes on Fridays:

the only reason I recognized the need is because I had a grade 9 student who came in and used to sign out every Friday afternoon... and I finally said, why do you keep signing out every Friday? Oh, I got to go to prayer....so I said can we do something here...so we created a space in the library where students go could and pray but as soon as we created the space, it outgrew itself and it was too small. So then, I was finding another space...and we found a larger space, a classroom. (Lauren, pp. 8-9)

If Lauren hadn't take the time to communicate directly with the students about their concerns, she might not have realized that there was an important reason that students were leaving school on Fridays and that a simple solution could be offered. The enactment of the equity policy at School 2 involved specific initiatives for teachers and staff through the Safe and Caring Schools Committee such as mindfulness training that was used to foster an equity lens amongst staff. Lauren's involvement with the boys' basketball team and the creation of a prayer space are examples of initiatives that were undertaken to support students within the school.

## Policy Roles

Lauren took on many different roles when enacting the equity policy at School 2. She was responsible for translating the policy into a narrative that would be palatable for her staff. Lauren was often described as the equity person in her school and was seen as a role model for other staff. Despite identifying the importance of leadership and exhibiting these qualities herself, Lauren self-described as a facilitator.

In terms of enacting the policy, Lauren was responsible for reading the Board's equity policy and enacting equity initiatives at School 2. It was through various initiatives in the school, that Lauren would give the equity policy life. Lauren relied heavily on the equity policy from the Board to guide her work and make things happen:

I keep referring to the [board] policies... and ministry policies and that's basically what I use when I'm working with the family of schools because we, as a family of schools, get together for monthly meetings to talk about how does this stuff play out in our schools and what do we need. How do we make different things happen – and – and affect change and we're – we're always referring back to the board policies. (Lauren, p. 20)

An important part of Lauren's work as policy actor was creating an equity narrative for her school. Part of creating this narrative was translating the language of the policy into something more palatable amongst teachers in the school. She needed to ensure that professional development and training with teachers was carefully planned to get teacher buy-in: "you can't pick your teachers though. And, you got a lot of teachers who have been at this a long time who haven't bought into [equity] at all or haven't had any exposure or training or accountability to be that way" (p. 19). Although supportive of the equity work done at the Board, Lauren explained that professional development with teachers, often provided by personnel from the Equity Office, isn't well received by teachers. This is another example of how important it was for Lauren to craft an equity narrative that was palatable to teachers.

She explained that it was important to find a different way to engage in professional development with teachers:

if gender-based violence is coming out to do a PD and equity is coming out to do PD and they're just pissing off teachers, what's a different way that we can deliver PD and have the conversations so that people will actually or willing to have conversation without getting their back up. (Lauren, p. 20)

Lauren's most important role as a policy actor was interpreting the equity policy text and creating a vision of equity for the staff at her school that was palatable to staff and could be used to generate teacher buy-in.

Lauren had a personal history of equity work in her various roles as a teacher and administrator. She explained how she has always made equity work a priority:

I always ended up trying to engage staff in discussions of equity. Reaching out to whoever was available at the board level and who was in an equity or a gender-based violence position to come in and do workshops so that we could understand how to support students. (Lauren, p. 4).

Lauren's personal commitment to equity work was also observed amongst other staff at the school where she was seen as a role model:

It's interesting because staff will come to me and say, well this would interest you because of your equity stuff. You like all the equity stuff so – and, if something comes in the mail to do with equity, well give it to [Lauren], she likes the equity stuff. So you sort of become the – the person that adopts or has an equity lens. (Lauren, p. 31)

Lauren explained that school leaders or teachers who are actively involved with equity issues often do so because it's part of their professional practice: “so, those people who get it, you see they really get it, and others probably don't quite get it” (Lauren, p. 7). The enactment of equity policy in the school required policy actors that were deeply committed to the value of equity and modeled these commitments for other staff.

Lauren had worked as a teacher and an administrator in schools for many years. She acknowledged the political clout and decision-making powers that an administrative position

carries with it: “I feel that moving from being a classroom teacher to an administrator, I can make things happen in a way I couldn’t make them happen as a teacher” (Lauren, p. 19). The unique positioning of school administrators make them powerful figures in enacting equity policy. Lauren leveraged this position, along with her personal and professional commitment to equity work, to be a leader for equity initiatives in the school:

If you don’t have someone above you so when I was a teacher, if I had an administrator who supported this work, it was so much easier to say yes we’re gonna get the support if I ask for funds for this or space for this or time for this or resources for this. And even as a vice-principal, teachers overwhelmingly say this wouldn’t happen without your support. (Lauren, p. 5)

Beyond her own leadership in the school in enacting the equity policy, Lauren also described how leadership beyond the walls of the school was significant:

Now I’m in a position where we have a superintendent who is phenomenal in issues of equity and is absolutely supporting everything we can do within the family of schools and there’s so much happening now because of the superintendent that’s there. (Lauren, p. 5)

Lauren explained the important role that school administrators play as policy leaders in a school. She used her own position as a vice-principal to enact equity initiatives in the school.

Although Lauren’s staff saw her as a leader in the school, especially in her advocacy of equity initiatives, she described her role in policy enactment as a *facilitator*:

I’m kind of a facilitator, I feel like I sort of connect things... I just feel like I just sort of connect things in a way that I’m not controlling them but I’m sort of putting people together of like minds that can help things grow. (Lauren, p. 19)

An important example of Lauren’s facilitation skills as a policy actor was fostering teacher involvement. Teachers are purposefully called upon as important policy actors in enacting equity initiatives. For example, Lauren described how she recruits teachers who “get it” to work with other teachers: “in some cases I have to tap teachers who I know get it... to come and help lead the discussion. So that they can affect change – because it – it’s always better

coming from a teacher than from an administrator” (Lauren, p. 18). This work between teachers and between administrators and teachers within a school was crucial to the enactment of the equity policy at the school level.

### **Barriers**

Lauren expressed that a lack of resources and limited accountability mechanisms were barriers to system-wide equity work. Lauren expressed concern over the lack of resources to support the enactment of the equity policy. Given the affluence of the local community where the school was located, the school’s need for financial resources was not raised by Lauren. Instead, Lauren identified a lack of human resources as one of the most significant barriers: “There’s just not the personnel or the staff. And, I think before Harris, there were more personnel that were available – to help to create an understanding and – and work closely with schools” (Lauren, p. 24). Without the provision of adequate resources, the equity policy was not producing real change: “it’s not actually having a difference. It’s not – you’re not putting any real resources into it” (Lauren, p. 28). Given the lack of resources for equity work, Lauren didn’t see the equity policy as having any real power to create social justice in schools.

Lauren described a lack of accountability for equity work at the Board as a barrier to policy enactment. Lauren explained that accountability mechanisms are critical for ensuring that policies are implemented:

there wasn’t accountability with it so maybe the documents have come through but unless you have someone reminded us about them on a regular basis and deconstructing what the policy is and expecting schools to demonstrate how they’re enacting that policy, that accountability – if it’s not there, it’s pretty hard to say what’s happening. (Lauren, p. 22)

The lack of an accountability structure meant that equity initiatives were superficial, often seen as a requirement that could be quickly *checked off* a school leaders' improvement plan:

I mean, there are principals' checklists that you get at the beginning of the year. You know, you have the safe school committee, do you have this? Do you have this? But [equity] is not something that you specifically expand on and – and prove the effect of. (Lauren, p. 23)

Lauren explained that the *checklist* approach existed at the Board. She explained how the Board checks off equity initiatives, even if they aren't producing real change:

I think we're kind of paying lip service to equity right now because we go – we've got that Office...yes we've got the gender-based violence, yes we got the Equity Office, yes we got – okay, we've got them in place but that's not addressing the concerns that we have about this isn't happening. Yeah, check check check. Like the board is just going through a checklist. (Lauren, p. 28)

As a result of these barriers, Lauren questioned the extent to which the equity policy was leading to system-wide change at the Board and in schools. Lauren believed that system-wide change was only possible with a genuine commitment from the Board. She pointed to the Board's commitment to other initiatives, such as student achievement, that have been more successful in creating system-wide change:

Maybe if we took all the energy we're putting into – to the EQAO and put it into this, let's help marginalized students, and how can we make sure they're successful? Then, maybe we can actually see some change. (Lauren, p. 35)

Inadequate resources and a lack of accountability mechanisms were barriers to the enactment of the equity policy at the school level. As a result of these barriers, the equity policy was not perceived as a practical solution to the problem of inequity and did not promote social justice in schools.

### School 3

At this particular site, an interview was conducted with the vice-principal. This section describes the context of the school as a factor that mediated policy enactment,

changing school climate as the main equity initiative, the different roles that the vice-principal occupied to enact policy, and barriers to equity work at the school. School 3 is located in a mixed neighborhood—there are brand new three story homes under renovation right across the road from or beside high-rise apartment buildings. The student population at School 3 is equally diverse. There is a program for gifted students and students with criminal records. Upon entering the school, you know you are entering an old building. Nothing is new. The floors and walls are predominately white. I notice small holes in the walls; later I’m told these are bullet holes. Nadine, one of two vice-principals, was interviewed at School 3. She had previous experience working in the Equity Office at the Board and had recently come to School 3 in her first role as a school administrator.

### **Context**

School 3 is located in a racially and ethnically diverse neighborhood and this diversity characterized the student population. Nadine described the school as very “racially and ethnically diverse”, noting that “our population is like less than five percent white” (p. 4). The community surrounding School 3 was predominately low socio-economic status. Nadine explained the impact that poverty had on the school climate:

Really high needs in the school. Really really high needs with respect to socioeconomic status. We have a lunch program that runs three days a week. A breakfast program that runs three days a week. We may start running that five days a week if we can get more funding to be able to run it. Kids are hungry. They kids really are hungry. (Nadine, p. 14)

The student population at School 3 presented unique challenges for Nadine. In her own words: “a lot of those students who are – some of them are really bad. Like really bad. Doing some really nefarious things outside” (Nadine, p. 4). Nadine explained that gangs were a prominent feature of the community surrounding School 3:

And I now know the different gangs in the area and this school is located sort of right in the middle so you have three different ones that come and are housed in the school and they behave themselves when they're in the school. But we know who the kids are. (Nadine, p. 4)

Since arriving at School 3, contact with local police services had become a difficult but common part of Nadine's job: "I have never in my life spoken with so many police officers. Like I now know [police station] very well. We know the gang unit very very well. That was hard for me when I first came in" (Nadine, p. 4). School 3 is an academically diverse school that has "a fair size IB program<sup>1</sup>" (Nadine, p. 14). Nadine explained that this program presented its own equity challenges: "it's like you've got two schools in one school and we have a lot of clash with respect to the kids don't hang out together" (Nadine, p. 4). Nadine also explained that while the students in the IB program are from middle-class backgrounds, there are other equity issues at play: "There's huge mental health issues. The majority of the suicide attempts have been in that program" (Nadine, p. 14).

