

Equity in Education: Examining the HPCDSB Resource Hub a Mechanism for Teacher  
Professional Learning about Equity

by

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### **Abstracts**

This project examines the development of the Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity, and Anti-Racism (EDIAR) Resource Hub at the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board (HPCDSB) of Ontario. The Resource Hub is an online platform which is designed to assist educators and school leaders by providing access to a comprehensive depository of resources which includes articles, policy documents, and training modules. Its primary goal is to promote equity in education and facilitate professional development in alignment with Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009) and the Equity Action Plan (2017). The project investigates how the Resource Hub aligns with these strategic frameworks and analyzes its effectiveness in transforming classroom practices, school environments, and leadership approaches within the HPCDSB. By analyzing the development of the Resource Hub, the study explores its contribution to advancing inclusivity and social justice within the educational setting. The project highlights how the Hub supports the development of equitable teaching practices and fosters a culture of inclusivity among staff and students. The project underscores the Resource Hub's significance in enhancing the accessibility of resources for educators and approaches effective recommendations for refining its functionality and broadening its access. These insights aim to reinforce the Resource Hub's scope to support educators in their professional growth and drive systemic changes towards greater equity, diversity, and inclusivity in education.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The importance of education lies in its ability to offer quality learning and achievement opportunities to everyone. Countries around the world are recognizing the necessity of creating educational systems that combine equity with quality (OECD, 2012). Ensuring quality and equity education to all students in this globalized world is an international commitment which is outlined by United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD, 2006), and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations (UNESCO, 2004) documents (in Ernest, Heckaman, Thompson, Hull & Carter, 2011). Yet, a commitment to these critical areas of quality and equity in education requires ongoing attention through research, theory, and practice.

Equity is not a static concept, it is evolving and influenced by many factors. The concept of equity in education includes factors such as ethnicity, social economic status, race, gender, religion, disabilities, community, and resources within the expanding student population (Jordan, 2010; Nadelson et al., 2019). Equity in education involves understanding the challenges and barriers some children may face and providing additional support so that every child has a chance for success while also contributing to the development of a more socially just world. Equity is not about equal treatment in education, but rather, meeting the differing and individual needs of students while creating inclusive space for the development of their personal and cultural knowledge and values (Hardy & Woodcock, 2023)

Canada emphasizes the importance of diversity, inclusivity, and equity in education (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009). In international contexts, Canada is known for its welcoming and celebrating attitudes of a multicultural society and thought to be a country which recognizes the value of different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives (Hamilton et al., 2023).

It is important not to generalize about Canada when it comes to education, education is not a unilateral entity, educational goals and policies vary by province, region and, to some extent, school (Taylor et al., 2016). In Canada, the responsibility for education lies with federal and provincial governments, which work in collaboration with democratically elected school boards. These boards, along with elected trustees, play a vital role in fostering partnerships with communities and governments to develop and maintain a world-class, universally accessible, publicly funded education system.

All Canadian education institutions, no matter their jurisdiction or region, are expected to strive to create inclusive learning environments that promote equal opportunities for all students regardless of their ethnicity, culture, religion, social economic status, gender, or abilities (Nadelson et al., 2019). Efforts are made across the provinces and within District School Boards to ensure that education is accessible and equitable, aiming to provide every student with the support and resources they need to become successful. In this project, I examine how a Catholic District School Board of Southwestern-Ontario enacts Ontario's Equity Education Plan and contribute to the development of an Resource Hub for teachers' professional learning about equity in education.

### **Public Education in Canada**

In Canada, it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that their children are enrolled in school and attend regularly (Government of Canada, 2022). The public education of Canada operates on a federal and provincial level. There are a federal government, ten provinces and three territories in Canada (Government of Canada, 2022). Each province and territory have its own Ministry or Department of Education who are responsible for administrating the education policies and curriculum. Although it varies from province to province, in general,

Canada's public education system typically consists of four levels such as pre-elementary, primary, secondary, and post-secondary education (University of the People, 2023).

Pre-elementary education is referred to as "kindergarten" which marks the initial phase of schooling in Canada. It's available to children aged four to five before they begin elementary school. Primary education starts in grade 1, typically when children are around 6 or 7 years old, and continues until grade 6 or grade 8, usually when they are 10 to 13 years old. Intermediate education is a two-year stage of education that includes grades 7 and 8. In some places, intermediate education is paired with secondary education to include two levels: junior high school and high school. Junior high school or intermediate education can also take place within elementary education (e.g. schools offering kindergarten through grade 8) or can start as part of high school. High school represents the final phase of secondary education. It begins at grade 9 when students are around 14 years old. This stage lasts for four years and typically completes at either grade 11 or 12 when learners are the age of 16 to 18, depending on individual circumstances and provincial regulations.

By law in Canada, students are obligated to attend school until they reach the age of 16, irrespective of their grade level at that point (Government of Canada, 2022). However, in Ontario and New Brunswick, students must remain in school until they turn 18 or until they have achieved a high school diploma. Post-secondary education in Canada includes colleges, universities, and vocational institutions. Canada has diverse range of post-secondary options, from community colleges offering diploma and certificate programs to universities offering undergraduate and graduate degrees (Government of Canada, 2022; & University of the People, 2023).

Each province and territory manage education through ministries. These ministries are led by a minister typically chosen from the legislative body and appointed by the provincial or



territorial government leader. These ministries define educational services, establish policies, and enact legislative frameworks. They also provide support in educational, administrative, and financial aspects to facilitate school operations. Local governance of education is assigned to entities like school boards, districts, divisions, or councils, whose members are elected through public voting. The authority granted to these local bodies varies and usually includes managing and administering schools within their jurisdiction, implementing curricula, handling personnel matters, student enrollment, and proposing major capital projects (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada; Government of Canada, 2022; & University of the People, 2023).

Despite the differences at the provincial and territorial levels, the Canadian education system is committed to nurturing inclusivity, equity, and diversity in education (Government of Canada, 2022). While Canada claims (and ranks high internationally in OECD/PISA on equity) a lot of work still to do and inequities persist across systems especially based on intersectional identity dimensions. Efforts are consistently made to accommodate students from diverse backgrounds in respect to their culture, race, gender, language, religion, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

### ***Ontario's Public Education***

The Ministry of Education administers all the sectors of public and early childhood education system of Ontario. According to the Education Act, the Ministry is responsible for: -

- Designing the curriculum;
- Distributing fundings to school boards;
- Fixing the policies and guidelines for school boards;
- Determining the criteria for graduation diplomas and certificates;
- Approving the textbooks and learning resources (People for Education, 2024).

Ontario has four types of school boards: English Public, English Catholic, French Public, and French Catholic School. In Ontario, there are 72 school boards in total, which include 31 English public boards, 29 English Catholic Schools, 4 French public boards, and 8 French Catholic boards (People for Education, 2024). According to Section 93 of the Constitution, followers of Roman Catholic faith have the rights to access publicly funded separate denominational schools, while French-speaking families have the right to enroll their children in French-language schools (People for Education, 2024).

According to Ontario's Public School Board Association (2021) the vision of Ontario's Public-School Boards (OPSB) is to foster quality education by nurturing every student's success and well-being by following the principles of

- Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
- Truth and Reconciliation
- Valuing Student Voice
- Quality and Innovation
- Good Governance, Accountability, Collaboration, and Integrity

OPSBs are always committed to provide quality education and student's wellbeing by ensuring equity, diversity, and inclusivity in education to ensure Canada's public education's goal of promoting inclusive learning in respect of students' ethnicity, culture, race, language, gender, socio-economic status, or abilities.

### ***Ontario's Perspective towards Equity in Education***

Equity is an ongoing priority for the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME) and is an essential philosophy to support student success, impacting future employment, and health and wellness outcomes of students (OME, 2014b). Ontario is almost among the most diverse places globally in terms of ethnicities, culture, languages etc. It is a large province, with many different

District School Boards (DSB) who are all taking up the call to create and improve equity in education. While there is not a simple solution to addressing equity, examining the efforts to promote equity within education can illuminate the intentions, practices, and resources which are being prioritized. For example, Ontario, Manitoba, Quebec, and British Columbia are all provinces which have established an Education Act to develop and implement a respectful human diversity policy that sustain equity based on race, gender, culture, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other protected grounds embedded in The Human Rights Code (in Taylor et al., 2016). There are many ways to bring the Education Act to life. This project, situated in Ontario, examines equity in education by looking at the ways equity efforts are being enacted by one District School Board, funded through the Ministry of Education, to address objectives of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009).

Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (OEIES, 2009) is designed to support the education community in identifying and decreasing discriminatory prejudices, biases, and systemic obstacles with the primary goal of promoting the academic success and overall well-being of every student. Strategies such as this exemplify the OME value the context of each school district by stating that to achieve education equity, it significant for teachers to embrace and uphold an equity mindset in their pedagogical approach. An equity mindset includes the beliefs, knowledge, perception, and attitudes of teachers which play a vital role in promoting social justice and equity in education and empowering all students to reach their potentials (Nadelson et al., 2019,). It is expected that teachers and administrators in all OME funded schools will adopt practices that promote equity, such as culturally responsive teaching, inclusion, and other approaches that allow students to learn based on their knowledge and individual needs and traits.

In 2017, Ontario developed an Equity Action Plan with four areas of focus including: School and Classroom Practices; Leadership, Governance and Human Resources Practices; Data Collection, Integration and Reporting; and Organizational Culture Change (Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan, 2017). Campbell (2021) suggests that the Equity Action Plan is concerned with the disparities of formal leadership recruitment and emphasized the necessities of training for the leaders to identify the systematic inequalities and implement measures within the education system. The plan required leadership development and action for realizing excellence and addressing equity (Campbell, 2021). This study looks at how one District School Board is promoting leader learning and fostering a broad understanding that all educators are leaders who make contributions to equity.

To begin DSBs typically prepare policy statements and multi-year strategic plans for their district as well as yearly plans within each school. One such board, of interest in this project, is a publicly funded Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board (HPCDSB) located in a geographically dispersed region of Southwestern-Ontario where this policy is established:

The Board and its staff are committed to the implementation of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and the Ontario Ministry of Education (the "Ministry") Policy in a manner which is consistent with the exercise of the Board's denominational rights under section 93 of the Constitution Act, 1982 and the Ontario Human Rights Code (HPCDSB, 2012).

This policy statement affirms the Board's commitment to applying Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy and Ministry policies while respecting its denominational rights aligned with the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Looking beyond policy statements, the equity efforts described in this project aim to develop a broad understanding about equity in action by detailing and examining equity efforts to enhance leaders and teachers' professional learning in relation to HPCDSB. Each year, the OME allocates funds to the school boards for specific projects, including professional development of the leaders and teachers in terms of their responsive teaching-learning, sharing the effective resources within the schools, providing professional resources and training on human rights issues to help the teachers in promoting inclusive classrooms (Elementary Teachers Federation of Ontario, 2024). My project highlights how HPCDSB is approaching leader and teacher learning as a form of professional development regarding equity in education.

### **Context**

This study explores a small Catholic district in rural mid—western Ontario known HPCDSB. The district was established in 1874 with a goal to serve agricultural and rural communities in Huron and Perth. Today there are approximately 4,600 students and 2,500 educators/staff who are committed to quality education (HPCDSB, 2023). A goal of the Catholic school board is to nurture all persons to be leaders of faith and Catholic social justice (HPCDSB,2023). As part of a broader mandate from the OME, HPCDSB enacted consultative processes to develop an Equity, Inclusivity and Anti-Racism (EIAR) plan in 2023, which was later adapted to reflect diversity aims as well and is most recently known as Equity, Diversity, Inclusivity and Anti-Racism (EDIAR).

The purpose of the EDIAR plan is to implement OEIES (2009) to promote equity, diversity, and inclusivity in education. The importance of the EDIAR and the inquiry in HPCDSB is reflected in Searle and Kirkpatrick's (2023) report, which positions "EDIAR as ... an essential focus to support capacity-building, maintain high expectations, and empower students, particularly those from historically marginalized groups (p. 3). As the first plan of its

kind, the plan addresses the district and school-level procedures which align with the four areas of focus in Ontario's Equity Action Plan" (2017, p.12).

Within the HPCDSB EDIAR plan, there are many initiatives and activities, all of which were designed to promote developing knowledge and capacity to broadly advance equity in education. For example, the district created an Equity Council with involvement from community, staff, and students. Student and staff Equity Leads were also identified as well as an increased number of learning sessions led by internal staff and external guests to broaden student and staff understanding of equity in education. One initiative, which is the focus of this project, was the development of a HPCDSB Resource Hub for educators.

The Equity, Diversity, and Anti-Racism Resource Hub was created with K-12 teachers and system leaders in mind, with the goal to promote the significance and practice of EDIAR within the Catholic school system. The Resource Hub is a comprehensive online platform which is designed to support promoting equity, inclusivity, and diversity within their classrooms and schools in alignment with OEIES (2009). It offers a wide range of resources including articles, policy documents, teaching materials, activities, videos, and podcasts on significant topics such as anti-racism, equity, gender identity, diversity, and cultural inclusivity. It has developed through collaborative efforts to the tools and guidance to remove biases and promote the practice of an equitable pedagogy.

This project traces the development of the Resource Hub to provide details and insight into this mechanism as a tool for increasing access and capacity to equity in education.

**Purpose of the Project**

This project investigates the development and impact of the HPCDSB Resource Hub within the context of the renewed Equity and Inclusive Education Plan by the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME, 2014). The central focus is to explore how the Resource Hub functions as a crucial tool for advancing teachers' professional learning in the domains of equity, with a specific emphasis on School and Classroom Practices, as well as Leadership, Governance, and Human Resource Practices. This project addresses the following key questions:

1. How does the HPCDSB Resource Hub align with and contribute to the objectives outlined in the updated Equity and Inclusive Education Plan of the OME?
2. In what ways does the Resource Hub impact teacher professional learning about equity, particularly in the areas of School and Classroom Practices and Leadership, Governance, and Human Resource Practices?
3. What valuable insights can be gathered from the development and implementation of the Resource Hub, and how these lessons help to take future initiatives for enhancing teachers' training and promoting equity in education?

Through the detailed discussion of these questions, this project provides insights into the Resource Hub as a platform for advancing equity in education. By analyzing the practical implementation, I offer recommendations to develop similar initiatives for creating inclusive and equitable learning environments within educational institutions.

**Positionality Statement**

My research philosophy is centered on seeing education as a commitment to social justice and this situating has driven me to explore the intersection of education, equity, diversity, and inclusivity. As a member of a religious minority from Bangladesh, I have often faced

discrimination in the form of an “Othering” gaze because of my religious identity. People’s reaction to my surname is part of a historical continuum of “majority vs. minority” or “us vs. them” binary opposition that has existed across the world in various forms. While a country’s education system is expected to be built on the doctrine of justice, equity, inclusion, non-communalism, secularism, and ethics, my experiences suggest this is not always the case. Various forms of inequity, racism, exclusion, otherization, communalism, sexism, and autocracy exist in the practice of education. Such disparities motivate me to examine and delve into the ideas about equity in education for my MEd project.

This equity project builds from my earlier thesis which was an effort to address some of the inequalities that I encountered during my academic life. My thesis, “Representation of (In)equality of in *English for Today (Class-VIII)*” explored the unequal representation of social class, religion, and profession in National Curriculum and Textbook Board which designs textbooks that all Bangladeshi students must read from class one to twelve. This research experience enhanced my awareness for education’s vital role in breaking down the societal inequalities and promoting understanding among diverse communities and prompted me look beyond my country.

As a Newcomer to Canada, it seems that equity is a central focus in many Canadian conversations and actions, and certainly an interest in education. As a new graduate student, I worked on a research collaboration with Drs. Michelle Searle and Lori Kirkpatrick who are in a long-term partnership with school district. The HPCDSB Resource Hub was part of a larger initiative they were working on related to EDIAR. Initially, my role was to work with another student to contribute to the development of Resource Hub content and plan for knowledge mobilization with the intended audiences. Later, I continued working directly to support an educational leader from HPCDSB by responding to feedback from teachers. In my second role



with the HPCDSB Resource Hub, I was responsible for identifying and organizing additional materials which could support educators looking to enhance equity in their professional practice.

The HPCDSB Resource Hub provided me with a chance to collaborate with professors, graduate students and educators who are engaged in promoting equity and inclusivity within the Catholic school system. I was able to bring some of my scholarly skills into this project and develop new ones while I was gaining an understanding of equity in educational contexts in Canada.

This project, which is a result of my hands-on experience with the development of the Resource Hub has taught me about the complexities and challenges which are inherent in promoting equity, inclusion, and anti-racism within educational contexts in Ontario. This direct involvement has increased my passion for advocating for equity, inclusion, and anti-racism in education and in our broader social world. It has enlightened me with concrete examples of how individuals and institutions can contribute to positive change. From this perspective I approach this project with a strong sense of purpose and dedication to make a meaningful contribution to the field.

