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Multiculturalism, Neoliberal Education Policies and its Effect on the Black Youth in Ontario Schools

Major Research Paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Canadian American Studies

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Section One: Introduction

Multiculturalism is finding unity in diversity. Canada is a multicultural country, not only on a face value but by law as well. According to Bakhov (2015), Multiculturalism is a policy aimed at preserving and developing cultural differences and the theory or ideology that substantiates this policy in a country and the world at large. At the time of confederation in 1867, multiculturalism existed as there was three founding ethnic groups: Aboriginal peoples, French, and the British. Ethnic diversity increased with the arrival of people from all over the world such as the Chinese (railway workers), Japanese (agricultural workers) and Blacks (underground railway) to name a few (Guo & Wong, 2016). Canada’s multicultural policy was created in 1971 by Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and it was set within a bilingual framework making Canada the first country in the world with an official multicultural policy. Eventually, the policy was included in the Canadian constitution in 1983 and further passed in parliament in 1988 led by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney. The various provinces thereafter enacted some form of multiculturalism policy; for example, Ontario had one in 1977(Guo & Wong, 2016). The main objectives of the policy is to assist cultural groups to maintain and foster their identity to help cultural groups to overcome barriers to their full participation in Canadian society; to promote exchanges amongst cultural groups; and also to assist immigrants to learn an official language (Dewing, 2013). As directly stated by the Government of Canada in 1971:

A policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework is the most suitable means of assuring the cultural freedom of all Canadians. Such a policy should help to break down discriminatory attitudes and cultural jealousies. National unity, if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one’s own individual identity: out of this can grow respect for that of others, and a willingness to share ideas, attitudes and assumptions...The Government will support and encourage the various cultural and ethnic groups that give structure and vitality to our society. They will be encouraged to share their cultural expression and values with other Canadians and so contribute a richer life for all (Government of Canada, 1971).
Bakhov (2015) asserts that the fear of separatism forced the Canadian government to concede to national minorities, that is, to resort to the multiculturalism principles: the French gained cultural and partly political and legal autonomy because the governing British sought a way to “buy” their loyalty to the crown (7). Multiculturalism presented a new narrative to Canada with the equitable “mosaic” that was seemingly liberal (Sy de jesus, 2012). This concept of the mosaic also represented Canada’s departure from its assimilationist history to a desire for a culture of diversity stemming from its ideals of universal human rights and civic liberalism. The main objective of the Multiculturalism Act was to create a unifying national identity that defined Canadian nationhood. Clearly, it is important to note that the Act was to ensure that every member of the Canadian society felt welcomed without any form of discrimination. All these prove that Canada at the time was welcoming of all ethnicities and cultures as it was the only and first county at the time to enact a Multiculturalism policy. In as much as the Multiculturalism Act sought to bring people of different backgrounds and cultures together, it received some backlash from some groups of people. Because Quebec had an agenda to build a unique French-Canadian culture, the Multiculturalism Act was perceived as a strategy by the Anglophones to undermine the French as a national minority. Nugent (2006) asserts that multiculturalism was a calculated attempt to deny the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society. She outlined how the Trudeau government enacted the policy as a “cultural bulwark against Quebec nationalism” by “equating the national status of Quebec to the ethnic status of the polyethnic groups”. Moodley (1995) says that the multiculturalism policy was not without problems since its introduction as the Aboriginal peoples saw it as a way of neutralizing their treaties and land claims and undervaluing their status as the founders of Canada.
In terms of multicultural education, Jean-Pierre & Nunes (2011) say that multicultural education can be conceived as an outcome of the federal policy of multiculturalism even though education remains a provincial responsibility with school boards deciding their orientations and practices. It is also imperative to note that some authors have criticized the concept of multiculturalism. For instance, Fleras & Elliott (2002) argue that multiculturalism is divisive and marginalizing as it undermines Canadian society by promoting cultural diversity at the detriment of national unity, and it also commodifies culture by invoking cultural solutions to structural problems. This implies that multiculturalism as a policy is culturally entrenched and does not provide adequate and cogent solutions to the problems faced in the society like racism. It is therefore minimalistic to believe that a policy which is highly based on the notion of cultural differences can address basic structural problems in the society like inequality and the marginalization of minority groups.

Aside multiculturalism as an overarching concept, an aspect of this paper focuses on multicultural education. Education remains a provincial responsibility in Canada, therefore, it is a prerogative of the schools to include multicultural policies in their framework or otherwise. Essentially, Canada’s vastness makes it practically impossible to have a single national education curriculum or centralized school system. Following the overarching concept of multiculturalism came the concept of multicultural education. Most authors have attempted providing a definition of multicultural education, however, Swartz (2005) provides a comprehensive definition which is also in line with the main concept of this paper. He defines multicultural education as;

...an education that uses methodologies and instructional materials which promote equity of information and high standards of academic scholarship in an environment that respects the potential of each student. An education that is multicultural conforms to the highest standards of educational practice: the use of well-researched content that is accurate and up to date; the presentation of diverse indigenous accounts and perspectives that encourage
critical thinking; the avoidance of dated terminologies, stereotypes, and demeaning, distorted characterizations; the use of intellectually challenging materials presented in an environment of free and open discussion. In short, multicultural education is a restatement of sound educational pedagogy and practice that requires the collective representation of all cultures and groups as significant to the production of knowledge (Swartz 2005, pg. 34).

This paper is a careful attempt to find the significance of multiculturalism in Ontario elementary and secondary schools as well as the challenges of the black youth in the Ontario education system. In this paper I will discuss the effects of government’s neoliberal education policies on the black youth in Ontario schools, and how it affects multicultural education and the black youth. Among the governments I will examine are the 1993 NDP government led by Bob Rae, the 1995 Progressive Government led by Mike Harris and the 2003 Liberal government led by Dalton McGuinty. The NDP government put in place some equity policies but were repealed by the conservatives in 1995 when they were voted into power. In 2003, when Premier McGuinty came into power, he reintroduced some of the policies initiated by the then NDP government. As such, this research paper proceeds as follows; section one is an introduction and background to multiculturalism in Canada. The next section tackles multicultural education and neoliberal policies in Ontario schooling hence focuses on the policies adopted by various governments in this regard.