Because of the challenges described above, School 3 received additional human resource support from the Board: "we have less than 1 000 kids and we have three VPs which is very rare. Each VP has a child youth worker attached to them which is also very rare" (Nadine, p. 6). Teacher retention presented another challenge for Nadine and the other administrators. In the last five years, 72 teachers had left School 3.

### **Policy Enactment Activities**

In contrast to the previous two case study schools, programming for staff and students was not identified as the primary way in which the equity policy was being enacted. Nadine explained that changing the school climate was her primary focus in enacting the equity

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<sup>1</sup> The International Baccalaureate (IB) program is a globally-renowned academic program offered in select school across the Board for high achieving students. Students in the IB program at School 3 were described as very intelligent, gifted students.



policy. Nadine discussed the importance of *school climate* as her way of enacting the equity policy. In contrast to the narratives of extra-curricular programming that were dominant in the previous two schools, shifting the school culture, or “cleaning house” at School 3 was the primary focus of Nadine’s equity work:

So when you emailed to say what are you doing with equity, I started laughing because it’s like , oh, we’re not there yet. We have to clean house first. We have to clean house first. And then I realized I was starting to think about it. This is an equity issue. (Nadine, p. 4)

Nadine explained that before she was able to implement specific equity initiatives, she needed to change the school climate. At the time she didn’t conceive of this work as being specifically equity-related, but soon realized that the climate at the school deeply affected students’ experiences of schooling. Nadine’s understanding of school climate included factors such as the safety of students in the school given the gang activity in the surrounding community, general student behaviour such as poor attendance, and low expectations and discriminatory attitudes that many teachers held. These factors created a negative climate at School 3, an inequity for the students in the school that needed to be addressed:

I realized this is an equity issue because the school was allowed to get to that state because of the kids – and the kids in here are just expendable. Real margin, so it doesn’t really matter. So let them kill themselves. I’ll take you on a tour of all the bullet holes that are inside the school. So that’s what we’ve been doing for the last five months or so is cleaning house, setting ground rules. (Nadine, p. 4)

Nadine had recently taken up the position of vice-principal. Prior to working at School 3 as a vice-principal, Nadine had worked as a curriculum specialist at the Equity Office. In her role as a school administrator, Nadine realized how important school culture is and how difficult it can be to change:

now I get to see how deeply engrained specific cultures are. So school climate is huge. So that’s what my focus has been coming in here – how do I address school climate?

How do I make it more inclusive? How do I hear the voices of all of the stakeholders?  
(Nadine, p. 5)

Nadine's work to change the school climate involved addressing student needs and providing equity training for teachers.

As part of her school climate strategy, Nadine focused first and foremost on outreach with students. Changing school climate involved creating rules and expectations for students in the school in terms of academics and behaviour. These changes made the students feel more supported and created a safer environment at School 3. Given the challenges of school climate described above, Nadine explained that students had been "running the school" when she arrived: "I was gobsmacked that the kids ruled the school. Rolling joints in the cafeteria, extortion. Like you name it. Lots of gangs. It's like help" (Nadine, p. 4).

It is important to note that Nadine was not judgmental or critical of the backgrounds and experiences of her students, nor the challenges that their behaviors posed for herself and other staff members. Perhaps due to her experiences at the Equity Office and previous equity training, Nadine was very committed to equity work and social justice was an important element of her professional practice and leadership style. Instead of judging or criticizing the students, she was supportive, acting as their biggest advocate. Her main and unrelenting priority was to address the unique needs of the students in her school, especially those that faced extreme poverty, marginalization, and oppression inside and outside of school:

You get to know them very well. They disclose stuff to you and you think okay, you've had a really shitty life and you're 15 years old and this is what you've dealt with. One little guy who's still here, that God knows what we're going to do with him. Very high up. Like very high up. I guess it's his family business and kids are terrified of him and he's very amicable.... You have to be able to like the kids to find that fine balance of being supportive. (Nadine, p. 14)

Nadine's approach to changing school climate began by addressing student needs. In contrast to other school leaders who discussed equity in terms of access, opportunity, or experience,

Nadine spoke about the *needs* of her students:

So this school has many many different programs but we noticed there was a group of kids who were not being – their needs weren't being addressed... And if we want a safe school they you've got to address their needs because they're one of the reasons why the school maybe is not necessarily so safe because teachers have turned a blind eye to the kids. (p. 14)

One of the specific strategies that Nadine employed to shift school climate was the creation of a boys' group at the school. Nadine and the other vice-principal at the school had created a group for at-risk boys:

When we first came here we were surprised that we had Grade 12 students who had maybe six credits... And they had just been allowed to languish, so we didn't want these grade 9 and 10s – we could see them going down on that road, so my colleague started a boys group where every week they have tutoring. They have a mentoring piece and then they get some sort of reward at the end of the month. (Nadine, p. 14)

Unlike other programs that existed for boys within the Board that focus strictly on achievement, Nadine explained that this group had a broader focus, teaching students to navigate the education system. This group focused on empowerment:

So it's teaching kids to navigate the system. They're getting the tutoring. They're – but they're also getting that mentoring of teaching how to navigate a system that views them a certain way and being really honest and open about that, right. And like this is what the system is saying about you. This is what the media is saying about you. So what are we going to do to combat that. (Nadine, p. 9)

Training for school staff, especially teachers, was a second pillar of Nadine's school climate strategy. Nadine explained that many teachers were ill-prepared to handle the unique challenges at School 3. The high attrition rate was evidence of the strain and pressures that teachers experienced. Nadine explained that the school had lost 72 teachers in just five years. Nadine acknowledged the significant role that teachers play in shaping school climate:

I'm seeing now the importance of staff – staff involvement and how do we get staff to like the kids. Like I'm gobsmacked at some of the comments I hear. It's like, wow. Why are you even a teacher? Like really, why are you a teacher? This is what you think about the student population you work with. Go elsewhere. (Nadine, p. 5)

Given the centrality of teachers to school climate, shifting school climate at School 3 required getting teachers *on board*:

we figured we couldn't do anything for school climate until we got staff on board... it was building relationships with the people and the students... So our office door is open all the time, so we have kids now coming in, plopping down and actually giving us warning of what's going to happen... And staff come in here... So relationships have been the key. Building really solid relationships. (Nadine, p. 8)

In contrast to previous administrators at School 3, Nadine actively reached out to teachers within the school to *boost morale*: “so the first thing we had to do was address the staff and get the staff morale up and still bring equity into it...infuse it into every staff meeting we have” (Nadine, p. 4). However, Nadine faced challenges in her work with teachers to shift the climate at School 3. She explained that teacher *apathy* was one of her biggest challenges in the school:

Teacher apathy. Teachers who really shouldn't be teaching and there's quite a lot of them and they're protected and I wouldn't want them in front of my kid. I actually said that in the staff meeting. Would you want you in front of your child and if you can't say yes, then you know what? It may be time to change practice. (Nadine, p. 16)

At times, Nadine explained that teachers were barriers to the implementation of equity initiatives. There is often push-back from teachers. Nadine attributed this to fear:

So it's constantly battling people's, I think fear. I think it's fear right. It's fear that folks don't want to be seen as being racist or sexist or homophobic or whatever, right, and folks feel that if you talk about it, then that means you're pointing a finger at them and it's not. (Nadine, p. 6)

Nadine acknowledged the role that both students and teachers play in shaping the school climate at School 3. She worked with both of these groups to provide support and build relationships that would create a more socially just, safe environment in the school.

### Policy Roles

Nadine took on many different roles when enacting the equity policy at School 3. She discussed the importance of making equity work palatable for her staff. While she was committed to the enacting the equity policy in her school, Nadine was also a critic of the policy. Nadine needed to present her staff with a particular interpretation of the equity policy that was palatable. Like other school leaders, Nadine explained the unpopularity of the word ‘equity’ and the way in which she carefully selected language in order to cultivate teacher support for equity work: “we’ll talk about specific issues but I don’t term issues as equity issues. I package it in a different way...so if we know equity turns folks off, then let’s find some other way to get them on board” (Nadine, p. 4). Once Nadine had decided on a particular equity narrative that she could ‘sell’ to her staff, she discussed the importance of involving people to give policy meaning, or *bringing it to life*: “I think in a school like this, you can bring it to life, right, you can really bring it to life, enacting it, right” (Nadine, p. 12). Nadine’s mission to “bring the policy to life” involved many different policy actors at School 3. She explained that teachers and school administrators are *policymakers*: “the front line workers are the policymakers. You teachers are the policymakers whether you like it or not. Right. And administrators, I think administrators is a big role to play” (Nadine, p. 10).

In her new role as a vice-principal, Nadine emphasized the importance of leadership in enacting policies. Reflecting on her work with teachers, Nadine emphasized the importance of leadership across an institution: “I focus on leadership development whether it’s with student leaders, teacher leaders, administrators, superintendents, systems superintendents” (Nadine, p. 21). In particular, Nadine advocated for a particular style of leadership that she called *distributed leadership*: “I very much believe in distributed leadership so it’s looking at

leadership as collective. So we're really trying to empower teacher leadership, getting them to start to step up to the plate" (Nadine, p. 5). Nadine discussed the importance of leadership in a school and encouraging all of her staff to take on these types of roles.

Nadine was heavily invested in making School 3 a more equitable place for students but she was also a vocal critic of the equity policy. As a result of her tenacious commitment to social justice for her students and previous experience at the Equity Office, Nadine questioned the philosophical approach and implementation strategies pursued by the Board. Nadine believed that there was a lack of political commitment to equity work at the Board and, as a result, system-wide change was not occurring:

I believe that at the senior level, to maintain the status quo at all costs. I really do believe that. I've seen people at the senior level who purposefully stop things from occurring for whatever reason. (Nadine, p. 18)

For this reason, she explained that an important part of equity work for her was about challenging institutional narratives: "I think for me, challenge the dominant narrative that is out there about education and doing it with students and with staff" (Nadine, p. 10). While working at the Board, it was difficult for Nadine to challenge the Board's narrative without facing backlash. Instead, Nadine pursued school-based equity work as a way to challenge the dominant narrative. She also wanted the opportunity to make a difference in schools by working with students and teachers in deeper, more sustained ways. She explained that "people were trying to silence myself and my other colleagues and we wouldn't be silenced so we finally realized enough is enough. We'll do our work grassroots in a school. I'll go into administration because then it's teaching kids but it's also working with adult learners" (Nadine, p. 3). While she continued to face challenges working with teachers in her school, Nadine was able to pursue equity work on her own terms and feel as though she is making

more of a difference for students in her school than she could at the Board working in the Equity Office.