The coming chapters highlight the objective of the resource hub, provide background about equity in education and professional learning, offer detailed information on how the Resource Hub was created and impressions about the utility of the hub with a focused plan for development. At the end of this project, reflections on the Resource Hub as one mechanism for advancing equity in education are offered with future implications for equity planning and action.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

Education is an important aspect of a country for its social and economic development (Madani, 2019). A country and its citizens' development depend on their impactful and progressive education system. According to World Education Forum (2000), "the basic educational skills; like reading and writing increases a person's income up to 10% acting as the perfect weapon that lifts individuals to freedom, which helps to eradicate international poverty and hunger" (Madani, 2019, p.100). Therefore, numerous organizations like UNESCO, Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981), UNICEF have prioritized to provide quality education to all children, youth, and adults (in Ainscow, 2016 & Madani, 2019). There is no specific definition of quality education. However, quality education lies upon equitable and inclusive education where "every learner matter" (Ainscow, 2020). Quality education is often synonymously used with equity education (Madani, 2019).

When thinking about equity and quality, the quality education is an important mechanism for nation's social and economic growth. There is no doubt that to fulfill the goals of quality education that education for all, education systems must promote and practice equity in education. When educational systems prioritize equity, fairness, allowing each student to access the support they need for optimal learning, this inclusive approach ensures that diverse needs are met, creating a more supportive and enriching educational environment (Ainscow, 2020). Ultimately, by fostering equity in education, institutions can tailor their strategies to provide quality education to each student, which is significant for promoting a more just and inclusive society and economic development of country.

Usually, equity means the fair treatment of everyone over their race, gender, class, religion, ethnicity, culture, norms, language and more (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2017). However, it is significant to realize that education systems cannot fix the connotation of equity in one single frame or ideology. The concept of equity varies from person to person and context to context. The concept of equity varies from person to person and context to context. Equity is a multidimensional and complex concept (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019) and its interpretation can differ among educators, researchers, and policymakers. In this chapter three main areas explored, first I explore key definitions related to equity, then historical perspectives of equity in education in Canada and finally, Equity in Ontario's Education Policy.

### **Key Definitions**

Since equity is a broad concept, the various perspectives in education need to be explored to frame the foundation for the discussion in this paper. The Ontario Ministry Education (2014) described equity and inclusive education as a process to seek to comprehend, identify, address, and eliminate biases, barriers, and power dynamics that hinder students' potential for learning, growth, and full societal contributions. There are numerous definitions of equity arising from the literature (Table 1).

**Table 1** *Definition of Equity*

Citation	Equity Definitions
Nachbauer & Kyriakidesb (2020)	Equity involves two key aspects: equity as inclusion, ensuring all students have access to high-quality learning opportunities, and equity as fairness, focusing on a just distribution of educational outcomes among student groups.
Luke, Mehta & Schwartz (2011)	“Equity education today is more concerned about underachievement and closing the achievement gap to maximize productivity of the citizenry and capitalize on Canada’s diversity in an international context.” (in Rezai-Rashti, Segeren & Martino, 2017, p.161)
Hardy & Woodcock (2023)	Equity, within the framework of diversity, can be defined as the fair and just treatment of individuals, by acknowledging and addressing a wide range of factors such as sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, race, ethnic origin, religion, socio-economic background, physical or mental ability, and other relevant elements.
Canadian Research-intensive Universities (U15)	“Equity as a concept of inclusion, which requires focusing on identifying and removing social and cultural barriers” (p. 46). (in Tamtik & Guenter, 2019)

These various definitions show a breadth of thinking that has interpreted and prioritized equity within the concepts of inclusion and diversity in education. Key dimensions across these definitions include equity as a practice with the inclusion of diverse people in terms of their identity, race, gender, culture, religion, language, social class etc. In the educational literature, equity, inclusion, and diversity are often associated terms that are interlinked to promote social justice or advance equality.

To achieve the goal of this project, it is also helpful to know how educators, researchers, academics, policymakers have defined inclusion and diversity to promote equity in education. The Ontario Ministry Education (2014) speaks of the dimensions of diversity as including, but not limited to, “ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, gender expression, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status”. Table 2 showcases additional definitions for diversity and inclusion in education, while equity, diversity and inclusion are frequently discussed in tandem in education they are distinct concepts.

**Table 2** *Definition of Diversity and Inclusion*

Tamtik & Guenter (2019)	Diversity is not just about different categories like race, gender, age, sexual orientation, socio-economic class, disability etc.; it involves including everyone, recognizing, and appreciating differences, and ensuring equal participation in society.
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UNESCO (2015)	“Inclusion focuses on education systems that remove the barriers limiting the participation and achievement of all learners, that respect diverse needs, abilities, and characteristics, and that eliminate all forms of discrimination in the learning environment” (in Tamtik & Guenter, 2019, p.43)
Ainscow (2016, p. 147)	“Inclusion involves a particular emphasis on those groups of learners who may be at risk of marginalization, exclusion, or underachievement. It is about the presence, participation, and achievement of all students.”

A common strand that emerges across these various definitions emphasizes the importance of identifying and valuing differences while ensuring equal participation and achievement for all individuals in educational settings. The definitions highlight the need to remove barriers that limit learners' participation, respect diverse needs and characteristics, and eliminate discrimination to create inclusive environments where every student can thrive and succeed.

Tables 1 and 2 make clear that although there are overlapping and interrelated constructs when talking about equity, diversity and inclusion, there are also differences defined not only in

each word but by differencing researchers or policy papers. For this project, the following definitions, which draw from the literature, are noted:

***Equity:*** Equity in education requires the fair distribution of resources, opportunities, and support, promoting inclusion to ensure that all students, regardless of diverse backgrounds, have equal access to a quality learning experience. It involves addressing systemic barriers to promote inclusivity and create a learning environment where every individual can sustain.

***Diversity:*** Diversity in education incorporates a variety of backgrounds, including differences in race, gender, culture, religion, ethnicity, language, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, and abilities, with a commitment to promoting equity for all.

***Inclusion:*** It believes in creating a pedagogy where diverse individuals feel valued and respected, fostering an equitable setting that embraces varied perspectives and ensures equal access to opportunities and achievements for all students.

These current definitions highlight the different dimensions of equity, diversity, and inclusion to provide context for reaching about the historical perspectives described in the next section of this chapter.

### **Historical perspectives of Equity in Education in Canada**

Canada emphasizes the importance of diversity, inclusivity, and equity in education (OME, 2009). In international contexts, Canada is often known for its welcoming attitudes and celebrating differences of a multicultural society and thought to be a country which recognizes the value of different backgrounds, cultures, and perspectives. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms provides broadly equitable conditions for all Canadian citizens and challenges discrimination:

Every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to the equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age or mental or physical disability. (Department of Justice 2013, in Hardy & Woodcock, 2023, p.6)

Canadian education institutions strive to create inclusive learning environments that promote equal opportunities for all students regardless of their ethnicity, culture, religion, social economic status, gender, or abilities (Nadelson et al., 2019). Across Canada, efforts are made to ensure that education is accessible and equitable, in Ontario, a goal of the MOE is to provide every student with the support and resources to become successful.

### ***Equity in Ontario's Education Policy***

Ontario is recognized as the most multicultural province in Canada (OME, 2014a). As the political atmosphere in Ontario changed, multiculturalism became a key feature of the education system, contributing to the development of a Canadian civic and social identity among its citizens (Nyereyemhuka, 2019). Canadian Multicultural Act was developed in 1988 under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau's direction and with time it has redefined and articulated. Embracing diversity and differences are the defining features of Canadian Multicultural Act (Cepin & Naimi, 2015). Canada's welcoming multicultural attitude has strong manifestation in Ontario's Education Policy.

Canada is an immigrant friendly country, therefore with the time of globalization, Canada experienced changes in social policies which were more concerned with embracing multiculturalism (Nyereyemhuka, 2019). This multiculturalism is deeply rooted and visible in the equitable and inclusive policies of Ontario's education system (Ontario Education Policy, 1993). In response to the multicultural population, the earlier definition of Equity Education in Ontario Ministry of Education is to include the "disadvantaged and marginalized groups and individuals



such as women, Aboriginals, and racial and cultural minorities” (OME, 1993, in Rezai-Rashti et al., 2016, p.161).