For the purposes of this paper, I will look at the education policies of Bob Rae (NDP) in 1993, the Progressive Conservatives led by Mike Harris in 1995, the 2003 Liberal government led by Dalton McGuinty, and the current Conservative government led by Doug Ford. These governments are the point of focus of this paper because their education policies highlight key equity and inclusion policies which is another focus of this research. Inferring from how the education policies are adopted and implemented by these governments, I seek to draw the link in explaining how multiculturalism is realized in these policies as well. Section three elaborates the
challenges of black youth in the Ontario education system and how neoliberal education policies play a role in furthering these challenges. The fourth section re-visions how the Ontario educational system can be set to create more inclusive and equitable schooling environment for the black youth in schools. The last section is the conclusion and summary of arguments raised, providing key highlights for future study. To put into proper context, this research is mainly in two folds; with the first two sections focusing on multicultural education and education policies adopted and implemented by the four governments and the second part of this research places a focus on the challenges black youth in Ontario schools and how we can re-envision the Ontario schooling system to create an equitable and inclusive environment.
Section Two: Multicultural Education and Neoliberal policies in Ontario Schooling

This section examines multicultural education in Ontario schools and how neoliberal policies by various governments hinder the progress of Black students due to the unequal nature of such policies which include both provincial and school board policies. Since education is a provincial responsibility, much focus will be placed on neoliberal policies and how they impact multicultural education and equity schooling in Ontario schools. Here, much focus will be placed on multicultural education among the black youth in Ontario schools highlighting how these policies affect them directly. Varying schools of thought with regards to multicultural education will be discussed.

Neoliberal ideologies in public services have characterized the Canadian policy structure for a very long time. Over the last thirty years, Canadian public education systems, which is administered by provincial governments appear to be under the pressure and influence of neoliberalism (Dionne & Miley, 2019). Khoury (2015) explains how a common theme of neoliberalism is portrayed as one which “fosters a culture of individualism as opposed to a collective responsibility for social wellbeing, pushing forward a problematic understanding that there can be a fair society diametrically different to a social justice perspective” (p. 30). He equally questions how fairness can be achieved in the society in an environment of individual freedom and choice, free market, competition and capital. Critics of neoliberalism argue that such (neoliberal) policies in education have created a significant result of inequalities and disparities in the society mainly with regards to issues of privatization, marketization, and performativity (Basu, 2004). Dei (2019) notes that neoliberalism provides an extension of European imperialism which has created a fertile ground for Western imperialism, exacerbated by racism and anti-Indigeneity. Further, he observes that the poor are kept out of education due to neoliberal education policies; for example,
within African communities, the high cost of education and the imposition of fees on parents and local communities has resulted in cuts in state educational funding. Also, the cuts to national educational budgets have led to low salaries and conditions of service for teachers, large class sizes as well as the unavailability of trained teachers (Dei, 2019; Pg. 52). Pinto (2015) asserts that since the 1990s, neoliberal ideologies have driven education reform globally, most notably in the USA, the UK, Australia and Canada. As subtly put by Carr & Hartnett (1996),

...it has led to a shift away from the more humanistic and egalitarian social democratic political ideology that had dominated most of the 1960s and 1970s to the more utilitarian political ideology [one] which signaled a return to market forces, individual responsibility and economic freedom. (p. 20).

After the adoption of federal multiculturalism policy in Canada, a school board in Toronto adopted some practices reflecting multicultural education. Jean-Pierre & Nunes (2011) identified the paradigm shift following the federal policy of Multiculturalism’s implementation in one Ontario school board and how it was associated with an ideal type of multicultural education. In this regard, it examines how policies that are adopted at the federal level can have significant impact on practices at other levels of administration, in this case, the school board. They adopted the typology of “three models of multicultural education”: the enrichment model, the enlightenment model and the empowerment model, espoused by Fleras & Elliot (2003).

The enrichment model of multicultural education targets exposing students to variety of cultures thus, in practice, it requires the addition of multicultural elements to the curriculum, multicultural awareness planning, challenging stereotypes, cross-cultural communication and intercultural sensitivity awareness (Fleras & Elliott 2003, 336). This model, according to Jean-Pierre & Nunes (2011) carries the danger of over-romanticizing minorities by studying culture out of its cultural and temporal contexts. This model is deemed as not addressing unequal relationship. The enlightenment model on the other hand entails a transformative approach for social justice. It
entails a careful attempt to change students’ attitudes and beliefs about diversity (Fleras & Elliott 2003, 336). Therefore, it requires students to examine race relations in society and think about hierarchical and unequal relationships unlike the enrichment model. For instance, the negative aspects of history which includes inequality should be reflected upon, finding ways to address these relationships. The empowerment model places total focus on the needs of minority students, with the basis that the school system is failing minority students hence what is required is a school-context that places focus on their strengths and learning styles to achieve academic achievement (Fleras & Elliott 2003). Practically, this denotes the creation of culturally safe spaces for minority students such as Afrocentric schools. Jean-Pierre & Nunes (2011) examined the paradigm shift experienced by the Board of Education for the City of Toronto between 1960 and 1975, in their approach towards immigrant students, from a focus on integration to an empowerment model of multicultural education (153).