### **Barriers**

Nadine explained that the most significant barrier to the enactment of the equity policy was the inadequate provision of resources. As a result of her past experience at the Equity Office, Nadine was frustrated by the lack of system-wide change. The inadequate provision of resources was identified as the most significant barrier to enacting the equity policy.

Nadine explained that there was a lack of *time* devoted to equity work which prevented teachers and administrators from engaging in critical conversations around equity issues:

We don't have those really critical conversations that need to be had. So where the Board lacks, I would say, is time. Giving time for administrators and teachers just to digest what this means to their practice, what this means to them personally...Change doesn't happen overnight. (Nadine, p. 17)

Nadine explained that school administrators are faced with increasing workloads and many different policies to implement. These ever-increasing demands make it difficult for school administrators to do equity work:

I can see how if administrators could be so completely overwhelmed with everything that they have to do that talking about anti-homophobia education or talking about Africentric education is not even on their radar because of dealing with all of the other stuff that they have to deal with. (Nadine, p. 6)

The lack of time for professional development often meant that administrators in particular lacked the proper *training* needed to address equity issues, especially in challenging contexts like School 3. Nadine was critical of principal qualifications programs, which she had researched for her graduate work, stating that:

There's nothing in any of those programs where they even start to talk about equity – equity is never talked about. It's a little add-on occasionally and it's – it's interesting...I don't know how administrators address equity issues in their schools if they do not have a solid background or training. There's just no way. It's such –

there's so many hot button topics that – they've already got issues. They're not going to open that. It's like opening a Pandora's box. (Nadine, p. 6)

Nadine lamented that despite an equity policy at the Board, system-wide change was not taking place at the school-level. In her previous role at the Equity Office, Nadine described the lack of system-wide change:

There's been no changes...and I found in my role in the Equity Office when I tried to talk about this in presentations and so forth, a lot of backlash... So the five years in that Office it was really interesting because it exposed this blight in the institution, right, and real blight in the institution. And I ended up leaving because I couldn't take it anymore (Nadine, p. 3).

She identified different factors that prevented system-wide change. First, she explained that the conceptualization of equity as an *add-on* or additive approach hindered system-wide change:

Equity is seen as an add-on and it's like oh, it's the politically correct people. Literally going into meetings with all these different Offices and then they see us and the eyes rolling and these are like superintendents. These are administrators. (Nadine, p. 2)

Nadine described how small incremental changes and the establishment of an Equity Office was used as evidence that equity work is being done. She was critical of this superficial approach: "Oh yes, but look what we're doing. But it's just little drops in the bucket, right. The real deep stuff that needs to be done they will not allow it to be done" (Nadine, p. 19). Second, the *reactionary* approach that was taken to equity work hindered system-wide change. Nadine experienced this while working at the Board and at School 3: "this board is reactionary. We do everything based on something that's hit the fan. We're not a proactive board at all which is sad" (Nadine, p. 21). The lack of system-wide change and the Board's additive, reactionary approach ultimately led Nadine to pursue school-based work as a vice-principal.



## Discussion

The embedded cases of school-based policy enactment in this section have revealed the diverse and contested nature of equity work in schools. This chapter has painted a portrait of policy enactment in schools that is mediated by various contextual factors and shaped by the actions of school leaders. Inadequate resources and a lack of accountability measures were seen as barriers to the enactment of the equity policy that prevented system-wide change. These findings are discussed in the final section of this chapter.

### The Role of Context

This section discusses the role of context in mediating policy enactment. Braun et al. (2011) explain that to understand how context influences the enactment of policies, attention must be paid to local forces within a school: “schools produce, to some extent, their own ‘take’ on a policy, drawing on aspects of their culture or ethos, as well as on situated necessities” (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011, p. 586). The embedded cases of school-based policy enactment illustrate the role of contextual factors in shaping, constraining, and enabling the enactment of the equity policy. The situational context was a factor that shaped the enactment of the equity policy in each of the case study schools and helped to explain the different approaches that were taken in each of the schools. The material context, especially a lack of resources, coupled with external pressures towards performative accountability constrained equity work and limited the system-wide impact of the equity policy. Finally, the professional context, specifically the dispositions and actions of school leaders, supported the enactment of the equity policy.

First, the situated context includes aspects that are “historically and locationally linked to the school” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 21). The situational context shaped each of the

school leaders' interpretations of the equity policy and the types of equity initiatives that the school leaders decided to pursue. Policy enactment occurred differently in each school because the local contextual factors shaped how schools respond to policy and how they translated texts into their own organizational cultures. The most significant element of the situational context that shaped policy enactment was the socio-demographic factors in the local community that influenced student intake. The local context and specifically the issues present in the local community influenced the types of equity activities that school leaders pursued. In this way, the local community was a contextual factor that shaped the equity narratives each of the school leaders created to guide their work. The situational context and the resulting student intake explained the slight differences in policy enactment across the three schools in the study. Even in School 1 and School 3, two schools serving a similar population of socio-economically marginalized and racialized youth who have been historically marginalized, the types of enactment activities were different. For example, the principal at School 1 referred to "schools like this" or "students like ours" to communicate the marginalization of the community. At School 3, vice-principal Nadine's interpretation of the equity policy focused on "cleaning house" and shifting school climate to make the school safer as a result of issues of crime in the surrounding community.

Second, the material context and external pressures towards performative accountability constrained the enactment of the equity policy. The school leaders in each of the case study schools discussed a lack of resources as a barrier to policy enactment. In regards to external pressures, surprisingly, although discourses of performativity and accountability have shaped the re-articulation of equity within policy documents from the Ministry and the Board, these discourses did not have a significant impact on equity work

specifically. However, the increasing demands that school leaders face and the litany of policies that they are responsible for, take time away from their ability to do equity work. For example, Lauren, the vice-principal at School 2 questioned how much equity work could be done if the Ministry and Board were as committed to equity work as they are to student testing. The school leaders did discuss that a lack of accountability mechanisms was a barrier to the enactment of the equity policy. Paradoxically, the lack of accountability actually constrained equity work in the case study schools.

Finally, the professional context in each school, specifically, the role of the school leaders, is one of the most significant factors that explain policy enactment in each of the case study schools. The professional context includes the values and commitments of school leaders. That each school leader was committed to equity and made equity a significant part of their professional practice helped to explain why the policy was enacted in the schools despite obvious barriers to equity work.

### **School Leaders as Policy Actors**

Understanding how policies are enacted in schools requires analyzing the actions of school-based policy actors. The process of policy enactment involved translating the textual abstractions of policy documents into real and actionable activities for practitioners intended to address student needs and improve their experience of schooling. During the process of enactment, school leaders occupied various roles as policy actors, including roles as narrators, translators, enthusiasts, and critics (Ball et al, 2012).

Policy enactment requires interpreting and translating the textual abstractions of policy documents into real and actionable events for practitioners. Through the work of narrators “texts are translated into actions, things to do in ‘real’ situations. That is, they are made

meaningful and doable” (Ball et al., 2011, p. 631). The policy text was an abstraction, a highly philosophical document that could remain on a shelf collecting dust. For example, Nathan spoke about the policy as overly ideological and philosophical and his task in narration is to “make it real”. As narrators, each of the school leaders explained how they had to create a vision for equity work in their school that they could sell to staff. School leaders explained how the equity narrative they constructed had to be *palatable* for their staff and so they carefully translated the policy text into keywords. School leaders typically avoided using the word “equity”. For example, vice-principal Lauren spoke about safe and caring schools and mindfulness training while vice-principal Nadine talked about the importance of choosing other language, in her case, meeting student needs. Ball et al., (2012) explain that part of the narrator’s role is “to work hard to convince their staff of the worthwhileness of policy ideas” (p. 51). The school leaders also discussed the importance of *buy-in* from staff, especially teachers.

The school leaders explained that policy documents can be used as tools to enforce meanings. For example, Nadine explained how she likes policy for the work it affords her in promoting school change:

So when they come to you, policy is your friend because you could say, look, I’m adhering to what we stand for in this Board. This is the policy. I’m not doing anything outside of the policy. I think knowing your policy is really really important. I love policy. I love policy and I know when I talk about that in meetings they all look at me like what the hell. (Nadine, p. 12)

Similarly, Lauren explained that she is able to make change in her school by referencing the Board’s equity policy: “how do we make different things happen, affect change, we’re always referring back to the Board policies” (Lauren, p. 20). The first step in initiating this change was to create an institutional narrative. School-based policy enactment involved the creation

of an equity narrative in each school. The vice-principals and principals in each of the three case study schools created an equity narrative that addressed the unique needs within their school.

As policy translators, school leaders also decided what types of equity initiatives would be pursued in the school. Different equity initiatives were pursued in each school; however, all of the school leaders explained that the types of equity initiatives they organized were intended to promote a *positive school climate*. The school leaders at each of the case study schools translated the equity policy into practices within their school, albeit in different ways. They explained that enacting the equity policy meant making it real or live through the creation of programs that were intended to create greater equity at the school. The school leaders were not just advocates for and champions of equity, they also created tangible programs or resources in their schools through which the equity policy was enacted. Examples included the leadership camps for students, prayer spaces, and professional development workshops and meetings with teachers. In these instances, school leaders were engaged in work as policy translators, people who “plan and produce events, processes and institutional texts of policy” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 59).

School leaders also took up roles as policy enthusiasts. They believed that the equity policy “enabled them to do ‘proper’ teaching, to engage with students in exciting ways, and to grow and develop themselves through creative and productive policy work” (Ball, Maguire, Braun & Hoskins, 2011a, p. 629). As policy enthusiasts, vice-principals and principals, acted as policy models who influenced the practice of those around them; they “embody policy in their practice and are examples to others, policy paragons” (p. 629). School leaders often

spoke about setting an example, recruiting others to their cause, or seeking out and mentoring like-minded teachers in order to shift school climate and foster greater equity in their school.

Despite their personal commitments and tangible manifestations of the equity policy, the school leaders faced challenges to enacting the equity policy in their schools. Ball et al. (2011a) described the complex work of school leaders as policy actors during enactment: “they are creative and sophisticated and they manage, but they are also tired and overloaded much of the time... very firmly embedded in the prevailing policies discourses” (p. 625). Sentiments of frustration with the lack of system-wide change were common among the school leaders in this study and were nestled, at times uncomfortably, alongside enthusiasm and dedication to their equity work. In these instances, the school leaders acted as policy critics, “irritants to policy, making official interpretations or narratives more difficult to sustain or slightly less credible” (Ball et al., 2012, p. 63). The vice-principals and principals had created a narrative for their school and modeled equity work as policy entrepreneurs but set against this work was also vocal criticism of the Board’s approach to equity. All of the leaders identified a lack of resources from the Board and limited accountability mechanisms as two important barriers to the realization of greater equity in their schools. Vice-principals and principals viewed the Board’s approach to equity work as surface level. Given these barriers to policy enactment, many of the school leaders openly questioned the Board’s commitment to equity work.