After giving priority to multiculturalism, the discourse of safe schools and academic excellence have influenced the Equity and Inclusive Education policy of Ontario, and these discourses are explained by Segeren (2012):

The safe school means building and sustaining a positive school climate for all students to support their education so that all students reach their full potential. The purpose of safe schools’ legislation was to prevent bullying, violence, and discrimination, and developing and implementing multicultural, anti-racism, and gender equity policies and initiatives. It recommended the implementation of anti-homophobia and anti-transphobia policies as well as school board support for Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) clubs, which connect LGBTQ students and allies with the aim of creating safe and inclusive school environments (p.11)

Safe schools’ policies in Ontario are connected to the province's Equity and Inclusive Education framework which emphasizes the creation of positive and inclusive school climates where all students can flourish academically and socially. These policies aim to prevent bullying, violence, and discrimination, aligning closely with multiculturalism and diversity initiatives.

Now the concept of equity has changed from safe schools and been rearticulated once again. Equity is now more concerned with metrics, testing and measurements of outcomes as these are viewed as being linked to student achievement (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2016). According to Rezai-Rashti and colleagues (2016):

Equity education today is more concerned about underachievement and closing the achievement gap to maximize productivity of the citizenry and capitalize on Canada’s

diversity in an international context. This reconstitution of equity is most evident with the emergence of boys as the new disadvantaged in Ontario, the erasure of racialized minority students who are replaced by the category of ‘recent immigrant’. It is argued that the neoliberal market reforms have shifted the conception of equity from its historically social democratic notion and re-articulated its meaning in economic terms (p. 161 & 162).

In the last twenty years Ontario’s Education policy has experienced a lot of changes in its policies. Examining Ontario's Equity Education Policy from 1993 to the present emphasizes the evolutionary changes that have occurred over time.

### **Equity Education Policy in Ontario: 1993–Present**

There are two significant challenges within the complex process of developing education policies in Ontario. First, education is officially managed by each province, but federal laws, particularly those concerning multiculturalism and citizenship, have influenced the decisions available to policymakers in the provinces and territories (Joshee, 2004, in Segeren & Kutsyuruba, 2012). Another significant challenge arises between the Ontario Ministry of Education and regional district school boards. The formal responsibility of creating education policies rests with the provincial authorities, while the implementation of these policies and the more intricate task of creating locally developed policies fall under the jurisdiction of school districts (Segeren & Kutsyuruba, 2012). This project focuses on equity policies developed in two different historical and political eras (1993 under the New Democratic Party [NDP] and 2009 under the Liberal government) to demonstrate the substantial changes and historical modifications in the conception of equity.

***Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity:*** In 1993, during Ontario's inaugural social democratic government led by Premier Bob Rae (NDP), the Ministry of Education officially introduced *PPM No. 119: Development and Implementation of School Board Policies on Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity* (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2016). This policy mandated that all school boards in Ontario create and enforce policies addressing anti-racism and ethnocultural equity. It was a comprehensive policy strategy for educational equity. It covered various aspects of education such as curriculum, learning materials, student assessment and placement, hiring and staffing, race relations, and community relations. The objective of this policy was to eliminate barriers for racial and ethnocultural minorities in education. To accomplish this objective, the Ministry developed an Equity Unit to “support the work of school boards and to make school boards accountable for their work on equity issues” (Rezai-Rashti et al., 2016, p.164). The NDP government couldn't put the antiracism and ethnocultural equity policy into action before they lost the election in 1995, which led to the leadership of the Progressive Conservatives, led by Mike Harris.

***Dramatic Changes in realm of Equity and Inclusion:*** Between 1995-2009, even though there were serious efforts to enhance equity in the education system, many of the changes were undone during the Conservative years. In 1995, Progressive Conservatives formed government by “promising, among other things, tax cuts, less spending on education, educational reform, and an end to policies such as employment equity” (Joshee, 2007, in Rezai-Rashti, et al., 2016, p.164). During this period there was a dramatic shift in realm of equity and inclusion.

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” (Anderson & Ben Jaafar 2003, in Rezai-Rashti et al., 2016, p.164).

The Conservative Party had serious consequences for *PPM No. 119*. the supervision of how the school boards implemented the Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity Policy, which essentially came to an end. *PPM No. 119* (1993) and other multiculturalism underwent significant improvements when the Liberal Party took over from the Conservatives in 2003. As part of their election and campaign promises, the Liberals assured Ontario citizens that they would enhance public education through the *Excellence for All* plan (The Ontario Liberal Party, 2002) and increased financial grants (Makarenko, 2003, in Nyereyemhuka, 2019). This commitment indirectly involved making enhancements to *PPM No. 119* (OME, 1993) since academic excellence was fundamental to both initiatives. Although effective in “raising awareness about racism and diversity issues in education, PPM No. 119 (1993) did not eliminate discrimination against racialized students” (Nyereyemhuka, 2019, p. 6). Therefore, the policy was refurbished in 2009.

***Equity Plan in Action (2009-Present):*** The Liberal Government has designed all policies, acts, and amendments by incorporating the Ontario Human Rights Code (OME,2009/2013). For example, in 2009, “amendments were made under the OME’s new strategy called *Realizing the Promise of Diversity: Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education* ... which made the distinction to shift the policy lens from an emphasis on race to one that focused on equity and inclusion” (Nyereyemhuka, 2019, p.7). The Ontario Ministry of Education realized that certain groups of students, particularly recent immigrants, children from low-income families, Aboriginal students, boys, and students with special needs are more vulnerable to experiencing lower levels of educational opportunities and achievements (OME, 2009c). To respond to this crisis, the Ontario

Ministry of Education formally and legislatively reissued *PPM No. 119* (OME 1993) once again, which was now titled *PPM No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools*. The reissued PPM was developed in attempts to “close student achievement gaps by identifying and eliminating any biases, barriers, and power dynamics that may limit students’ prospects for learning, growing and contributing fully to society” (OME, 2014b, p. 12).

*The Equity and Inclusive Education in Ontario Schools: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* (EIEOS; OME, 2014b) was introduced as a four-year guideline. It aimed to help school boards in creating policies to achieve equity and inclusive education for all students. The three main objectives that formed the foundation of *PPM No. 119* within the *Realizing the Promise of Diversity* strategy were: achieving high levels of student success, minimizing disparities in student success, and boosting public trust in publicly funded education.

To build on its achievements and further its advancements, the OME introduced its new vision, *Achieving Excellence* (2014) concentrating on four revitalized goals: attaining excellence, ensuring equity, promoting well-being, and strengthening public confidence. This development of Ontario's Equity Education Policy since 2009 is significant because it takes a thoughtful transition towards a more inclusive and equitable education system. By implanting the principles of equity and inclusion into judicial frameworks and educational policies, Ontario aims to address disparities in student achievement and opportunities.

The emphasis on closing achievement gaps, eliminating biases, and promoting a positive school climate underlines a broad commitment. This commitment assures that all students, regardless of background or circumstance, have equal access to educational success and are

supported in reaching their full potential. This strategic approach not only reflects Ontario's dedication to social justice but also aims to build a more inclusive society by fostering diversity and equity within its educational institutions.

Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan (OME, 2017) —extended the work of the *EIEOS* (OME, 2014b) and served as a three-year plan intended to establish accountability measures for educational stakeholders in attaining the objective of ensuring equity with four areas of focus such as School and classroom Practices; Leadership, Governance and Human Resources Practices; Data Collection, Integration and Reporting; and Organizational Culture Change (Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan, 2017). This plan is the one that is currently referenced in HPCDSB materials as it provides the basis for formulating their action plan.

### **Challenges of Promoting Equity in Education**

Over time, Ontario has remained committed to multiculturalism, valuing diversity, and educational excellence while acknowledging the long-standing, persisting, and emerging inequities (MOE, 2014). There are two primary strategies to promote educational equity within Ontario's education system (OME, 2017). The first strategy centers on closing the gaps in educational achievement and enhancing overall student success, leading to improved performance across diverse student groups, including gender, English Language Learners, and Special Education Needs. The second strategy emphasizes the development of an equitable and inclusive education system, expanding the concept of equity to encompass various aspects of classroom, school, district, and provincial-level changes. Both of these strategies have faced challenges which are elaborated on in research.

Campbell (2021) reveals that despite widely established equity plans, there are many issues are notably under-represented across the school districts such as anti-racism and ethno-

cultural equity, anti-discrimination protections for LGBTQ2+ people. In fact, Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education has the potential to both support and hinder diversity in classrooms. Mitchell (2012) identifies that there is a lack of standardized evaluation planning for measuring the policy's effectiveness. Mitchell also criticized the definition of bullying used by the government, highlighting that it relies heavily on stereotypes and suggesting the risks of creating a hierarchy of victimhood.