In order to understand the context of neoliberalism within the scope of multiculturalism better, this paper will discuss what neoliberal education reforms are and what they seek to do as well. Ross & Gibson (2007) contend that public education in North America is under attack due to neoliberal government policies with education being the main target due to its large market size as well as the centrality of education to the economy. Historically, the shift towards neoliberalism in Canada started in the mid-1980s with the Mulroney government adopting policies aimed at promoting economic growth through competition and deregulation reducing the role of government and in public expenditures. Neoliberalism has been a key focus in the eyes of educators due to its immense impact on the policies and practices of institutionalized education in all its forms including the notion to consider education policy shifts in relation to the basic social
and economic purposes of education (Carpenter et al, 2012). Giroux (2010) pinpoints the effects of neoliberalism by asserting that;

with the advent of neoliberalism, or what some call free-market fundamentalism, we have witnessed the production and widespread adoption within educational theory and practice of what I want to call the politics of economic Darwinism … [which] undermines most forms of solidarity while promoting the logic of unchecked competition and unbridled individualism (Pg. 3).

Brathwaite (2016) for instance, argued that neoliberal education reforms place much focus on high stakes accountability, increased assessment, as well as school choice. She further asserts that under neoliberal reform, schools are required to increase the number of assessment and are awarded or punished according to student performance. Since these schools are classified by performance, serving as a measure of school quality, parents rely on this classification when selecting schools rather than attend a zoned school. The assumption thereby is that when all schools are improved and all families have a choice in selecting schools, they will choose the school that best suits their needs. Brathwaite (2016) suggests that this focus does not reduce inequality between schools. Similarly, Apple (2001) explains how neo-liberal policy solutions to education problems have further created greater inequalities and disparities in society. As such Tabi & Gosine (2018), say that neoliberalism exists to marginalize, and group individuals based on race, gender, and class with these inequalities being of benefit to individual entities. In other words, minority groups in the society are the hardest hit by neoliberal policies as it exists to favor the privileged in the society at the detriment of racialized and marginalized groups of people who are often ignored. In a similar vein, Harvey (2005) asserts that the disconnection between neoliberalism, the practice of policy formation, and the impacts of these policies on the actual lived realities of communities must be taken into consideration when discussing neoliberalism. This is
particularly true because the theoretical implication of the neoliberal education reform is different from the experiences of the people affected by these reforms.

Having said this, this remaining section will provide a careful analysis of neoliberal education policies adopted by various governments in Ontario specifically, ranging from different governments like the Progressive Conservatives and the Liberals. Harper (1996) explains that in 1985, the provincial government in Ontario schools issued a policy on race relations assuring the people that it would adequately work to stop all aspects of racial discrimination including policies which had a discriminatory effect, albeit unintentionally. The provincial advisory committee was created to conduct a series on the inequalities that existed in schools. This committee was appointed by the Ministry of Education and Training. The policy drafted (Policy on Race and Ethnocultural Equity) was a model intended for the creation of equity policies across the province (Ministry of Education and Training).

According to Anderson & Jafaar (2012), education policy in Ontario schools underwent some key changes in the 1990s and the early 2000s due to the several changes in government from David Peterson’s Liberal Party (1986-90) to the New Democratic Party led by Bob Rae (1990-95), to the Conservative Party under Mike Harris (1995-2002) and his successor Ernie Eves (2002-03), then back to the Liberals and Dalton McGuinty in the Fall of 2003 (79). They further explained that the Conservative government in the 1960s legislated a consolidation of school boards from 300 to about 170 which lead to the establishment of large school boards and district office bureaucracies serving many schools. In the same vein, changes in federal immigration policies in the 1960s also led to a rise in racial, cultural, and linguistic diversity in schools. For instance, in the 1970s, the Toronto and York Boards of Education adopted the first multicultural policies in education which led to several other demographic policy changes (Anderson & Jafaar, 2012; 82).
In 1993, the government adopted a key education policy program termed *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* which required all school boards to adopt antiracism and ethnocultural equity policies.

Correspondingly, the province created an *Anti-Racism Directorate* to oversee and keep track of the implementation of this policy. The “‘Antiracism and ethnocultural equity’” refers to the equitable treatment of members of all racial and ethnocultural groups and the elimination of institutional and individual barriers to equity” (Ministry of Education & Training, 1993). This policy framework is to ensure that students regardless of their identities achieve their potential and acquire accurate knowledge and information and confidence in their cultural as well as racial identities, equipping them with knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors needed to live in a diverse world (Ministry of Education & Training, 1993). According to Rezai-Rashti et al (2015), Ontario has had some policies targeted at addressing diversity, equity, and social justice. In 1993, the Ministry of Education under the leadership of Bob Rae, the NDP leader led the initiative to develop and implement an antiracism and ethnocultural equity policy and ensuring that school boards are made accountable for their work on issues of equity. Rezai-Rashti (2015) asserts that even though Ontario had progressive policies addressing diversity, equity, and social justice, these issues were not given much attention in Ontario schools until the mid-1990s and the election of the NDP. Some schools boards like the Toronto Board of Education, had developed policies on race relations and multiculturalism, however, it was not until 1993 that the Ministry of Education formally mandated the development and implementation of an antiracism and ethnocultural equity policy, through *Policy/Program Memorandum No. 119* (Pg. 12). The Ministry established an Equity Unit to support the work of school boards as well as holding them accountable for their work on equity issues. Unfortunately, the NDP government was not able to fulfill the
implementation of this policy as their government was overturned in the election of 1995 that brought the Progressive Conservatives of Mike Harris into power. Jones (2004) similarly notes that the education policy environment began to change in 1995 with the election of Mike Harris from the Progressive Conservative who implemented the Common-Sense Revolution (CSR) where government expenditures including education were cut down drastically. The Conservatives closed the Anti-Racism Secretariat created by the NDP, and equity issues were disregarded as the Policy/Program Memorandum 119 (1993) which sought to create equity and inclusion was not enforced (Rezai-Rashti, 2015).