### **Leading for Social Justice**

The school leaders identified the importance of leadership for doing equity work in their schools, but that leadership took many different forms. For example, Nadine at School 3 used the theory of distributed leadership to work collaboratively with teachers to build

relationships and cultivate an equity lens amongst school staff. She explained that it was important to “bring equity issues into every staff meeting... infuse it into every staff meeting and create that lens for the teachers” (Nadine, p. 4). At School 1 both Nathan and Sandra discussed the important role of the administration team in acting as role-models for other teachers and staff in the school. Lauren at School 2 conceived of her role as facilitating equity work by “putting people together of like minds that can help things grow” (Lauren, p. 19). All of the school leaders engaged in professional development and mentorship with staff and teachers to foster school-wide support for equity work.

A growing body of research is identifying the traits and dispositions necessary to lead for social justice. For example, Theoharis (2008) analyzed the dispositions of school leaders working for social justice and identified three common traits: arrogant humility, passionate visionary leadership, and a tenacious commitment to social justice. These dispositions help to create social justice in schools:

social justice ingrained into the very being of the social justice leader means that each decision, every aspect of that principalship, and all details of the school are examined and seen from a social justice perspective. When social justice is so interwoven into the leader, transforming a school is not only about enacting a particular reform or making the school more inclusive... each interaction—each decision—becomes about enacting justice. (p. 21)

The school leaders in this study embodied the dispositions necessary for social justice leadership. Each of the school leaders in this study demonstrated a tenacious commitment to social justice in their professional practice. These commitments translated into passionate leadership in pursuing their own style of school-based equity work, even when these initiatives or programs were unpopular amongst teaching staff. The following quote from Nathan illustrates how he used his equity lens to make changes to the school’s leadership camps despite the fact that these changes were not popular with staff:

I do have an equity lens and I'm looking at this program and I'm going this is not fair. It's inequitable how this camp is being run. I found a specific example that made me uncomfortable. The policy gave me the impotence to look for the right things, to feel like I was fighting the right fight. So when I addressed this issue with staff, I got lots of pushback from the teachers. (p. 4)

These dispositions were instrumental in explaining the enactment of the equity policy at the school level. This study has contributed a greater understanding of the dispositions and experiences of social justice-oriented school leaders by providing portraits of real-life models of social justice leaders.

Furman (2012) has summarized the body of literature in social justice leadership explaining that leading for social justice requires the adoption of practices that are “action oriented and transformative, committed and persistent, inclusive and democratic, relational and caring, reflective, and oriented toward a socially just pedagogy” (p. 195). The school leaders in the case study schools demonstrated many of the practices described above. The schools leaders were all action-oriented. They described, in detail, specific programs, initiatives, or instances through which they were enacting the equity policy. Each of the school leaders created different equity narratives to transform their school. Every interaction they have and decision they made was to pursue greater social justice. The school leaders in the case studies were leading for social justice. Their work was action-oriented towards identifying and removing discriminatory, unjust practices and replacing them with more equitable ones (Furnam, 2012). This study has contributed to the growing literature on social justice leadership by describing the dispositions of social justice leaders and the actions that vice-principals and principals took to create greater social justice in their schools.

Additionally, Theoharis (2004) argues that the field of educational administration lacks the real-life models of social justice to show that social justice leadership is not just rhetorical or



theoretical but can actually be practiced everyday. By illustrating the necessary dispositions and every day practices that school leaders seeking to lead for social justice engaged in while enacting the equity policy, this study has addressed this gap and provided real-life models of three different social justice oriented school leaders.

### **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented a detailed description of the enactment of the equity policy in three schools at the Board. The *context* of the schools including socio-economic factors, social demographics, student body, and resource base determined the types of equity initiatives that were pursued at each school. Within each of the three case study schools, the enactment of the equity policy frequently took the form of different programs or initiatives organized and spearheaded by vice-principals and principals within the school. These programs or initiatives were developed in each of the schools to address the particular *needs* of the students or staff at the school.

While there was diversity in the types of programs that were enacted as part of the equity policy, the school leaders in each of the case study schools often took up similar positions as policy actors within their schools. As *narrators*, school leaders interpreted and translated the policy to make it real or live. In this way, the school leaders recognized the importance of people to enacting policy. As policy *entrepreneurs*, the school leaders all described the importance of *leadership* to support sustained enactment of the equity policy and to get buy-in from staff and teachers. Most importantly, all of the school leaders that were interviewed had deep *personal commitments* to equity work in their schools and had spent years cultivating an equity lens in their own professional practice.

Policy actors in the case study schools also experienced common barriers to the enactment of equity policy including *inadequate resources* and *lack of accountability mechanisms*. Limited financial resources severely curtailed the ability of school leaders to make equitable changes within their schools, especially schools located within low-income neighborhoods. For these reasons, school leaders were also *critics* of the equity policy and the approach to equity taken at the Board. The case study of policy enactment at the school level highlights the instrumental role that school leaders play in enacting equity policies. Because the equity policy was not supported with adequate resources or accountability mechanisms, its implementation relied heavily on the personal dispositions and professional commitments of school administrators, both vice-principals and principals. Four portraits or real life models of social justice oriented school leaders were described in this chapter.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect on the main findings of the research in light of the current literature in the field of policy sociology and theories of policy enactment. The contributions that this study has made to these fields are summarized. The enactment of equity education policy in Ontario is an example of creative non-implementation—a lack of resources and accountability mechanisms resulted in an equity policy that failed to produce system-wide change. In spite of these barriers to policy enactment, the commitments and leadership styles of school leaders were important dispositions that supported school-based enactment of equity initiatives. Set within the macro context of neoliberal globalization and pressures towards performative accountability, this study has documented the re-articulation of equity policies and practices in Ontario shaped by the *equity of outcomes* discourse of social justice. This re-articulation of equity necessitates a disruption of the portrait of Ontario as a *high-quality-high-equity* model of education reform. Reflecting on these contributions, this chapter concludes with a series of implications for policies and practices related to equity as well as future research directions.

### Revisiting the Research

The purpose of this study was to provide insights into the enactment of *PPM No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools (2009)* in one district school board in Ontario.

The following questions guided the study:

- In what ways do socio-cultural, historical, economic, and political contextual factors mediate the ways in which school boards in Ontario enact equity policies?

- How do policy actors enact equity policies in specific contexts given the constraints of human and material resources?
- What philosophical conceptions of equity are embedded in the Ontario Ministry of Education's equity education policy and the school board's locally-developed equity education policy?

The equity policy enactment case study explored the ways in which the provincially mandated equity and inclusive education policy statement was being interpreted and translated in one district school board and three schools in Ontario. To illuminate the process of equity policy enactment, the case study probed how contextual factors mediated policy enactment, the actions of policy actors engaged in enactment, and the philosophical conceptions of equity within policy texts. Education policy has been globalized such that “globalized discourses and agenda-setting and policy processes now emerge from beyond the nation” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 15). The analysis of education policy in local contexts must take into account the influence of globalized policy discourses and pressures towards increased performativity, accountability, and marketization of education. This study has documented how equity is being re-articulated under the neoliberal imaginary of globalization and the effects on policy enactment at the Board and in schools as a result.

### **Knowledge Contributions**

In this section, the contributions that this study has made to the fields of policy sociology and theories of policy enactment are presented. This study made theoretical contributions to policy enactment, highlighted the importance of contradiction in explaining policy enactment, and provided insights into creative non-implementation.

### **Policy Enactment**

According to Maguire and Ball (1994) enactment studies are concerned with “the interpretation and engagement in policy texts and the translation of these texts into practice” (p. 280). While it is difficult to single out the most important factors that explained the enactment of the equity policy at the Board, it is necessary to focus on the role of policy actors, especially school leaders, as an influential force in driving policy enactment. In highlighting the significant role played by policy actors in policy enactment, this study has responded to Ball’s (2015) observation that “policy research is often done with a focus on texts, principles and practices, and little attention is given to the formative role of actors in the policy process” (p. 1). The findings from this study echo Salter’s (2014) observation that “it is often the role of school principals or curriculum leaders to take the first steps to enacting policy. These key mediators of policy serve to introduce the local particularities of policy enactment” (p. 148). The school leaders in this study were “key mediators” in determining whether or not equity initiatives were pursued within a school at all. Staff at the Equity Office explained the key role that a school’s administration team plays in granting them access to do equity training with staff at the school. This study illuminated the dispositions and actions of school leaders who were enacting the equity policy in their school. The enactment of the equity policy in schools across the Board was very much dependent on these types of policy entrepreneurs and enthusiasts—committed, tireless, agents of change who modeled policy ideals, and worked as leaders to create positive changes in their schools. The Office staff and school leaders created equity narratives and translated these narratives into tangible programs and initiatives. Without these people, the equity policy would not have been enacted.

Not only did this study shed light on the dispositions that school leaders working for social justice often have, it provided evidence of the significant role that the school and community context played in mediating policy enactment and social justice leadership. While the dispositions of the school leaders helped explain whether or not the equity policy was being enacted at all in the school, the surrounding context, including the school-community relations, mediated the specific types of initiatives or programs that school leaders implemented. This study drew on Ball et al.'s (2012) approach to policy enactment research in secondary schools, emphasizing the way in which policies are interpreted, translated, mediated, and recontextualized in local school contexts. Ball and colleagues assert that policy enactment is “intimately shaped and influenced by school-specific factors which act as constraints, pressures and enablers of policy enactments” (p. 19). Vice-principals and principals interpreted and translated the equity policy in relation to the “local particularities” within their school. Even in similar schools, such as School 1 and School 3, the school leaders manifested the enactment of the equity policy through different programs and initiatives. These localized contextual specificities serve to explain the differences in policy initiatives that were pursued in each school, whether it was extra-curricular activities for students or equity training for staff.

DeMatthews and Mahwinney (2014) explain the significant role that school context plays in social justice leadership. DeMatthews (2015) has also pointed out that leadership for social justice is context dependent and “differs across schools because of the various individual, social, political, and organizational variables that impact schools and communities” (p. 140). School leaders seeking social justice “confront daunting challenges when navigating high-poverty urban schools and districts that often maintain structures of

inequality” (DeMatthews and Mahwinney, 2014, p. 845). Nathan, the principal at School 1, a high-poverty urban school, explained how the lack of resources from the Board to support the student needs at his school was a significant barrier to equity work and policy enactment. The lack of redistributive funding across the Board maintained and entrenched inequity at School 1 even though the school leaders were committed to and engaged in equity work. Despite the passion, commitment, and competence of school leaders, the local context mediated policy enactment, especially in high-poverty schools.