One of the challenges faced throughout this project was the role of religion and religious education when thinking about EDIAR. Ontario education policy strongly emphasizes equity and inclusion in diverse classrooms, but issues arise when these principles contrast with religion. For example, discussing the experiences of 30 self-identified Muslim educators in Ontario public schools, a study explores their efforts to implement responsive pedagogy for faith-centered learners (Memon & Chanicka, 2022). Through dialogic portraits in two school boards, the educators express a consistent sense of responsibility to advocate for religious accommodations while being cautious about discussing religion to avoid marginalization by colleagues. The research underscores the need for more comprehensive notions of equity and inclusion that consider the complexities of religious identities within the public education system (Memon & Chanicka, 2022).

In the forthcoming chapter, I explore how equity is integrated into the educational framework of HPCDSB through the Resource Hub. Chapter three explores how the Resource Hub addresses and integrates Ontario's Equity Strategy and reflects efforts to support diverse classrooms while maintaining commitment to Catholic educational values.

### **Chapter 3: An Equity Project in Practice**

In this chapter, I delve into the underlaying and visible manifestations of equity within the educational framework of the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board (HPCDSB). I start by elaborating how Catholic values meet with the concept of equity in Ontario's education system. Then, I explore the fundamental intersection between Catholic values and equity in Ontario's education system to investigate how these principles integrate the board's approach to fostering equity diversity, and anti-racism (EDIAR). A key focus is exploring the development of the Resource Hub. This chapter explains the detailed journey of the Resource Hub by uncovering the driving forces, methodologies, and objectives behind its development. Through this exploration, I aim to shed light on the practical applications of equity initiatives within educational contexts by highlighting their significance in promoting EDIAIR as part of advancing social justice in education.

#### **Catholic Values in Education**

HPCDSB delivers Catholic education rooted in the foundations and ancient traditions of the Christian faith (Groome, 2014). In the past, the Church wanted to create its own schools to protect Catholic students from losing their faith in public schools, which sometimes had Protestant or secular influences (Shields, 2018). From the earliest days of Christianity, education has been a central aspect of the Church's mission. Catholic values in education, is often combined with preserving Catholic identity (Shields, 2018). The long history of Catholic education demonstrates that its purpose is not just to benefit the individual but also to support Jesus' mission to bring good news to the poor, free the captives, give sight to the blind, liberate the oppressed, and proclaim the Lord's favor (Saver, 2018). Catholic education emphasises on faith and spirituality. According to Lapsley and Kelley (2022) besides academic advantages, Catholic education anticipates students will show dedication to the Christian path of faith within the



Catholic tradition. This includes actively practicing a vibrant spiritual and religious life, possessing a moral character centered on essential virtues, and having a well-informed conscience that extends their beliefs into public life as involved citizens who prioritize social justice, the common good, and the enhancement of civic life. Catholic schools encourage students to develop a deep, personal relationship with God and to integrate faith into every aspect of their daily lives to reflect its commitment to individuals and communities (Shields, 2018). Catholic education focuses on a comprehensive approach that combines academic, moral, and physical excellence with strong spiritual growth by protecting and securing Catholic beliefs. This twofold mission of personal growth and societal contribution defines the essence of Catholic education.

### **Planning for Equity in Catholic Education**

Catholic teaching emphasizes the duty of providing pastoral care to learners, focusing on their holistic well-being, including spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and social dimensions (A Catholic World View, 2019). Catholic education is deeply concerned with the moral, spiritual, and academic development of students. They are prominent in promoting social justice, equity, and morality among the learners. Catholic District School Boards in Ontario generally view the province's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) planning as a positive and necessary initiative that aligns with their core values (Durham Catholic District School Board, 2020). Catholic education inherently promotes principles of equity and inclusion, rooted in the Catholic Social Teachings which emphasize the dignity of every person, solidarity, and the common good (A Catholic World View, 2019). These values guide Catholic schools in creating inclusive environments where all students feel respected and valued.

Subsequent studies, such as Coll (2021) reveal an underlying theme of fostering a more inclusive and compassionate environment within Catholic schools.

Catholic schools actively attempt to integrate EDIAR principles by fostering a welcoming atmosphere for students of all backgrounds. They emphasize the importance of respecting diversity, combating discrimination, and promoting social justice. Programs and curricula are designed to reflect these values, ensuring that students understand the importance of inclusion and respect for all individuals, regardless of their race, gender, socioeconomic status, or other differences.

For example, the Waterloo Catholic District School Board (WCDSB) in Ontario has implemented proactive efforts to address the needs of LGBTQI students (Liboro et al., 2015). Their strategies include creating positive spaces through GSA (Gay, Straight, Alliance)-type clubs that promote student agency, activism, and leadership, fostering safer school climates with LGBTQI-affirming campaigns and events, involving all school community members through multiple programs, and connecting students with LGBTQI-positive community partners. WCDSB also conducts professional development, staff training, and curricular changes to support these initiatives.

The development of an Resource Hub by the Huron-Perth Catholic District School Board (HPCDSB) was also an effort to promote EDIAR by enhancing access to professional learning and resources. The HPCDSB Resource has designed as a broad resource to serve various dimensions, including race, gender, sexuality, culture, religion, language, and socio-economic status.

### **Planning for EDIAR within HPCDSB**

HPCDSB upholds a commitment to EDIAR as foundational principles rooted in Catholic teachings and Ontario's educational policies (Searle et al., 2023). This commitment is guided by Genesis 1:27, recognizing each person's inherent dignity and uniqueness. In alignment with

Ontario's Education Equity Action Plan and HPCDSB's own Equity and Inclusive Education Policy 3A:21, the board has undertaken a comprehensive EIAR action plan spanning 2021-2024.

This action plan addresses key areas identified by the Ministry of Education, focusing on school and classroom practices, leadership and governance, human resources, data integration, and organizational culture change. It reflects a collaborative approach, engaging stakeholders across the district and partnering with external organizations to foster an inclusive educational environment.

One pivotal strategy within HPCDSB's EDIAR action plan is the development of an Resource Hub. A resource hub serves as a centralized platform designed to provide educators and staff with accessible, up-to-date resources, tools, and guidance on equity, diversity, and inclusion practices (Searle, & Kirkpatrick, 2023). It consolidates diverse materials such as policy documents, teaching resources, articles, videos, and training modules that support the implementation of EIAR principles in educational settings.

The Resource Hub aims to empower educators and school leaders by offering practical insights into addressing complex EIDAR-related topics and promoting inclusive teaching strategies. It plays a crucial role in disseminating board-approved resources and fostering ongoing professional development.

By integrating the Resource Hub into broader EDIAR initiatives, HPCDSB aims to cultivate an educational community where all members feel valued, supported, and included. This initiative reflects the board's proactive approach to advancing equity and fostering an environment where Catholic values of dignity and respect guide every aspect of educational practice.

### **Development of the Resource Hub**

The development of the Resource Hub can be divided into two phases. The first phase involved the creation and development of the hub, while the second phase focused on launching the hub to its target audience and collecting feedback. The Development began in 2022 and continued until mid-2023. During this period, a group of collaborators, including district level professionals, university researchers and graduate students working on the Resource Hub had numerous meetings to discuss their expectations for the hub, its design, and considerations for resource selection. My role in the hub development was as a graduate student, initially working as a part of the broader collaborative team and then throughout 2023-2024 sustaining my efforts.

The collaborative group, led by a district leader with responsibility for this area established criteria for choosing resources. A vital criterion was that resources must align with Catholic values of teaching, specifically promoting peace, human dignity, the common good, and community. Based on these criteria, graduate students searched for and suggested appropriate resources such as racism, culture, gender discrimination, gender identity, sexuality, religion, language etc. Initially, these resources were organized in an Airtable (see Figure 1) database with various columns detailing the type of resource, its relevance to Catholic values, and other necessary information.