When the Progressive Conservative government was voted into power in 1995 in Ontario, it was under a theme of what became popularly known as the ‘common sense revolution’ (CSR) which had a specific economic vision for Ontario. The main aim was to either cancel or weaken policies and laws that sought to improve the social condition of society (Delhi, 1996). The CSR was a political platform and set of policies that aimed to solve the socio-economic problems in Ontario with lower taxes and sweeping education policy reform. The so-called common-sense revolution was set to place a focus on the need for parents, teachers, and communities to take control of the education of their youth (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999). The message of the common-sense revolution focused on job creation, tax reduction, and cost saving strategies thus bringing changes in all area such as education, municipal administration, roads, and many more (Basu, 2004). For these reforms to pass without a major public backlash, the Progressive Conservative party thought it wise to create a crises in schooling by undermining the reputation of the public education system, thereby creating a concern over ‘the declining quality of Ontario education’ in order to further their agenda.
After the conservatives were voted into power in 1995, many schools in Ontario realized that most of the programs that strived towards equity and social justice were either terminated or had their funding drastically slashed (Delhi, 1996). In 1996, the Progressive Conservatives under the leadership of Mike Harris dissolved the Anti-Racism Directorate which left the school boards with equity policies without any form of funding to help ensure that they are successful in terms of implementation. Sohail (2006) notes that these cuts threatened the future of antiracist and equity education in Ontario because they were antithetical towards improving the experience of students who faced marginalization and discrimination in schools. Delhi (2006) states that this conservative agenda mostly affected cultural minorities as they directly faced the government’s ideological attack. Due to the Harris government’s cutbacks to school equity initiatives, some of Ontario’s school boards were left with policies at varying degrees of completion, while others were completely without. As Braithwaite (2003) writes, “from all accounts, equity education suffered a deliberate and severe attack...and just as we thought that the message [of] equity was gaining a decisive place in education, we have become witness to a retrenchment [of these ideals] which if not quickly arrested will obliterate the gains of the past decade” (p. 132). Few months after the election, Sattler (2012) notes that the Fewer School Boards Act, (Bill 104) reduced the number of school boards from 129 to 72 with a corresponding decrease in the number of trustees from 1900 to 700 and a limit on trustee salaries of $5,000 per year (pg. 12). To facilitate the implementation of these policies, the Fewer School Boards Act, (Bill 104) legislation established the Education Improvement Commission giving it “far-reaching power to monitor and approve such things as budgets, administrative appointments, and the initial operation of the new boards” (Gidney, 1999, p. 247). Another reform that was put into practice was the Education Quality Improvement Act (EQIA), Bill 160, which changed funding structures, instituted standardized testing, reduced school
board powers, eliminated the fifth “Ontario Academic Credit (OAC)” year of high school, and instituted “teacher testing,” which examined the abilities of teachers’” (Thompson, 2008). The “OAC” was a system designed for high school students which enabled them to adequately prepare for entrance to university or college. The system had been in existence for 82 years until 2003 when the Mike Harris government eventually got rid of it. These requirements are an impediment to multicultural education because they seek to tone down equity education in these schools. Also, these standards and procedures, which are neoliberal in nature are often designed to favor the privileged in these schools.

The Progressive Conservatives led by Mike Harris envisaged policies that would lead to fruitful outcomes in education during the campaign period in the run up to the 1995 provincial elections. They made several policy proposals to improve teaching and learning in Ontario elementary and secondary schools. A policy paper was released by the Ontario Progressive Conservative Caucus in October 1992 which was known as “New Directions II: A Blueprint for Learning.” This was the manifesto document on education that outlined the intended agenda and ideas of the party regarding education policy reform. The neoconservative ideals of the party which informed this document also signaled a shift from government funding of education to a more capitalist-oriented system where school funding is extremely minimized.

Hence a neo-conservative conception of less-government spending as well as reduced social services. However, the government gave the assurance that a reduction in social services expenditure, including education would not be at the expense of the quality of public services. Mike Harris continued with his education policy reforms by formalizing the role of school councils, confirming their advisory role and clearly stating their purpose as improving student achievement and enhancing the accountability of the education system to parents (Sattler, 2012.
The school councils, however, were not substitutions for school boards (Education Improvement Commission, 1998, pg. 4). The report of the Education Improvement Commission was religiously adhered to. The Commission posited that, ‘‘school improvement plans are organized around three key areas: curriculum delivery, school environment, and parental involvement’’ (Education Improvement Commission, 1998, pg. 20). The Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) was established as a semi-autonomous agency to design and coordinate the provincial standardized testing program and provide annual reports on results (Anderson & Ben Jaafar, 2003). Other mandates of the agency included evaluating the quality of education, researching and collecting information on assessing academic achievement and suggesting strategies on how to improve the public accountability of boards (Anderson & Jafaar, 2003, pp 15).

The implementation of the education policy reforms by the Progressive Conservatives became problematic to Ontario citizens, especially teachers’ unions and parents. Pinto (2012) noted that the ‘‘Common Sense Revolution was dismissed by mainstream media, elites, and much of the business community as unjustified, petty, divisive, mean spirited, and cruel’’. The Common-Sense Revolution cut spending on funding of schools and reduced the number of school boards which was problematic because it ‘‘destabilized organized labor amongst educators and increased standardization of testing and curriculum’’ (Carpenter et al, 2012). This was met with outrage from both educators and parents because the educational standard of Ontario was falling. These led to consistent labor disruption which demoralized teachers and caused a relatively higher teacher turnover (Levin 2008). Indeed, there were aggressive reforms which lacked a clear and centrally mandated agenda as well as an absence of clear direction of educational aims (Pinto, 2011, p.57).
Another focusing event that signaled the problematic conditions was the statement issued by the National Anti-Racism Council of Canada which lamented the racist nature of the education policy reforms of the Mike Harris administration. They stated:

The boards of education have collectively refused to work any further behind the scenes to squeeze money from the province and have either passed deficit budgets or refused to pass a balanced budget containing the program cuts which they consider to be unacceptable. Some of the most dramatic cuts to date have been made to English as a Second Language, heritage language, literacy, adult education programs and related supports, which affect racialized and Aboriginal learners (National Anti-Racism Council of Canada, 2002).