### **Contradiction in Policy Enactment**

This study has emphasized the role of contradiction and incoherence in explaining how policies are enacted within schools. In general terms, this study has provided a nuanced account of how policy, as a text, both enables and constrains equity work in schools and social justice leadership. For example, some participants described how policy sits on a shelf collecting dust, while others described the equity policy as a strategic tactic that can be used in schools. In some instances, the equity policy served as a textual tool allowing school leaders to make and enforce unpopular programs or initiatives. For example, vice-principal Lauren at School 2 described how she continually references the equity policy in daily work with her staff. Cindy, a student outreach coordinator at the Equity Office, explained that she uses the equity policy and the Board’s policies on human rights to push through unpopular equity training, especially in hostile circumstances when school leaders or teachers are resistant.

At the same time, the equity policy also lacked adequate resourcing and accountability mechanisms. Board staff and school leaders lamented a lack of resources to support equity work and described the policy as unenforceable. Capper and Young (2014) explain that education policy can actually constrain the practice of social justice leadership. They argue

that “the sheer number of uncoordinated, and sometimes contradictory, federal and state policies and initiatives, and a lack of policy fluency experienced by most educators” (p. 161) drastically limits the possibility for school-based social justice leadership. Ball et al., (2012) speak of “initiativitis”, described as “a litany of policy statements, documents and legislation” that can overwhelm and drown school leaders in endless management and bureaucratic tasks leaving little time for social justice work. Participants in the study expressed similar sentiments. For example, Nathan, the principal at School 1 explained that “the biggest problem with the initiatives the Ministry has, each one are well intentioned but they’re too controlling, too much paperwork, too much reporting. I got to spend hours to make that happen” (Nathan, p. 12). Several participants described experiencing burnout or feelings of complicity with the lack of system-wide change being made in regards to the equity agenda. For example, Jane, a student outreach coordinator at the Equity Office discussed burnout as a common experience for staff at the Board and vice-principal Nadine at School 3 explained that she had chosen to leave the Equity Office and pursue school-based leadership to have a greater impact on students. While Office staff and school leaders were “creative and sophisticated” in interpreting and translating the equity policy, “they are also tired and overloaded much of the time... very firmly embedded in the prevailing policy discourses” (Ball et al., 2011, p. 625). These policy barriers prevented the realization of deeper systemic change and greater social justice in schools.

In regards to specific instances of school-based policy enactment, this study confirms that the school is an institution faced with contradictions when attempting to enact policies:

the school is continually disrupted or faced with contradictory expectations, but this is an incoherence that can be made to work, most of the time. This precariousness is partly produced by the specifics of policy but is also inherent in the incompatibilities embedded in the general functional demands on schooling. (Ball et al., 2011, p. 637).



In their own study of policy enactments Ball and colleagues (2011) observed that “our data taken as a whole convey a sense of overload and contradiction being held together by fragile structures, more or less convincing narratives and a great deal of raw commitment and much goodwill” (p. 637). The data in this study illuminated particular instances where contradiction and incoherence best describe how Ontario’s Equity Strategy is being enacted. These instances include the roles of policy actors as enthusiasts and critics, the re-articulation of equity as outcomes-based and needs-based, the governance of the equity policy at a systems level and an individual level, and the paradox of accountability mechanisms.

First, this study described the different positions from which policy actors engage with policy and the specific roles they occupy during processes of interpretation and translation. Staff at the Board and school leaders in the case study schools took up multiple and conflicting roles in relation to policy, including roles as entrepreneurs and enthusiasts and simultaneously as policy critics. There is contradiction in the experiences of school board staff and school leaders. Each participant in the study was deeply committed to equity work and translated these commitments into tangible initiatives and programs as part of their daily work enacting the equity policy. However, at the same time, they were also critical of the Board’s approach to equity.

Second, an important priority in this study was to document shifts in how equity is defined and responded to through policy. There was contradiction with respect to the values that were used in the construction of equity narratives at the Ministry, the School Board, and schools. The analysis of policy documents and the case study at the Board and within schools illustrated an instrumental framing of equity, embedded in student performance indicators as part of the policy as numbers turn. This conceptualization drastically narrowed the possibility

for equity work. For example, the policy analysis demonstrated that the *equity of outcomes* discourse of social justice is dominant at the Ministry of Education. This discourse trickled-down to the school board level evidenced by the student achievement task force and their reporting activities, which were very influential in steering equity policy by the numbers at the Equity Office. While the *equity of outcomes* discourse was prominent at the Ministry of Education and the Board, evidenced by reference to at-risk students and closing achievement gaps, this was not the case in the equity narratives created at the school level. School leaders did communicate feeling pressure to account for student outcomes in a general sense but this did not necessarily form the basis of their equity agenda. In some instances, school leaders were critical of the focus on student achievement and found the demands from the Ministry and the Board unreasonable. Despite these pressures, school leaders were able to construct equity narratives that addressed issues related to opportunity, experience, and need. However, given the difficult task of identifying and locating social justice-oriented school leaders for this study, it is important to recognize the power of performative accountability systems. Perhaps, the school leaders in this study represent outliers and their commitments to equity are “in danger of erasure, glimpsed in our case studies only in asides, discomforts and murmurings, or recovered fleetingly in moments of crises” (Ball et al., 2011, p. 636). The incoherence in equity narratives across the Ministry of Education, the Board, and within schools highlights the individual agency of school leaders as policy enactors. While they felt pressure for student outcomes through literacy and numeracy initiatives or graduation rates, these pressures were not absolute or overbearing, leaving room to create a local narrative that guided equity work at their school. Although the Ministry and Board presented an instrumental framing of equity, the work of school leaders represented a much more intrinsic

valuing of equity, often framed with the discourse of student needs.

Third, this study has documented a shift in education policy governance, namely the trickle-down effects of policy responsibility from institutions such as the Ministry of Education to school boards for developing equity policies, and ultimately schools and school leaders for creating positive school climates. This study provided evidence of the devolution of responsibility from the institution to the individual for equity work. The Ministry has created policy statements, but these texts shift the focus of responsibility from state or government to the school principal. The policy analysis presented in Chapter Four illustrated that the Ministry of Education mandated a system-wide approach to equity. This system-wide approach took different forms. The Ministry acknowledged the intersectionality of discrimination and how it affects students and required that school board policies on equity and inclusion also take a system-wide approach addressing different areas of institutional functioning. In this way, the problem of discrimination and the proposed equity solution both reflected a systemic approach.

Despite these lofty goals contained within the policy texts, the case study at the Board and the embedded cases of policy enactment at the school level illustrate that in fact, the Ministry of Education has abnegated much of its responsibility to school boards and schools. The policy documents in Ontario's Equity Strategy describe the Ministry's role as one of support and guidance. The Ministry has established policy requirements as per PPM No. 119 (2009), created policy templates, and other such resources to assist school boards with policy development, and disseminates research on best practices. Ontario's Equity Strategy charges school boards with the task of writing their own equity policies. Staff at the Board's Equity Office were also responsible for conducting equity training with school leaders, teachers, and

students. School boards, in return, have also downloaded responsibility for equity work onto school leaders who are responsible for creating and sustaining a positive school climate. Equity work and the task of creating socially just schools has become the domain of school leaders, often without the adequate provision of training or resources to support this work. Missing from the Ministry's role is the adequate provision of financial resources to actually accomplish the stated policy goals. Instead, school boards and schools become responsible for resourcing. Because adequate resources are not provided, school leaders take on the commitments that governmental institutions such as the Ministry of Education were once responsible for, even if only for a short time in Ontario's history. For example, principal Nathan at School 1 described advocating for the needs of the community and fundraising to support school-based extra-curricular activities. He spent a great deal of his time trying to find the financial resources necessary to sustain the leadership camps that promoted positive school climate at School 1.

Fourth, Ontario's Equity Strategy describes policy accountability as one of the priorities of the equity policy evidenced by increased public confidence in the education system. Surprisingly, in an age of hyper accountability, this study revealed that school boards and schools are not held accountable for equity work. Ball et al. (2011) observe that "there is a low trust policy environment in which accountability work and the reporting of performances can take up increasing amounts of time and divert time and effort away from that which is reported on" (p. 629). Unlike literacy and numeracy initiatives that are tested through EQAO, there is no formal mechanism for ensuring boards and schools are doing equity work.

### **Creative Implementation and Non-Implementation**

Policy enactment theory helps to explain how policy is enacted but also why some policies are not enacted. Nestled alongside examples and moments of equity work within schools at the Board are also schools where no such work is taking place. This study provides a greater understanding of the process of *creative implementation*; that is, “how it is that certain policies, or strands within policies, become picked up and worked on, why they are selected and who selects them and what alternatives are discarded along the way” (p. 4). The concept of creative implementation is useful for explaining the uneven and limited enactment of the equity policy at the Board. While policy enactment depended a great deal on the social-justice related dispositions of policy actors (Theoharis, 2008), especially school leaders, the scope of enactment also depended on contextual considerations. The Board was a shining example across the province of equity work, arguably, a best-case scenario in regards to the enactment of Ontario’s Equity Strategy. And yet, participants in the study also criticized the Board’s equity policy and questioned the degree to which it was able to produce greater social justice in schools. These criticisms centered around two main themes: lack of accountability mechanisms and inadequate resources.

First, staff at the Board and school leaders consistently explained that the equity policy had *no teeth* to force its implementation. Staff at the Equity Office explained that they are unable, given material resource constraints, to do equity work in all of the schools within the Board. Furthermore, they explained that because equity work was by invite only, those schools that needed equity training the most were often schools where Office staff were not allowed to go. Ball and colleagues (2012) discuss the oppressive and overbearing power of “master” policies, “those that take precedence over everything else in schools” including

policies on standardization, accountability, and discipline (p. 145). Equity policies, in contrast, do not make oppressive demands on school leaders. In contrast to policies on student achievement or school safety, school leaders were not coerced into implementing the equity policy, and therefore, it was not a priority for all school leaders. Formally, there is an equity policy; however, without accountability mechanisms to support enactment, it does not have the power required to make the systemic changes that it seeks to address. This study illustrates *the paradox of accountability*. In an age of neoliberalism, education is a low-trust environment where all stakeholders, leaders, and teachers are held to account. The area of equity policy represents a marked departure from this trend. Despite an environment of hyper-accountability, equity is one of the few policy areas that school leaders are not held accountable for.