**Figure 1:**

*Screenshot of Airtable Database of Resource Hub*

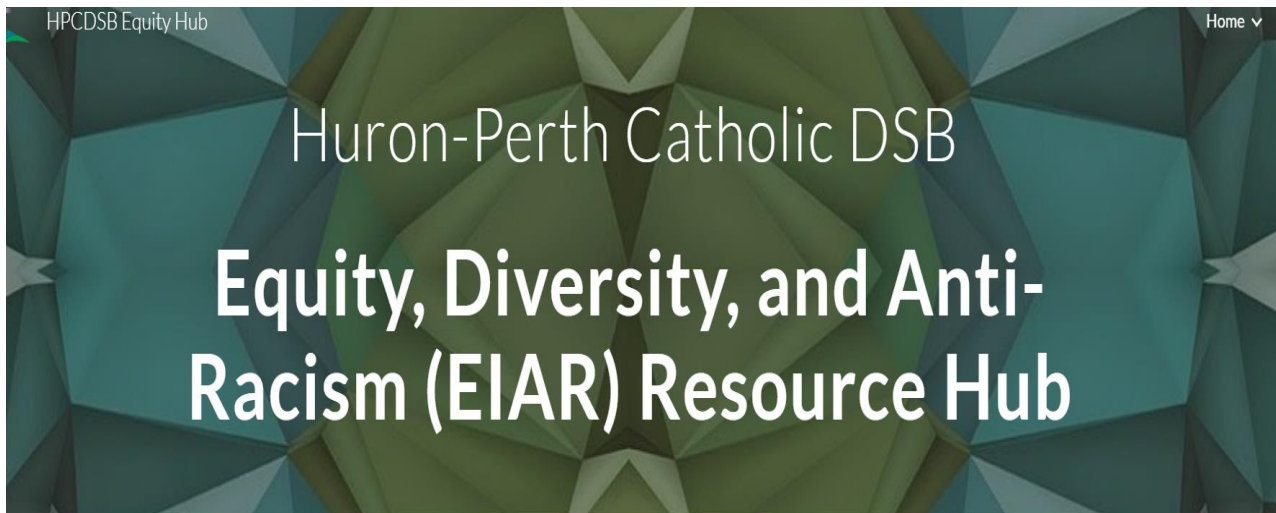
Resource Name	Resource Type	Human Rights Coded Group	Keywords	Link
Professional Advisory on Anti-Black Racism	Policy Document	Race/ Colour/ Ancestry	Ontario College of Teachers, Adv...	<a href="https://www.oct.ca/">https://www.oct.ca/</a>
Black Lives Matter - Music and art from Black c...	Video	Race/ Colour/ Ancestry	Black Artists, Expression, Anti=Bl...	<a href="https://www.youtub">https://www.youtub</a>
Anti-racism Event Series	Website Professional Developm	Race/ Colour/ Ancestry Anti-racism	Anti-racism, Equity, Anti-black ra...	<a href="https://www.cspsef">https://www.cspsef</a>
The New York Times - I stutter. But this is what ...	Video	Disability	Disability, Speech	<a href="https://youtu.be/m0">https://youtu.be/m0</a>
The New York Times - I Have a Visual Disability...	Video	Disability	Disability,	<a href="https://youtu.be/Tjx">https://youtu.be/Tjx</a>
TED - How technology allowed me to read	Video	Disability	TED talk, Accessibility, Literacy,	<a href="https://youtu.be/Qo">https://youtu.be/Qo</a>
Ted (DiagnostikCoaching) Deep Sea Diving...in ...	Video	Disability Religious Discrimination	Disability, Accessibility, TED talk,	<a href="https://youtu.be/YZl">https://youtu.be/YZl</a>
Antisemitism Classroom Toolkit	Website Activity/Lesson Plan	Religion	anti-semitism, classroom resourc...	<a href="https://www.fswc.ca">https://www.fswc.ca</a>
UN Report on combating antisemitism to elimi...	Document Resource Website	Religion	anti-Semitism, United Nations, G...	<a href="https://www.ohchr.c">https://www.ohchr.c</a>
Factsheet – Antisemitism in Canada	Website	Religion	anti-Semitism, factsheet, govern...	<a href="https://www.canada">https://www.canada</a>
Catholic Social Teachings	Website Article/Blog	Religion (Catholic)	Catholic, Catholic Social Teachin...	<a href="https://stmikes.utor">https://stmikes.utor</a>
Ontario Catholic School Graduate Expectations	Website	Religion (Catholic)	Catholic, Graduate expectations, ...	<a href="https://iceont.ca/res">https://iceont.ca/res</a>

While selecting the resources, I had to specify the type of resources, such as an article, blog, website, video, policy document, or activity/lesson plan. I also needed to provide the link to each resource and identify the target audience, such as teachers, administrators, staff, and others. Most importantly, I had to indicate the focal point of each resource, such as race, gender discrimination, religion, disability, language, or culture. Additionally, I identified relevant keywords for each resource, such as antisemitism, anti-racism, equity, women empowerment, and immigration. I also wrote a short summary (approx. 100 words) for each resource. Based on the information, the district leader reviewed, evaluated, and approved the resources for inclusion. Once they approved, these resources were loaded into an online space that serves as the Resource Hub.

The second phase of the Resource Hub began with designing its webpage. It took quite a bit of imagining, group brainstorming and prototyping to figure out the best way to showcase the resources.

**Figure 2:**

*Screenshot of the Resource Hub Landing Page*



The Huron-Perth Catholic DSB EIAR Resource Hub's goal is to provide a variety of excellent resources that cover the areas of Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism.

This site will continue to be updated with current articles, resources, and learning opportunities.



Eventually, the collaborative group decided that the resources would be divided into two main categories: General Resources and Code-Protected Groups. The General Resources section includes various subsections: EDIAR and Catholic Social Teachings; General Equity and Anti-Bias Resources; General Professional Development and Teaching Resources; HPCDSB and Ontario Resources.

The section on Code-Protected Groups focuses on resources related to equity, diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism. These sections are categorized by various terminologies such as ancestry, ethnic origin, color, race, place of origin; creed, religion; decolonization and Indigenous ways of knowing; language; people with disabilities; sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression; and socio-economic status. The Resource Hub is significant for professional development, providing educators with the tools and knowledge necessary to foster EDIAR within educational environments. The Resource Hub is designed for ease of use and accessibility from any device, anywhere with an internet connection. The visual layout of the hub is communicative, including both pictures and words, making it user-friendly. We carefully selected language and terminology to ensure we used widely accepted and globally recognized terms to avoid any potential contradictions or unintentional harm. Figure 3, on the next page, provides an example of two different pages on the Resource Hub to showcase how resources were laid out.

**Figure 3:**

*Screenshots of Sample Pages from the Resource Hub*



This section outlines general resources including relevant equity-related policy documents, opportunities for self-directed learning, webinars of holistic equity topics, and connections between equity topics and Catholic values, graduation requirements, and Social Teachings.

Click the images below for relevant pages outlining these links and resources!



EIAR and Catholic Social Teachings



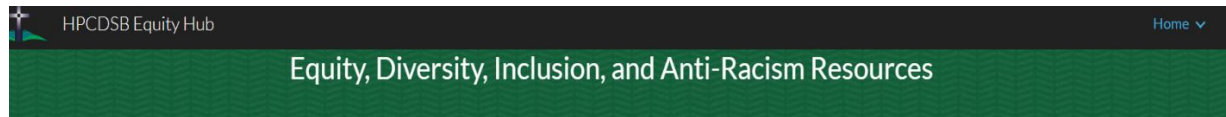
General Equity and Anti-Bias Resources



General Professional Development and Teaching



HPCDSB and Ontario Resources



This section provides code-specific resources including information on key terms, advisory documents, and topic-based knowledge. It also contains teaching resources, and some have voices and stories from members of these communities.

Click one of the images below to see these links and resources!



Ancestry, Ethnic Origin,  
Colour, Race, Place of Origin



Creed, Religion



Decolonization and  
Indigenous Ways of Knowing



Language

## Disseminating Resource Hub

The primary objective of the Resource Hub was to ensure it is accessible to its target audience who are the teachers of the HPCDSB. This objective was initiated by publicly launching the Resource Hub in a presentation at a district-wide professional learning session held online in May 2023. The presentation was designed by the district lead and graduate students who had been working on the Resource Hub with input from other collaborators. The presentation was introduced by the district lead and then conducted by the developers who were directly involved in developing and designing the Resource Hub.