The problem here was framed as racism by the Progressive Conservative government about education since it did not favor some minority groups such as the Aboriginal learners and students of the heritage language. Essentially, Ontarians were dissatisfied with the state of public education (Leithwood, Fullan & Watson, 2003; Hargreaves, 2003).

More so, the labor union aggressions, racist nature of the education policy reform of Mike Harris, cuts in the funding of special needs education as well as the amalgamation of school boards were all negative events that made the liberal government under the leadership of Dalton McGuinty reconsider the education policy reforms set by the Progressive Conservatives. The ideologies of neoliberalism produced by the Common-Sense Revolution was challenged by various actors mostly when the implications were felt at the local level which implied that there was a spatial disjuncturce in the rationalization of neoliberal policies (Basu, 2004). Braithwaite (2003) notes with regards to the education policies of the Harris government that,

from all accounts, equity education suffered a deliberate and severe attack...and just as we thought that the message of equity was gaining a decisive place in education, we have become witness to a retrenchment of these ideals which if not quickly arrested will obliterate the gains of the past decade (p. 132).

The Ministry of Education in Ontario released a policy document Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy in the quest of promoting and realizing the promise of diversity. This
was done under the liberal government with the promise of ensuring the best publicly funded school system in the world. Three of the most important aims were listed as having high levels of student achievement; reduced gaps in student achievement and increased public confidence in publicly funded education (Ministry of Education, 2009). It is reported that out of Ontario’s seventy-two school boards, only forty-three have some form of equity policy which ranges from a one-page statement to comprehensive documents accompanied by guidelines and resource materials (Ministry of Education, 2009; Pg. 10).

After the Liberals won the election in 2003, they took the clues from educators with regards to how improvements could be made in student learning. They brought back the policy adopted by the then NDP government and termed it as “Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools”. According to Anderson & Jafaar (2015), the Liberals took a different approach to education policy which included the overturn of several conservative education policy initiatives. In the first three years of its mandate, the Liberals increased provincial education funding thereby reducing the inequalities that existed in schools. There was a total of $2.6 billion in education in 2006 which included an increase in the base funding per pupil to better reflect costs as well as initiatives targeted at improving student success (Anderson & Jafaar, 2015). This was a significant improvement from the Harris government where a cut of more than $525 million was made with regards to the funding of education in Ontario (O’Sullivan, 1999). In 2009, the Ontario Ministry of Education formally and legislatively re-introduced PPM No. 119, now titled PPM No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools. The policy intentionally widened the scope of the 1993 policy to address more pressing discriminatory issues like sexual orientation, race, physical or mental disability, gender, and class and how they create barriers for students (Rezai-Rashti, 2015). This reflects a form of
intersectionality which draws on inclusivity from diverse groups who are discriminated against. With regards to these measures put in place by the liberal government, it can be inferred that they were committed to the notion of multiculturalism as equity and inclusion is a key hallmark of a multicultural country.

The current Conservative government under the leadership of Doug Ford is currently taking an attempt to make education in the province unbearable for both students and teachers by cutting down funding as well as increasing class sizes, which Shaker (2019) terms as a déjà vu of the 1995 Mike Harris government. As with the Mike Harris government, the impact of such a policy initiative is most likely to affect minorities and students from low income families making the affordability of education hard. The cuts will affect each of the province’s 72 school boards since the boards do not all provide the same programs under the fund. Also, the cuts in education affect programs that provide tutors in classrooms, special needs students, services for Indigenous and other racialized students. The President of the Ontario Teachers Federation, Diane Dewing lamented that these cuts are worrisome as most funded programs offer support to those who need it the most (Global News, 2019). This government is a replica of the 1993 Harris government as cuts to education and increase in class size is proposed. Again, this undermines minority groups as funded programs usually benefits students who are in minority groups. Clearly, neoliberal education policies do not help in serving the interests of minority groups like the black community. As stated by Anderson & Jafaar (2015), most of these neoliberal education policies end up affecting black students and it also defeats the purpose of having multicultural education which seeks to promote equity of information and high standards of academic scholarship in an environment that respects the potential of each student. It is important to note that just as neoliberal education policies move away from the root causes and sources of structural oppression and
inequity, multicultural education also places excessive focus on culture and attitudinal changes, shying away from the core issue of structural oppression, racism and inequity. As echoed by Tabi & Gosine (2018), neoliberalism marginalizes minority groups of people and favors private entities. Therefore, neoliberal education policies do not necessarily address the inequalities that exist in schools, rather they seek to de-amplify the voices of students from minority backgrounds as these policies are usually in favor of the privileged students in the schools. In the subsequent paragraph, I will explain how neoliberal education policies limit multicultural education drawing some hindsight from Canada’s neighbor, the United States of America.

Neoliberalism limits multicultural education as they deflect attention from the lived experiences of black students and rely primarily of literacy tests and standardized tests. This provides very little incentive for multicultural education to thrive in the classrooms. To emphasize, Bourassa (2019) describes neoliberal education policies as antithetical to multiculturalism and multicultural education due to the various practices, pedagogies, and approaches that have been articulated in opposite relation to it, such as culturally responsive pedagogy. Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive pedagogy as “teaching “to and through [students’] personal and cultural strengths, their intellectual capabilities, and their prior accomplishment premised on “close interactions among ethnic identity, cultural background, and student achievement” (p. 27). It is evident that when this form of pedagogy is not employed in the classrooms it stifles the learning and teaching of multicultural education because educators still practice the neoliberal forms of teaching in the classroom.