Second, the lack of resources, financial and human, was consistently identified as a significant barrier to equity policy enactment. Staff at the Board pointed to a lack of resources provided from the Ministry to support the requirements of PPM No. 119 and school leaders explained that the Board didn't provide adequate resources to their schools to engage in meaningful equity work. The Ministry developed the equity policy text and the Board had previously created an Equity Office as evidence of a commitment to an equitable education system. However, these developments did not result in system-wide change. As a result, Office staff and school leaders questioned the Board's commitment to equity.

The barriers discussed above should not be understood as a refusal or lack of implementation. On the contrary, in cases where an institutional commitment to a particular policy might be lacking, policies “may be subject to ‘creative non-implementation’ (Ball, 1994, p. 20) and/or ‘fabrication’, where policy responses are incorporated in school

documentation for accountability reasons, rather than for reasons of pedagogic or organisational change” (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011, p. 586). Blackmore (2009) explains that, “increased accountability has focused system and media attention on social inequality” so that the “state is no longer able to ignore issues of educational inequality” (p. 8). The Ministry of Education responded, espousing equity as an important policy value, despite the fact that little institutional or practical attention is devoted to this policy area. Given the lack of accountability mechanisms and adequate resourcing, equity education policy is an “informal, less visible and undocumented policy... some policies are more dominant than others, non-negotiable high-stakes policies that command attention and even compliance, other policies are more fluid” (Maguire, Braun, and Ball, 2015). Maguire, Braun and Ball (2015) explain that the type of policy that is being enacted is a significant factor that influences implementation. They explain that “one over-riding influence relates to the ‘type’ of policy that is being explored and whether it is mandated or merely recommended” (p. 498). Staff at the Equity Office and school leaders explained that equity was something that could quickly and easily be checked-off a school improvement plan. While equity education policy is legislatively required and not merely recommended, without accountability mechanisms and adequate resourcing, school leaders do not feel pressured to ensure its implementation and this helps to explain creative non-implementation. This study has illustrated that the policy approach to equity at the Board was largely symbolic not resulting in substantive change since individual Board staff and school leaders are not equipped with the political clout and resources to address educational inequity.

### Re-articulation of Equity Education in Ontario

Literature in the field of policy sociology analyzes the ways in which globalized education policy discourses inflect policy enactment in local settings. While globalized discourses and neoliberal pressures towards standardization, accountability, and performativity are undermining equity, these discourses influence policy in locally specific ways. Ozga (1987) argues that policy sociology in education should seek to connect the macro-context of restructuring demands to the micro-context of the schools. This research study explored how neoliberal forms of accountability, intimately tied to the growth and uses of data for evidence-based policymaking, are shifting conceptualizations of educational equity and the implications for policy enactment as a result. In presenting a case of the re-articulation of equity in the Ontario context, this study has illuminated the re-articulation of equity in education, in both the context of the policy text and the context of policy practice. In light of the shifting conception of equity, in policy and practice, it is important to disrupt the common sense narrative of Ontario as a *high-quality-high-equity* education system. The analysis in this chapter contributes to other critiques of the OECD's PISA and the portrait of Ontario as *high-quality-high-equity* that "focus on school-based interventions and the role of quality education systems in their capacity to ameliorate socio-economic disadvantage by ignoring significant structural dimensions of inequality and a politics of redistribution" (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2013, p. 607).

Policy texts contain the dominant discourses of social justice at a given time and place. The textual analysis of equity policies presented in this study illustrated the dominance of the *equity of outcomes* discourse, at the Ministry and the Board, that has replaced more socially democratic understandings of and approaches to equity. The equity of outcomes discourse



intimately ties equity to educational quality so that greater equity is constructed as a strategy to improve student achievement and close the achievement gap. From a philosophical standpoint, Clarke (2014) points to the difficulty in addressing quality and equity and the inherent tensions between the two values:

discourses of quality and of equity are premised on a fundamental lack, on the inadequate provision of each entity in contemporary education... Addressing this purported insufficiency, grounded in irrefutable 'evidence' from national and international test data, provides a political strategy by which these governments strive to differentiate themselves from their predecessors, whilst also offering a relentless mode of governance and a powerful source of legitimacy. (p. 594)

This political strategy and mode of governance is dependent upon the policy as numbers phenomenon and naming and classifying inequity (Lingard, 2010; Lucas & Beresford, 2010), meaning that some groups are targeted by the equity policy while other groups remain invisible (Lingard et al, 2016; Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013; Rezai-Rashti, Segeren & Martino, 2016). Martino and Rezai-Rashti (2013) present a particular critique of the gendered achievement gap made possible through Ontario's Equity Strategy. Rezai-Rashti et al., (2016) have documented how the re-articulation of equity has resulted in the erasure of racialized identities and the invisibility of social class within the equity policy. This political strategy has resulted in specific equity-related practices at the Board and within schools. Capper and Young (2014) state that "in the current educational policy context that emphasizes student learning and achievement, scholars and educators for social justice send mixed messages on the role that student learning and achievement should play in this work" (p. 161). The re-articulation of equity in the context of policy practice has illustrated that student achievement has become synonymous with social justice. This study has illustrated that student learning and evidence of it is a top priority even when considered within the context of an equity education policy. The messages sent from the Ministry and the Board are not as mixed as

Capper and Young (2014) might suggest. The evidence of this focus on outcomes is discussed below through examples of specific policy actors and practices at the Board and within schools.

The equity of outcomes discourse has trickled down from policy texts into policy practice through the actions of policy actors and the particular programs or initiatives they seek to enact. As expressed by many participants in the study, external political pressures towards performative accountability have resulted in an outcomes approach to equity that hinders social justice across the Board and within schools. Office staff discussed how data from the student achievement task force is collected and analyzed to inform equity initiatives at the Board. The hyper-visibility of the achievement gap has shifted equity priorities at the Board and therefore the types of initiatives that are enacted. The report issued from the student achievement task force has been significant in targeting specific groups of students and particular schools for equity work. Board staff described system-wide equity initiatives including raising the achievement of Black students, mentorship programs for Boys, and Africentric schools. Ryan, a curriculum specialist at the Board, explained that the report from the student achievement task force should inform equity work: “it needs to be part of the conversation... one of the greatest inequities that exists is providing people with an inadequate educational experience. It plays out socially for generations to come. So we have a responsibility to get it right when they’re here” (p. 16). School leaders also explained how pressures for student achievement shaped their work and that they were held responsible for ensuring student success in their schools. The school leaders also explained that the Board was more committed to student achievement and meeting the objectives of the student achievement task force than to equity in general:

They're too myopic...too data driven. I got to raise test scores in this area. I got to raise achievement rates in this course. I got to spend hours to make that happen and then they can say see what a great initiative. We, really, you haven't changed the school, you just changed three or four courses, maybe two or three teachers. (Nathan, p. 12)

These findings indicate that equity education today is more focused on underachievement and closing the achievement for particular groups of students. This focus impacted the work of staff at the Equity Office and school leaders.

This study has detailed the textual and practical re-articulation of equity in education in Ontario. As a result of the shift to governance and the politics of accountability, equity education is more concerned with closing the student achievement gap by focusing on student outcomes instead of addressing issues of access, opportunity, experience, or needs. As a result of this finding, it is necessary to disrupt the labeling of Ontario as a *high-quality-high-equity* education system and model for education reform in a global context. Recently, the Ontario education system was singled out as a top performer on assessments of the Programme for International Student Assessments. High test scores and the fact that Ontario does not have large gaps in student achievement has led to the labeling of Ontario as *high-quality-high-equity* and has created 'PISA envy' in the international context. Ontario's education system, it is argued, is most likely to contribute to economic productivity and social cohesion. The marketization of equity (Rizvi, 2013) in these terms reinforces Ryan and Rottmann's (2009) analysis that "bureaucratic and market structures work hand in hand... to disrupt democratic efforts" by school leaders (p. 493). Given the criticism of this approach to equity leveled by the participants in this study and the limited system-wide changes on equity at the Board and within schools as a result, it is necessary to question the extent to which Ontario's education system can truly be defined as high-equity. The use of numbers and data

in the form of high-stakes testing regimes is used to substantiate a commitment to increasing social equity for some groups, while resulting in the invisibilization of others. This study illustrates that a narrow, instrumental framing of equity as a policy discourse is resulting in policy enactment activities that are inadequate in creating social justice in schools because they focus specifically on student achievement and outcomes. The implication of the re-articulation of equity in outcomes-based and economic terms necessitates a re-thinking of how educational goals are defined and measured.

### **The Politics of Recognition and Distributive Policies**

Ontario's Equity Strategy acknowledged that some groups of students were at-risk for lower levels of educational achievement. Closing this achievement gap became the objective of the equity policy. The equity policy specifically targeted "recent immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, boys, and students with special education needs" as "at risk of lower achievement" (OME, 2009c, p. 5). The Ministry and the Board draw on a politics of recognition as opposed to a politics of redistribution and representation to pursue greater educational equity. The focus on student achievement data and the use of a *culturally responsive pedagogy* at the Board drastically limits a system-wide approach to equity. While cultural days of significance and celebratory discourses are arguably important in a racially and ethically diverse school board, these approaches are not sufficient in addressing deeply rooted historical legacies of marginalization and present day poverty. This study is an example of the limitations of a recognitive politics or policies embedded in political recognition for addressing inequities in the education system.

DeMatthews and Mahwinney (2014) observe that policies can be contradictory, often appealing to both a politics of recognition and inequitable distribution of resources. Social

justice leadership often demands that school leaders juggle competing interests and handle complex dilemmas that “arise from conflicts between recognition and redistribution principles of social justice work. These principles can come into conflict when leaders attempt to simultaneously address issues of inequality of resources for and nonrecognition of marginalized groups” (p. 874). By drawing on a politics of recognition without a commitment to redistribution or representation, Ontario’s Equity Strategy was not able to achieve greater social justice in schools.

Rizvi and Lingard (2010) distinguish between distributive and redistributive policies. Distributive policies simply distribute various human and financial resources. In contrast, redistributive policies “seek to intervene against disadvantage through positive discrimination, usually but not always in relation to funding” (p. 11). They note that most policies are distributive with funding allocated according to accountability measures and performance indicators as opposed to needs-based factors. The approach reflected in Ontario’s Equity Strategy from the Ministry and the Board’s equity policy is distributive as opposed to redistributive. This study provided evidence that the Ministry and the Board are not pursuing a politics of redistribution. All participants lamented the lack of resources including time, human, and material resources as a barrier to greater equity in schools. School leaders in at-risk or low socio-economic neighborhoods were not provided with adequate resources for serving a high needs student population. For example, both school leaders at School 1 explained that despite critical incidences and high-needs, the school had not received promised resources from the Board. Nadine, the vice-principal at School 3, explained that the Board had provided additional staff at the school, but that there were still other pressing needs to be met. In these schools, the school leaders adamantly explained that resource distribution

across the Board was not needs-based. In this way, the equity policy is contradictory: acknowledging systemic discrimination and social inequity, but without the financial resources to support full-scale enactment. Given that PPM No. 119 (2009) and the Board's equity policy pursue only a politics of recognition, there are limited possibilities for this policy to promote progressive and sustained social change.