During the presentation, the developers explained the objectives of the Resource Hub, the criteria established for selecting resources, and the strategies used to design the content. They outlined how the Resource Hub could benefit different members within educational environments and emphasized the goal of identifying EDIAR resources that could be practically implemented. The sessions also included an open forum for the audience to explore the resources and ask

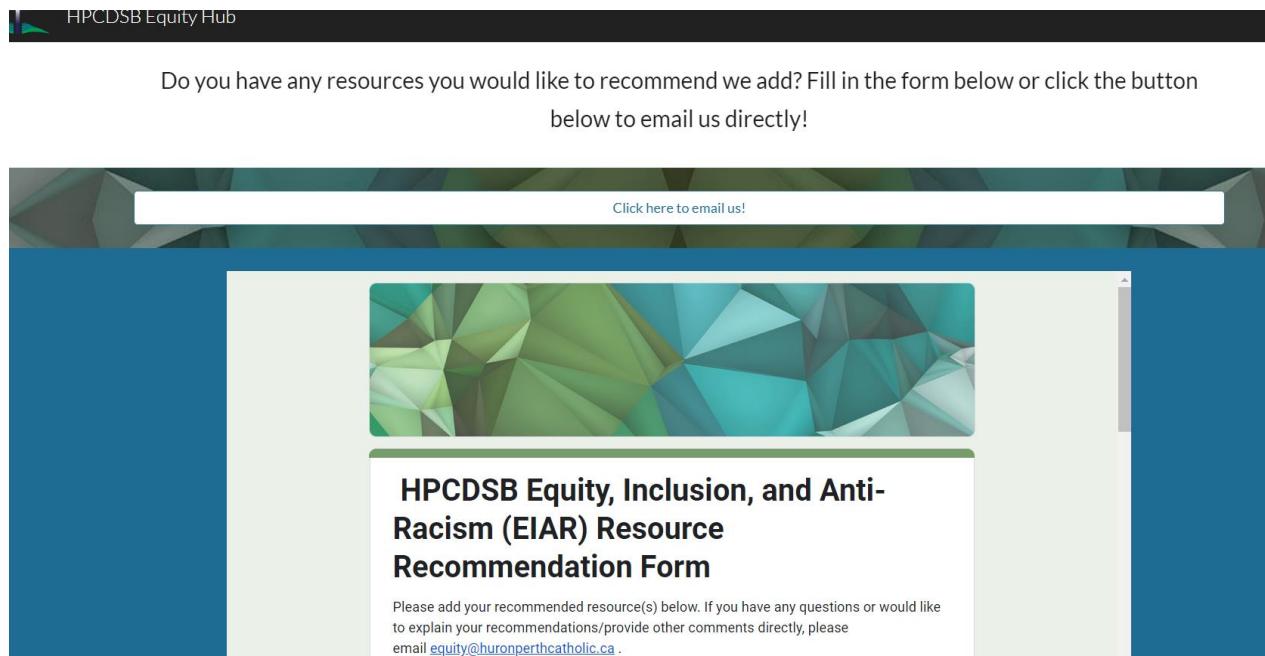


questions about the Resource Hub. The question-answer session has made the Resource Hub objectives more understandable and interactive.

During the professional learning day, teachers and school leaders were asked to participate in a survey to provide feedback on the Resource Hub and suggest improvements or additional content. The survey was designed to be completed quickly, taking only a few minutes and was given out during work time. In addition, Figure 4 shows the feedback option built into the website of the Resource Hub, where individuals can share their opinions and suggestions anytime. This feedback is monitored by a district lead and responded to as necessary. Any feedback provided about the Resource Hub, on the day of its release or in an ongoing way is completed anonymously.

**Figure 4:**

*Feedback section for Resource Hub*



To enhance the visibility of the Resource Hub, HPCDSB extended beyond initial presentations by following up with a series of posters available to schools promoting the Resource Hub and created a series of advert for social media platforms. The visual reminders of the Resource Hub post-presentation launch day were designed to provide frequent, visual reminders of a place where HPCDSB staff and leaders could go to access EDIAR materials.

Worth noting is that the Resource Hub is regularly updated with timely resources essential for contemporary pedagogy. When resources are added, established communication pathways, such as the 'Monday Memo' within HPCDSB carries the message to school leaders and teachers.

The development, launch and dissemination of the Resource Hub by HPCDSB promotes EDIAR. Through targeted presentations, engaging question-answer sessions, and proactive approaches of feedback via surveys and online platforms, HPCDSB has taken steps to ensure that the Resource Hub meets the evolving needs of its users. By engaging various communication channels such as school posters and social media promotions, the Hub is positioned for widespread visibility. Its continuous updates with significant resources, including those addressing sensitive topics like mental health during conflicts, underscore its relevance in contemporary pedagogical approaches. Moving forward, HPCDSB remains committed to maintaining the Resource Hub's accessibility, thereby fostering a supportive environment for ongoing educational advancements of EDIAR.

The development and launch of the Resource Hub by HPCDSB demonstrate effective knowledge mobilization (KMb), as explained by Cooper, Levin, and Campbell (2009). According to their idea, KmB involves not just transferring knowledge from experts to others but is a social process that includes creating, sharing, and adapting knowledge to fit specific contexts. Through

careful, intentional, and collaborative planning, the Resource Hub is designed to share established research and adapt resources to meet the unique needs of educators. This approach ensures the Resource Hub continuously evolves and integrates new insights to support teachers' professional development and promote equity, diversity, and inclusivity in education.

### **Chapter 4: Reflections of an Educational Researcher**

In this chapter, I discuss the pivotal role of the Resource Hub in advancing EDIAR within HPCDSB as part of Ontario's Equity Education Plan (2017). This analysis emphasizes how the Resource Hub is helping HPCDSB educators, leaders and researchers who are involved in the project. It also highlights a reflection of the key research questions that reinforce this project. Furthermore, I reflect on the personal and professional learning I have gained as an educational researcher through this Master of Education (MEd) project, detailing how it enriches my development as a researcher and contributes to the field of educational equity.

#### **Integrating the Resource Hub Equity and Inclusion Aims in Ontario**

The detailed discussion on Resource Hub will address the first key question of my project: how does the HPCDSB Resource Hub align with and contribute to the objectives of the updated Equity and Inclusive Education Plan of the Ontario Ministry of Education (OME)?

The Ontario Human Rights Code, enacted in 1962, underscores a dedication to promote equal rights, opportunities, and the exclusion of discrimination and harassment based on factors such as race, color, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, disability, creed, and age (Campbell, 2021, p. 413). In Canada, there is a metaphorical concept known as a 'cultural mosaic' which is an idea suggesting that individuals can integrate into Canadian society while still maintaining and valuing the diversity of their identities, cultures, ethnicities, histories, and experiences (Campbell, 2021, p. 410). The cultural mosaic thinking is embodied in education and equity as described in this project.

Central to Canadian national policy is a strongly committed view to multiculturalism. Cepin and Naimi (2015) mentioned in their study that embracing diversity and accepting differences are emphasized as fundamental aspects of the Canadian approach to the nation and its

education systems. At one time, Ontario was identified as the province with the highest level of cultural diversity in Canada (OME, 2014) and to this day, although no longer considered the highest level of diversity, Ontario remains a province with diverse cities (Singer, 2023). With the change of time and different governments, multiculturalism became a significant aspect of the education system in Ontario, which plays an important role in fostering a collective Canadian civic and social identity among its residents (Gereluk et al., 2016). Even though multiculturalism has been replaced with other ideas such as gender identity, sexuality etc. and values over time, it is an important idea when considering equity in education.

Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009) identifies diversity as the asset for the province, stating that to fulfill the commitment of diversity, it is essential to respect and appreciate an entire spectrum of differences. Moreover, to build a unified society and a robust economy it is pivotal to nurture equitable and inclusive education. At the time of launching the Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2009) priorities for the school boards require:

Each school board to develop and implement an equity and inclusive education policy and guidelines for the board and its schools; and each school to create and support a positive school climate that fosters and promotes equity, inclusive education, and diversity. (p.11)

Promoting equity, inclusivity, and diversity in education requires active participation from every district school board as well as educators, administrators, and researchers. The HPCDSB's Resource Hub embodies this collaboration and a commitment to Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009). The Resource Hub seeks to foster equity and to dismantle biases, obstacles, and power imbalances that limit students' opportunities for learning, development, and active participation in society. A unique aspect of this Resource Hub is bridging Catholic

Education Values and Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy (2009) to promote EDIAR in education.

The Resource Hub serves as the practical reflection of Ontario's Education Plan (2017), by addressing its first two focus areas to promote inclusive and equitable education. The first focus area, School and Classroom Practices, involves promoting culturally relevant and inclusive teaching methods. The second focus area, Leadership, Governance, and Human Resource Practices, emphasizes integrating equity, inclusion, and human rights into educator's training, leaders' performance evaluations, and enhancing diversity in the recruitment and promotion of the education workforce.