According to Atasay (2012), neoliberal education policies are detrimental to already poorly performing social groups, particularly students of color as it puts more inequalities in educational settings. To provide more context, Sleeter (2012) explains that neoliberal education reforms that
have dominated U.S. schools since the 1990s have been “deliberately context-blind. Although racial achievement gaps have been a focus of attention, solutions have emphasized offering all students the same curriculum, taught in the same way based on the language, worldview, and experiences of White English-speakers” (p.562). Again, this is indicative of the unwilling nature of neoliberal policies to adapt and accept other forms of pedagogy which reflects the culture of students, specifically, students of color. Also, the neoliberal structuring of education is racialized and largely centered on communities of color which assesses marginalized students by standardized tests and holding them accountable without considering their social realities (Atasay, 2012).

Also, neoliberal education policies, as highlighted by Ross & Gibson (2007) are highly capitalist in nature and gradually becoming a global trend. Such policies make it difficult for all students to have a level playing field. Having said this, it is imperative to also note that multicultural education, just like neoliberal education policies ignores the structural injustices faced by minority groups by placing undue focus on aspects like cultural differences. This does not solve the problem of minority groups as there are more pressing issues that need to be focused on like rate of school dropout among students, standardized testing, among others. Because neoliberal education policies are not necessarily minority centered, it is difficult to envision a critical form of multicultural education whose focus is minority groups of people, in this case the black youth in Ontario schools. Therefore, Dei (2001) calls for an antiracist form of education, which is all-encompassing and seeks to tackle the root causes of school challenges among minority students. He emphasizes the importance of having both the teacher and student involved in anti-racist education. Educator’s understanding of what inclusion connotes is therefore important in answering pertinent questions about race raised by students in the classroom (Dei, 2001). Just like
how minority groups were disempowered historically, culturally diverse students are disempowered educationally. Dei (2001) explains this by saying that the multicultural context is already laden with unequal power relations which makes it difficult for teachers to have a full-fledged form of multicultural education. This is why the need for anti-racist education is key because it is based on teacher-student relations and not the rigid curriculum which does little to curb the discrimination faced by black students in schools. With anti-racist education, teachers can relate to all students equally regardless of the color of their skin thereby reducing the prevalence of discrimination and marginalization against minority students.

Another important conversation with regards to anti-racist education is the need to pay attention to the power and equity dynamics in schools and among students. Dei (2001) explains that educators need to explain the meaning of power and how it is often used to maintain dominance, privilege, agency and resistance. As power goes hand in hand with privilege, students can engage in classroom practices that reiterates this status, thus the onus lies in the antiracist educator to ensure a safe space for all students to engage in the classroom in an equal manner. Consequently, when the structural sources of inequality and oppression against minority students is properly handled by anti-racist educators, multicultural education becomes easy to implement even with the existence of neoliberal policies. To emphasize, multicultural education intends including elements of minority culture in the curriculum but it however fails to address structural oppression; therefore the presence of antiracist education fills this void by way of including both the educator and the student in the fight against racism and inequality. So, with neoliberal education policies hindering the progress of multicultural education, educators and students can play their part by incorporating an anti-racist education structure as advocated by Dei (2001).
To conclude, multicultural education is necessary and important in Ontario elementary and secondary schools, but it can only be achieved when the structural problems like racism and inequality are tackled by educators in the schools. Also, it is key to put measures in place that helps to realize it in the various elementary and secondary schools. However, the presence of neoliberal education policies, in many ways hinder the actualization of multicultural education as it has led to a shift away from an equal society. In a different perspective, the critics of multicultural education would argue that neoliberal educational reforms and (mainstream) multicultural education both downplay structural & institutionalized sources of inequality. Neoliberal education policies limit multicultural education because it does not invite and appreciate the lived experiences of cultural minorities. It also neglects the social realities of students of color by way of marginalizing and excluding their cultural realities from the curriculum. This is inimical to multicultural education because it is equally important to understand appreciate the personal realities of black students in the classroom in order to have an inclusive environment (Sleeter, 2012). In essence, neoliberal education policies only exist to subdue the teaching and learning of other cultures thereby limiting multicultural education.
Section Three: Challenges of Black Youth in the Education System

This section focuses on the challenges of black youth in the Ontario educational system as featured in several researches over the past decade and beyond. The challenges, as highlighted in the current study, hinges on key aspects of racial discrimination and stereotypes, the lack of representation of Black/African perspectives in the school curricula, the absence of Black teachers, and a prevailing culture of White dominance. Ultimately, this section will navigate the implications of neoliberal education policies in terms of creating an inclusive and equal environment for the Black youth. Yon (1994) sums up the plight of the Black youth as they negotiate and navigate the Canadian school system as follows:

The most important issues facing [Black] students and that present enormous difficulties in adaptation are the structural and attitudinal barriers within the education system itself. Systemic racism and the differential treatment of [Black] students by teachers, administrators, and other students is a significant problem that directly contributes to the lack of achievement (p. 134).

Throughout this section, the terms African Canadian and Black(s) are used interchangeably to refer to anyone of African descent regardless of national origin or background. Furthermore, although the primary focus of the current study is the Ontario province, pockets of data from Toronto is mostly featured.

Dei & Karumanchery (1999) affirm that the educational system reinforces social differences through the implementation and use of dominant Eurocentric notions knowledge, whether it is valid or invalid. They believe that in a multiethnic country like Canada, it is important and valid to question the appropriateness of promoting and maintaining an educational system that is geared to the needs of the majority. In this regard, they question how the system can move beyond the Euro-Canadian system to engage multiethnic student populations which will benefit and advance the current state of education and subsequently into the future. The inequities of the education
system have been highly linked to low career expectations, high dropout rate as well as placement in inappropriate academic programs (Ministry of Education & Training, 1993). James & Braithwaite (1996) contend that multiculturalism did little to address the structural and systemic racism in the educational system which largely affected the interactions of students, parents, teachers and the school authorities. This is why most educators like George Dei emphasize the need for having an Africentric school which has the potential of addressing these challenges. In all these, the presence of neoliberal education policies does not favor multicultural education due to the standardization of tests, province-wide testing and the rigid homogenization of the curricula (Carpenter et al, 2012). When this happens, educators shy away from being ingenious to engage the students from diverse backgrounds, rather they resort to the rigid system which provides little to no room for diversity. In order to have an equal and inclusive form of education, there should be an open-minded curriculum which can be tuned to the dynamics of the classroom. When this happens, students from diverse backgrounds feel included in the classroom because there is no stringent curriculum rather one that leaves room for diversity. In a class of diverse students, it is only prudent to have an open system that encourages critical thinking and dissent.