Progressive social change depends on pursuing a politics of recognition, redistribution, and representation (Fraser, 2009). A policy approach that demands the redistribution of resources across the Board, and community representation in decisions surrounding the policy approach to equity, are necessary to achieve educational justice. The political philosophy of Iris Marion Young is also useful for theorizing the social justice implications of equity policies. According to Young, social justice must focus on the role of "basic structures" the set of "background conditions" within which social actions take place (Young, 2006b, p. 91).

Young (2006a), in defining the basic structure, is worth quoting at length:

structures denote the confluence of institutional rules and interactive routines, mobilization of resources, as well as physical structures such as buildings and roads. These constitute the historical givens in relation to which individuals act, and which are relatively stable over time. Social structures serve as back-ground conditions for individual actions by presenting actors with options; they provide "channels" that both enable action and constrain it. (pp. 111-112)

Young (2006b) argues that social justice must "focus primarily on the basic structure, because the degree of justice or injustice of the basic structure conditions the way we should evaluate individual interactions or rules and distributions within particular institutions (p. 91).

Robertson and Dale (2013) conceive of education as a "basic structure" and argue that efforts towards social justice in education must take into account relational effects. They explain that relational justice as opposed to recognitive or redistributive justice "is not just a matter of who gets what, but how those unequal distributions come about, through what structures,

processes, what bodies, what norms and practices, at whose responsibility, in whose interest, and with what consequences—and responsibilities—for the ‘losers’” (p. 441-442).

Ultimately, these philosophically informed critiques (Fraser, 2009; Young, 2006 a,b) illustrate that an outcomes-based approach to social justice, embedded in a politics of recognition “eschews important aspects of maldistribution, with important consequences for understanding the significance of the interlocking influences of race, social class, gender and geographical location, where there is evidence of spatial concentrations of poverty and histories of cumulative oppression” (Martino and Rezai-Rashti, 2013, p. 589, see also Gulson, 2010).

### **Implications**

It is important for the findings of research to have practical significance. Enactment is the space between policy texts and the practice of education; therefore, this study has implications for both education policy and the practice of education in schools, especially practices intended to make schools more socially just spaces. In this section of the chapter, the implications of this study for policy and practice are discussed. This study sought to identify ways in which the neoliberal dominance in equity and education policy could be resisted or subverted. The implications of this study speak to this objective. Given the limitations of the case study methodology and the scope of this project, this section concludes with avenues for further research.

#### **Equity Education Policy**

This study has illustrated that Ontario’s Equity Strategy and the equity policy at the Board were largely symbolic policies that failed to produce system-wide changes. Equity policies, at the Ministry and the Board, have not been supported with adequate resources to

sustain broad or long-term enactment or accountability mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress. This study has illuminated the importance of ensuring that policies are adequately resourced to support enactment and that school boards and schools are held accountable for their progress on equity and social justice.

If equity policies are to be effective in promoting system-wide or school-level change on social justice, they need to be adequately resourced. Resources must be provided at multiple levels: first, from the Ministry to the Board; and second, from the Board to schools. The Equity Office suffered, first and foremost, from a lack of resources. The Office was not funded at the same level as other Offices, for example the literacy and numeracy Office. If this Office was afforded a larger operating budget, additional staff could be hired. This would ensure that all schools across the Board are provided with training and workshops on equity and social justice. A larger operating budget would also allow the Office to pay for teacher release for Board-wide workshops and initiatives to ensure that more teachers are able to attend professional development workshops and equity training. At the school level, the embedded cases of policy enactment illustrated that school leaders in urban, high-poverty environments face additional financial challenges. The school leaders in these schools explained that without fundraising from the local community, it was difficult to find the financial resources to pay for student programs such as extra-curricular activities or breakfast programs. The school leaders at School 1 and School 3 expressed that resource distribution at the Board is not needs-based. To address the social and economic marginalization in these schools, funding to schools from the Board must be allocated according to need and pursued through redistributive policy mechanisms. The Ministry's Equity Strategy and the Board's



equity policy sought to address systemic discrimination; however, without redistributive policy approaches, this is a lofty objective that will not be realized in practice.

In addition to not being adequately resourced, symbolic policies are often not monitored or evaluated. The Ministry's Equity Strategy and the Board's equity policy lacked accountability mechanisms. School boards in Ontario were only required to "report" progress to the Ministry of Education; however, there is no evidence of an organizational or institutional body to which school boards were required to report. Schools were also required to "report" progress to the Board in their efforts at creating a positive school climate through school improvement plans. However, school leaders explained that this reporting was superficial, something that could quickly be checked-off their school improvement plan. This lack of policy accountability, in an age of hyper accountability, suggests that the Ministry and the Board were not committed to the realization of equity in schools, but instead the policy was a political priority. Principal Nathan at School 1 contrasted the political approach taken to equity with mandated, non-negotiable policies like health and safety policies:

Health and safety is different. It is non-negotiable so I have the health and safety binder in my office. Somebody comes in, does a health and safety audit check, writes up all of the concern, I have to reply within a month. But those things get funded. If the door is unsafe I put in a work order and get a new door. I don't have to pay for it because it's a safety concern. Safety is non-negotiable. But equity is negotiable. (Nathan, p. 15)

Without accountability or enforcement measures linked to the equity policy, it is seen as negotiable or recommended even though it is legislatively required.

Establishing a series of accountability mechanisms would support a more sustained implementation of the equity policy within schools. Given the unintended and perverse effects of performative accountability regimes on educational equity, an alternative model of accountability must be established. Accountability mechanisms must be designed to support

system-wide change. For example, staff at the Equity Office explained that they required greater discretionary power to work within schools. Since they must be invited into schools, school leaders that choose not to engage with or enact equity initiatives faced no consequence for doing so. School leaders responsible for enacting the equity policy should be provided with consultations from the Equity Office to support them in enacting the equity policy and building a socially just school. These consultations would be supportive and collaborative as opposed to punitive.

### **The Practice of Social Justice**

This study has pointed to the dispositions of school leaders as important factors that explain the enactment of the equity education policy. Given that these dispositions are critical to the implementation of equity-related programming in schools, school leaders must be provided with proper training. As key agents responsible for setting an equity agenda for their school and cultivating an equity lens for their staff, school leaders must themselves be provided with the professional development and training necessary to transfer these practices to school contexts. As expressed by vice-principal Nadine, the principal qualifications course is inadequate in preparing school leaders, especially those that will work in high-risk or high-needs schools: “they don’t actually train folks to actually work in these kinds of schools and there’s nothing in any of these programs where they even start to talk about equity. Equity is never talked about” (Nadine, p. 6). School leaders discussed the importance of an equity lens, which often involved acknowledging power and privilege and re-working unequal relations of power. These theoretical understandings and the ways in which they can influence professional philosophies and approaches take time and safe training spaces to cultivate. This education is crucial to provide to school leaders if educational practices are to work towards

social justice instead of other dominant imperatives in the education system such as testing or curriculum knowledge. However, it is important to note that training and professional development is typically noted as an implication or recommendation from research. While training and professional development remain important for the everyday practices of school leaders, it remains inadequate for addressing social justice in schools.

### **Imagining Alternatives**

Overall, this study has presented moments and instances of equity work occurring in one school board in Ontario and at select schools within the Board. And yet, these small moments of social justice work were set against an equity policy that is symbolic, hindering rather than supporting equity initiatives. This study has called into question the ability of equity policies to effectively realize greater social justice in schools. For this reason, it is important to illustrate moments of resistance to the equity policy and to propose alternatives.

A constant theme throughout this study has been the complex and at times competing roles that policy actors occupied while enacting policy. This study illustrated that the enactment of the equity policy was dependent on policy entrepreneurs or equity champions, both at the Board and within schools. These same policy actors questioned and criticized the approach taken by the Ministry, the Board, or within schools. Simultaneously enactors of equity programming and critics of the policy approach, the actors within the study and their experiences of policy enactment present opportunities for resistance and imagining alternative ways of doing equity in the education system. Ryan, a curriculum specialist at the Equity Office, insightfully raised the issue of the purpose of education. How we define the purpose of education bears heavily on goals, daily operations, and how success is measured. Currently, Ryan explained that student achievement data was an important barometer. This is

because the purpose of education, according to the priorities established by the Ministry of Education, is academic excellence as measured by student performance on standardized, high-stakes tests. Re-imagining the purpose of education to account for a wider variety of factors would put issues of educational equity in the spotlight instead of on the backburner:

So our measure will be the data of whether they're achieving or not achieving and whose achieving. If we can define education differently then we can measure differently. So let's say everybody at the school is achieving but you have teachers making racist comment, there's homophobia and discriminatory curriculum materials being used, and sure people are getting 95% but is it creating an unjust culture? (Ryan, p. 16)

According to Ryan, we must think critically about the purpose of education and how we measure educational success. Ryan is advocating for “opportunity to learn standards” a form of accountability proposed by Darling-Hammond (2010), that provides a platform for the expression of demands by schools and communities about what the education system should look like, what its goals should be, and how resources should be distributed. This form of bottom-up accountability gives greater voice to students, parents, and communities, providing them with greater political representation in and by the schooling system. If success is only measured in terms of student achievement and outcomes as opposed to deeper experiences and long-term outcomes than the current system will continue to perpetuate injustice and inequity.

Finally, this study has demonstrated the limitations of policy as a mechanism to create social justice in schools, including the dominant understanding of equity as outcomes-based and the need to focus on closing achievement gaps to achieve equity. Furman and Gruenewald (2004) argue that “the focus on school underachievement as an indicator of social injustice, a predictor of future economic disadvantages, and a target for social justice reforms has led frequently to a view of social justice as synonymous with school achievement” (p. 51).

This limited vision of the causes and solutions to social injustice in schools “distracts from community well-being as well as other important moral purposes of schooling” (p. 52). Given the political priorities of policy sociology, this study illustrates the limitations of the current conceptualization of educational equity. Conceiving of social justice in schools as closing the achievement gap prevents a deeper analysis of the historical roots of social and educational injustices and how to dismantle discriminatory barriers. Instead, Furman and Gruenewald argue that social justice leadership has a moral imperative, better addressed by a socioecological approach to equity in schools: “the pedagogies we advocate explicitly aim to examine and respond to the problematic environments that human beings have created for themselves and others—human and nonhuman” (p. 58).