The Resource Hub provides teachers with access to EDIAR ideas and resources to advance practical aspects of eliminating disparities in education. This Resource Hub supports teachers' professional development in equity education. Consequently, it can be stated that the HPCDSB Resource Hub is actively expanding Ontario's Equity Education Plan.

The Resource Hub serves as a platform for professional learning which may support educators to understand and apply equity principles in their daily practice. It provides guidelines and best practices that promote EDIAR, ensuring that the education system reflects the diverse backgrounds of the student population it serves.

The Resource Hub is effectively supporting the OME's goals by providing comprehensive resources and initiatives that promote inclusivity and diversity within the school community. It offers professional development for educators, diverse learning materials for teachers-students, and raises a school culture that values equity. By aligning its programs with the OME's updated objectives, the Resource Hub is trying promote.

that all students feel equal and safe which contributes to a more equitable educational pedagogy.

### **Implications of an Equity in Practice Initiative**

Equity in education requires the Ministry of Education as well as educators, curriculum designers, policy makers, evaluators, researchers, and others involved to work together. The HPCDSB Resource Hub is an initiative of a school district to provide access to develop the teachers' professionally. In time, the Resource Hub may also serve as an inspiration for other school boards, curriculum designers, policy makers, evaluators, researchers and those learning to teach to consider EDIAR. Here, I will discuss how the Resource Hub offers substantial benefits to educators, curriculum designers, policy makers, evaluators, researchers in fostering an inclusive learning environment.

### ***Educators***

Teachers' self-efficacy is a crucial skill for educators in inclusive classrooms (Specht et al., 2016). The effectiveness of inclusive education is closely tied to teachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusion. Research from Specht and colleagues emphasizes that for inclusive education to be succeed, teachers must have the belief that all students belong in regular classrooms, feel self-assured in instructing diverse students, and possess the necessary knowledge and skills for such teaching (Specht et al, 2016). Furthermore, Nadelson et al., (2019) emphasizes the importance of teachers learning to implement a culturally responsive curriculum and addressing diverse topics related to poverty, social class, culture, ethnicity, and more. In other words, a teacher's equity mindset can influence the development of their students' mindset.

The Resource Hub serves as a comprehensive platform for educators to expand EDIAR mindsets. By offering access to a wide range of materials, including policy documents, articles,

videos, and teaching strategies, the Hub equips educators with practical insights and actionable guidance. Access to this continuous professional development may help teachers access and address complex EDIAR-related topics effectively, which help to promote a more inclusive and supportive educational environment. By accessing materials focused on various aspects of equity, such as race, gender, disability, and socio-economic status, teachers can develop more modified and responsive teaching strategies. The Resource Hub's artifacts focus on creating brave conversations and fostering positive spaces for LGBTQ+ students and other marginalized groups to further enhance teachers' ability to foster a welcoming and affirming school climate.

The integration of Catholic values (A Catholic World View, 2019) with principles of equity and social justice is a key feature woven throughout the Resource Hub. Educators can use the resources to help the students to understand the importance of dignity, respect, and the common good, which are central to both Catholic teachings and EDIAR principles. This dual focus supports the holistic development of students, encouraging them to grow not only academically but also morally and spiritually. By promoting these values, educators can inspire students to become active and compassionate citizens committed to social justice and the betterment of society.

The influence of Resource Hub in teachers' professional development is clearly addressing the second objective of my project asking, in what ways the Equity Resource Hub impacts teacher professional learning about equity.

### ***Ministry of Education***

The Resource Hub may serve as a model for other school boards and educational institutions which are aiming to enhance their EDIAR efforts. Further research is needed to determine if the Ministry of Education can represent this Hub as a model to encourage and guide



other school boards in developing similar initiatives to ensure a more consistent and extensive adoption of EDIAR practices across the province.

### ***Researchers***

The Resource Hub's various collection of materials such as policy documents, teaching resources, and professional development tools, provides a valuable resource for researchers to examine EDIAR practices in education. Through these resources, researchers can gain insights into the current state of equity initiatives in schools and identify best practices and areas for improvement. This can contribute to the broader body of knowledge on EDIAR in education which will contribute to future research and policy development. The development and implementation of the Resource Hub can serve as a detailed case study for the researchers who are interested in the practical aspects of promoting equity in education. Researchers can analyze it as a case study to understand the challenges and successes encountered by HPCDSB to provide valuable lessons for other institutions which are approaching to take similar initiatives. Ongoing collaborations between researchers, the MOE and those in school boards can strengthen evidence-informed approaches to promoting EDIAR.

### ***Curriculum Designers and Policy Makers***

The Resource Hub may be impactful for curriculum designers and policy makers as well. The resources were selected from worldwide sources which provide a global perspective on practicing equity and addressing inequity in pedagogy. These global perspectives offer curriculum and policy designers a look into diverse international approaches to EDIAR in education. This global scenario enables curriculum and policy designers to reflect on their thinking to consider if curricula and policies are inclusive and culturally sensitive to effectively address the diverse needs of the students. The Hub's practical examples and comprehensive

materials may support the development of the curricula and policy that promote inclusivity and respect for all individuals to enhance the overall educational experience for every student.

### **Researcher Reflection**

Reflection is a valuable, if not necessary, aspect of growth and is essential for educators who want to have responsive pedagogy for EDIAR. In this section, I reflect on my thoughts about this project from three perspectives: as a researcher and developer, as an MEd student, and from my personal experience as a teacher and a member of a minority community in my country.

#### ***As a Researcher and Developer***

From the beginning, I have been deeply involved in the development of this Resource Hub. I was responsible for searching and curating the resources for the Hub, which included case studies, articles, research papers, videos, podcasts, posters, images, and more. Before developing the Hub to promote equity in education, it was crucial for me to understand how biases, exclusion, and inequities manifest.

As a researcher, I believe that to solve a problem, you must first understand its root causes. This HPCDSB Resource Hub allowed me to learn more about the root causes related to EDIAR and reflect on how educators and researchers can recognize and address inequities, biases, and discrepancies while simultaneously promoting equity in education.

I now realize that promoting equity in education is not solely the responsibility of educators; it is a societal duty. When we practice equity in society, it extends to education. This realization has influenced my future research endeavors; I plan to focus on studying individuals who are victims of inequity, deprivation, biases, and exclusion to further understand and address these issues. This project has been an eye-opening experience which reinforces the importance of comprehensive understanding and societal responsibility to promote equity in education.

***As a MEd Student***

The primary reason for pursuing my second Master's degree abroad was to gain a global perspective on the objectives of education. By writing this project and developing the HPCDSB Resource Hub, I have fulfilled my desire and fueled my interest in social-justice-oriented education.

To develop the Resource Hub and undertake my project, I completed an internship with HPCDSB. This experience taught me that achieving social justice and equity in education requires teamwork, where every person involved is accountable for their efforts and actions. The Resource Hub is the practical evidence of teamwork. My experience of working with HPCDSB has broadened my knowledge and interest in equity, diversity, and inclusivity in education. This MEd project is a small contribution to promote equity in education and represents the first step towards a career dedicated to advancing social justice in education.

***As a Teacher and an Individual***

In my earlier career, I taught for five years and therefore, I can understand the significance of this Resource Hub for supporting professional development. In my career, I experienced many situations where my students expressed their struggles with feeling excluded, unwanted, and deprived.

In my positionality statement, I mentioned that I belong to a minority community in my country. I have personally encountered various forms of bias and exclusion. These experiences have given me a unique perspective on the importance of equity and inclusion in education. The development and implementation of the Resource Hub has not only been a professional and academic pursuit but also a personal interest to ensure that no student feels marginalized or excluded.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, my contributions to the HPCDSB Resource Hub demonstrates my experiences and aspirations as a researcher, student, teacher, and individual commitment to equity in education. It is evidence of the power of collaboration and the importance of addressing the root causes of inequity to foster an inclusive and just educational environment. Through this project, I aim to contribute to a future where every student can thrive, regardless of their background or identity.

The development and implementation of the HPCDSB Resource Hub stands as a practical manifestation to the commitment of Ontario's educational institutions towards fostering EDIAR in education. This initiative not only aligns closely with the objectives of Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy but can also serve as a model for promoting EDI practices province- and nationwide. As a researcher, MEd student, and advocate for social justice in education, this project has reinforced the importance of collaborative efforts in addressing inequities and promoting educational equity. Through ongoing research and advocacy, I aim to contribute further to the advancement of equity and inclusion in education and ensure that every student has equal opportunities to be succeed.

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