In 1994, the Ontario Royal Commission on Learning released a report after an extensive study of the Ontario school system. The commission recommended that "school boards, academic authorities, faculties of education, and representatives of the Black community collaborate to establish demonstration schools ... " in jurisdictions where there are large numbers of Black students (see Dei, 1995). This recommendation was based on a 15-member working group appointed by the Canadian government in November, 1992 to establish the African Canadian Community Working Group which proposed that one predominantly Black junior high school be established in each of the six Metropolitan Toronto municipalities. The report also proposed a five-
year pilot scheme, establishing a Black-focused institution where Black history and culture would be taught. The agenda then, was to provide Black students with the choice of an alternative learning environment and to develop their sense of identity and belonging to a school (1995:181). Dei (1995), presumed that the proposal of a “Black-focused” school was based on the hope that by teaching about Black/African-Canadian students' heritages, such a school would deal appropriately with the problems of isolation and frustration that many Black youths have in society (p. 181). The Black focused school is intended to address a problem, youth disengagement from school, where do we want them? ... on the street or in an alternative educational place (Dei, 2005; p. 5). Dei (1994) argues that the basic principles of African-centered schools are that the social, political, cultural and spiritual affirmation of Africa and her historical ties with the Diaspora is a key component to the educational objectives of African-centered schools, explaining that the dynamic nature of culture makes it necessary for students to be culturally grounded in order to learn effectively. Indeed, scholars such as Carl E. James, Karen Braithwaite, Anthony Stewart, Henry M. Codjoe, George S. Dei and Afua Cooper argue that within historical and contemporary contexts, Canada’s educational system failed to meet the needs of black students. For instance, Braithwaite and James in Educating African Canadians, argue the continuous racial discrimination in Ontario’s education system. In “The Education of African Canadians: Issues, Contexts and Expectations,” Braithwaite and James (2012) also contend that inherent racism in the education system was most evident through discriminatory teachers, counselors, administrators, and in curriculum and school practices (see Aladejebi, 2015:16,17).

In 2009, the first Africentric Alternative School in Canada was established based on the recommendation of the 1994 Royal Commission on Learning (Howard & James, 2019). They explain that this elementary school was also a result of a 30-year struggle by members of Toronto’s
Black communities for a Black-focused school as one measure to address how Black students are underserved in Toronto schools. Another key purpose of this school is the fact even though the school provides a sense of community to Black students primarily, it is also important for Black teachers and parents. As explained by Galabuzi (2008), the initiative is not to have a Black only school, but a school with an Africentric curriculum focus which can be attended by students and based on a transparent, non-discriminatory criteria. Teachers will be of all ethnic backgrounds as far as they demonstrate competency in delivering an Africentric curriculum. Overall, the purpose of the school is to ensure that African Canadian youth get good, quality education in a controlled learning environment.

In the midst of a call for an inclusive curriculum, Dei’s study in 1992, with the assistance of student researches from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), provides an exhaustive research data on the experiences of Black/African-Canadian students' in the Ontario public school system, in order to foreground the narratives of their school experiences highlighted in the discourse on public schooling in Canada (1995:182). From individual group responses of 150 Black students from four Toronto high schools, the study discovered that student narratives about school experiences bothers on the following: differential treatment by race, the absence of Black/African Canadian teachers, and the absence of Black/African-Canadian history in the classroom (p. 183). Indeed, let me be quick to add that these findings are being echoed in other previous studies prior to, and after Dei’s research in 1992. For example, concerns over the absence of Black teachers and top school administrators are expressed in studies by the Board of Education (1988), Little (1992), and the Black Educators Working Group (1993). Other studies by Brathwaite (1989), James (1990, 1994), Canadian Alliance of Black Educators (CABE) (1992), and Henry (1994) have also highlighted the Eurocentric school curriculum that historically has either
distorted, omitted, or misrepresented the Black/African-Canadian presence in Canada (1995:184). The pervasive message in all these researches is a call to strengthen diversity of ideas and opinions that continue to shape human growth and development in Canadian schools, in the context of sound multiculturalism.

Due to the heterogeneity of the student population, students’ concerns vary. For instance, Dei (1995) notes that Continental African students raise concerns about issues of language, religion, and culture. Students who have been schooled in the Caribbean also complain about the "social labelling" of Black students as "trouble-makers" (p. 183). Similarly, concerns of identity are raised by students born in Canada, especially, those born to mixed parents. Then there are students who are concerned with intragroup discrimination and prejudices among their peers because they speak with distinctly different accents and dialects. However, it is noted that issues about differential treatment; the lack of representation of Black/African perspectives, histories, and experiences; the absence of Black teachers; and a prevailing culture of White, Eurocentric dominance in the mainstream school system are concerns shared by all Black youths (p. 183, 184).