### **Limitations**

The most substantial limitation of this study relates to timelines. Due to time resources, this policy enactment study took place in only one school board in Ontario. As previously noted, there is great diversity in Ontario’s school boards, particularly with respect to their various histories and experiences with equity and inclusive policy initiatives. The generalizability of the study would have been augmented if multiple school boards were selected so that a cross-case analysis could be conducted. A second limitation of this study relates to the schools that were selected as embedded cases. As a result of time constraints, only three schools were selected for further study. These schools were selected based on the referrals and recommendations of staff at the Equity Office. The school leaders in this study were engaged in equity work. Additional insights into policy enactment and barriers to policy enactment would have been illuminated with a broader selection of schools across the Board.

### **Future Research Directions**

Given the demands of policy sociology to investigate localized policy enactments and the limitations of case study research to generalize findings, future research should be conducted in additional school boards in Ontario. The Board was purposefully selected for its historical experience with equity work as an exceptional, information rich case. Repeating this study in other school boards and schools across the province would yield a more robust understanding of how the equity policy is being enacted across the province of Ontario. Additionally, examining the approaches to equity education in other provinces in Canada or regions in the world would allow for cross-case analyses. Such research would illuminate the geographical reach of the re-articulation of equity in policy and practice under neoliberal globalization.

Classroom teachers are a significant element of the policy landscape that was not explored in this study. Programming at the Equity Office and the efforts of school leaders were often intended to change the practices of teachers. However, because teachers were not recruited for this study, their dispositions and experiences were not documented. This study cannot provide insights into the roles that teachers occupy as policy actors and the ways in which their actions influence policy enactment. Future research that explores the roles of teachers as policy actors would be significant and illuminate an under-researched aspect of equity education policy enactment.

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## Appendix A: Ethical Approval



Research Ethics

### Western University Health Science Research Ethics Board NMREB Delegated Initial Approval Notice

**Principal Investigator:** Prof. Goli Rezai-Rashti

**Department & Institution:** Education\Faculty of Education,Western University

**NMREB File Number:** 105302

**Study Title:** How Secondary Schools Do Equity: A Policy Enactment Case Study of Ontario's Equity Strategy

**Sponsor:**

**NMREB Initial Approval Date:** May 26, 2014

**NMREB Expiry Date:** January 31, 2015

#### Documents Approved and/or Received for Information:

Document Name	Comments	Version Date
Instruments	Interview questions that will guide the semi-structured interviews with district school board officials, principals/vice-principals, and teachers/support staff.	2014/04/26
Recruitment Items	Recruitment email as requested for section 4.3	2014/05/22
Western University Protocol	This is the revised Western Protocol, clean draft, in PDF. Version date is May 22, 2014.	2014/05/22
Letter of Information & Consent	This is the revised letter of information and consent in PDF form with all changes made. Version date is May 22, 2014.	2014/05/22

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the above named study, as of the HSREB Initial Approval Date noted above.

NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the NMREB Expiry Date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of HSREB Continuing Ethics Review.

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario.

Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB.

The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

## Appendix B: Recruitment Email



### *How Secondary Schools Do Equity: A Policy Enactment Case Study of Ontario's Equity Strategy*

October 1, 2014

Dear Mr./Ms./Mrs.,

My name is Allison Segeren and I am a doctorate student from the Faculty of Education at Western University. As part of my dissertation entitled *How Secondary Schools Do Equity: A Policy Enactment Case Study of Ontario's Equity Strategy*, I am currently conducting research into the experiences and insights of school administrators and teachers implementing equity education policy. In particular, I am interested in understanding the challenges that school leaders and teachers face when implementing policy and what resources could be useful for supporting policy implementation in high schools.

I invite you and any interested staff members to participate in this study. The experiences and insights that you can offer will be extremely valuable to this study.

The Review Committee of the (school board) and Western's Office of Research Ethics has granted approval for this study. The primary investigator for the study is my supervisor, associate professor Goli Rezai-Rashti, at the Faculty of Education, Western University.

All administrators or teachers at your school who are interested in participating in this study will be asked to participate in one (1) interview. The interview will last approximately 45-60 minutes, will be audio-taped, and will occur during the school day. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw from the research at any time. I am hoping to conduct these interviews between October, 2014 and December, 2014 depending on the availability of school staff during the school year. The interview will include questions about your professional experience in the board or school, roles and responsibilities while enacting the equity policy, challenges that you faced attempting to enact the equity policy, and your insights into the relationship between the equity policy and social justice in schools.

Attached you will find the *Letter of Information* which includes detailed information about the study. Please contact me by email at (email address) or by telephone at (number) if you are interested in participating, have any questions, or require additional information.

Thank you for your time and consideration of my study.

Best,

Allison Segeren  
PhD Candidate  
Faculty of Education, Western University

## Appendix C: Letter of Information and Consent Form



*How Secondary School Do Equity: A Policy Enactment  
Case Study of Ontario's Equity Strategy*

### LETTER OF INFORMATION

#### **Introduction**

My name is Allison Segeren and I am a PhD candidate at the Faculty of Education at the University of Western Ontario. I am currently conducting research on the enactment of equity education policy in schools and would like to invite you to participate in my study. This study has been approved by the Western University Research Ethics Board and the External Research Review Committee at the Toronto District School Board. The primary investigator for this study is Professor Goli Rezai-Rashti at the Faculty of Education, Western University.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The aim of this study is to learn more about how the provincially mandated equity and inclusive education policy statement (PPM No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools, 2009) is being interpreted and enacted in one district school board in Ontario. I am inviting administrators and teachers to provide their insights into the process of policy enactment to enrich my understanding of equity education policies in secondary schools.

#### **If you agree to participate**

If you agree to participate in this study you will be asked to meet for a face-to-face interview that will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded but you may choose not to be audio recorded.

#### **Confidentiality**

All information collected for the study will be kept confidential. The information collected will be used for research purposes only. Your name will not be used in any publication or presentation of the study results. You will be given a pseudonym to protect your identity. Any information such as names of people, locations or events will be changed to protect your identity. The data from the interviews will be stored in a secure place for five years. Study data will be deleted from the USB and hard drives of computer devices and hard copies of data will be shredded and disposed of.

#### **Risks & Benefits**

There are no known risks to participating in this study.

The proposed research will have policy and practice impacts. By illuminating the experiences of administrators and teachers who are enacting education policy, this study will mobilize practical knowledge about how best to support and facilitate policy enactment in secondary schools. The study also has academic impact through conference presentations and journal publications.

#### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate, refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time.

#### **Questions**

If you have any questions about the conduct of this study or your rights as a research participant you may contact the Office of Research Ethics, Western University. If you have any questions about this study, please contact Allison Segeren by email: (email) or by telephone: (number) or Goli Rezai-Rashti (the primary investigator) by email (email) or by telephone (number).

Sincerely, Allison Segeren, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Education, Western University



*How Secondary School Do Equity: A Policy  
Enactment Case Study of Ontario's Equity Strategy*

*Allison Segeren, PhD Candidate  
Faculty of Education, the University of Western Ontario*

### CONSENT FORM

I have read the Letter of Information, have had the nature of the study explained to me and I agree to participate. All questions have been answered to my satisfaction.

Name (please print):

---

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix D: Interview Guide**

### **School Board Officials**

1. Describe any personal information you wish to share such as name, age, background.
2. Describe your professional journey, how long have you been working in the school board, what types of educational positions have you held?
3. How do you define equity and/or social justice?
4. What is your current position, job title, and job description at the Equity Office?
5. Describe a typical day in your current position.
6. Describe your role in developing the equity policy for the school board.
7. What are some of the challenges that you faced while developing the district school board equity policy?
8. What do you like most about your current position at the Equity Office? What are some of the successes you have experienced in your current role?
9. How would you describe the role of the Ontario Ministry of Education's regarding the equity policy?

### **School Leaders: Principal and Vice-Principal**

1. Describe any personal information you wish to share such as name, age, background.
2. What is your current position?
3. Describe your professional journey: how long have you been working at this school/in the school board, what types of educational positions have you held?
4. How do you define equity?
5. How have you implemented the equity policy in your school?
6. What do you like most about your current position at the Equity Office? What are some of the successes you have experienced in your current role?
7. What are some of the challenges you have faced while implementing equity policies within your school?
8. What resources or support have you had in implementing the equity policy?
9. Do you think equity policies can effectively deal with social injustices? Explain.

## Appendix E: Curriculum Vitae

### ALLISON LINDSAY SEGEREN

#### EDUCATION

##### **Doctorate of Philosophy**

**Western University, London, Ontario**

**Faculty of Education: Critical Policy, Equity and Leadership Studies 2016**

Dissertation: How Secondary Schools Do Policy: A Policy Enactment Case Study of Ontario's Equity Strategy

##### **Masters of Education**

**Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario**

**Faculty of Education: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies 2011**

Thesis: Twenty Years and Counting: The Development of Equity and Inclusive Education Policy in Ontario (1990-2010)

##### **Bachelor of Education**

**Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario**

**Faculty of Education**

**2009**

Level of Teaching: Intermediate Senior

Areas of Concentration: History, Geography

##### **Bachelor of Arts (Honours)**

**Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario**

**2008**

#### SCHOLARSHIPS

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canadian Doctoral Scholarship (\$105 000) **2012 – 2015**

#### PUBLICATIONS

Rezai-Rashti, G., Segeren, A., & Martino, W. (2016). The new articulation of equity education in neoliberal times: The changing conception of social justice in Ontario. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 1-15.

Hibbert, K., & Segeren, A. (2015). Secondary language instruction and student diversity. In J. Andrews & J. Lupart (Eds.), *Diversity education: Understanding and addressing student diversity* (pp. 482-497). Toronto: Nelson.

Rezai-Rashti, G., Segeren, A., & Martino, W. (2015). Race and racial justice in Ontario education: Neoliberalism and strategies of racial invisibility. In S. Majhanovoch & R. Malet (Eds.), *Building democracy through education on diversity* (pp. 141-158). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.



Segeren, A., & Kutsyuruba, B. (2012). Twenty Years and Counting: The Development of Equity and Inclusive Education Policy in Ontario (1990-2010). *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 136.

Segeren, A. (2012). Mapping Geographic Education in Canada: Geography in the Elementary and Secondary Curriculum Across Canada. *Review of International Geographical Education Online*, 2(1).

#### **TEACHING EXPERIENCE**

**Virtual High School**

Teacher and Curriculum Developer

**2013 – Present**

#### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

Ontario College of Teachers