The concept of race continues to be a problem among Canadian students, and its permanent feature is expressed by ‘the presence of a system of racial meanings and stereotypes, of racial ideology’ (Omi & Winant, 1998, p. 17). Flecha (1999) calls it a form of ‘modern racism’, which ‘occurs when the rules of the dominant culture are imposed on diverse peoples in the name of integration … and presumes that different races have unequal levels of intellectual, cultural, economic, and political progress, rather than simply different ones’ (p. 154) (see Cudjoe, 2001: 344). In the politics of identity (re)formation, race, becomes central to evaluating the experiences of African-Canadian students'. The concept is important in students' narratives, to the extent that it draws powerfully on the specific identifications that students make with the school system.
Furthermore, for black students, race is central in educational practices concerned with staff representation, curricular, instructional and pedagogical practices (Dei & James, 1998:93). Within current North American educational environment, the academic failure of the Black student is viewed in the context of racism, and it is ‘manifested in discriminatory treatment by teachers, counsellors and administrators, and in curriculum and school practices that excluded Black students’ (James & Brathwaite, 1996, pp. 18–19; D’Oyley & Silverman, 1976). To this, Giroux (1994) contends that

Within the next century, educators will not be able to ignore the hard questions that schools will have to face regarding issues of multiculturalism, race, identity, power, knowledge, ethics, and work. These issues will play a major role in defining the meaning and purpose of schooling, the relationship between teachers and students, and the critical content of their exchange in terms of how to live in a world that will be vastly globalized, high tech, and racially diverse than any other time in history. (p. 280)

Cudjoe (2001) also acknowledges that because “Black youth abound in many North American secondary schools, colleges and universities, the issues of race and racism must be significant issues of discussion and policy-making in the education of youths” (p. 344).

Most research findings provide evidence of the persistence of racism in Canadian Schools. For instance, a study in Ontario discovered that:

Black students encounter discrimination daily on an individual level. They must deal with racial slurs, vicious graffiti, [and] ostracism on the part of their fellow students. Many feel that it is no use complaining to the authorities about this, since they believe that the teachers and the administrators are themselves racist” (Towards a New Beginning, 1992, p. 79)

According to Cudjoe (2001), psychological effects of racism on Black youths remain greatly underestimated because studies point out numerous ways in which racism and other forms of discrimination affect Black students and their learning. For example, Taylor (1991) found out that, to the extent that teachers harbour negative racial stereotypes, the Black student’s race alone is probably sufficient to place him or her at risk for negative school outcomes (see Cudjoe, 2001:
Irvine (1990, Pg. 4) also adds that racism and the underestimation of Blacks in Canadian society “cannot be ignored as a primary contributing factor to Black underachievement”.

Closely related to the issue of race is the varied stereotypical challenges that Black youth continue to face in Canadian schools, particularly in Ontario. Cudjoe (2001) reaffirms the position of scholars who have argued that the Black student experience in Canada also includes ‘stereotyping by the dominant power groups whose attitudes are reflected in institutions such as education, the media and the law’ (Brathwaite, 1989, p. 206; see also Yon, 1994; Dei, 1996a). Other Studies indicate that stereotyping, regarded as racial profiling, contributes to much of the problems and struggles students are experiencing in schools, specifically Ontario schools (Dei, 1997; James & Taylor, 2010; Solomon & Palmer, 2004, James, 2012). Similarly, James, in ‘Students “at Risk”: Stereotypes and the Schooling of Black Boys’ (2010), discusses the many ways in which the stereotypes of Black males contribute to disenfranchising young Black male students as they navigate and negotiate the school system. James concludes that Black male students are tagged as immigrants, fatherless, athletes, troublemakers, and underachievers. These stereotypes work together to affect educators’ conceptions of the abilities and skills of the Black youth which in turn affect their responses to these categorizations (2012:471).

In the context of seen as immigrants, young Black males are stereotyped as foreigners with cultures from elsewhere. Hence, their poor educational performance and disciplinary problems are not only attributed to their lack of Canadian educational values and discipline, due to their inability or unwillingness to assimilate, but also to their “foreign cultures” that do not value education. (James, 2012:472). In addition, many of the youth live in stigmatized, heavily policed, low-income urban neighborhoods populated by a significant number of immigrants with related issues of unemployment, poverty, limited school–community interactions, and negative media reports
These existing factors contribute to further strengthening the stereotypical challenges that the African-Canadian youth face in the classroom.

James (2012) continues his argument in regards categorization of Black youth in Canadian schools. He notes that there exists the perception that the family structure recognizes single motherhood as the norm. It is also perceived that single parenthood does not provide the scope and opportunities to fully engage with their children’s education and schooling (such as helping with school-work, monitoring school performance, and attending parent-teacher meetings, etc). Hence, the children from such families are seen as lacking the needed educational and social skills, aptitude, and discipline that put them at risk of failing in school. (James, 2012:474). According to Statistics, some 46% of African Canadian children (compared to a national average of 18%) are growing up in one-parent, typically single-mother, households (Statistics Canada, 2009). These families are perceived to be “dysfunctional” and “producing damaged children” (Griffith, 2006, p. 129). A recurring theme around the rhetoric of fatherlessness is the assumption that mothers are unable to provide the appropriate and necessary supports and guidance for their children. On the contrary, however, it is mothers who are most often involved in the early year foundational socialization of children and are the ones who are most often involved in their children’s school activities, like attending parent-teachers meetings (Fraser, 2011; James, 2010).

In the case of being regarded as “athletes”, African-Canadian athletes are habitually reduced to their bodies and their talent “attributed to nature” (Ferber, 2007, p. 20). They face what Harry Edwards referred to as “double negative label” in that they are constructed as “dumb” athletes and “unintelligent” Blacks (Harrison, Sailesb, Rotiche, & Bimper, 2011; see also Singer, 2009). The stereotypical assumption is that if a Black male is good at sports, then he is also a poor
student (James, 2012:477). James (2012) posits that coaches and teachers are known to use racial stereotypes in their consideration of who will make the best basketball players. The narratives of some African Canadian male student-athletes reveal how they have been recruited for the basketball teams primarily on the basis of race and physicality (p. 478). For instance, in the essay, “Why Is the School Basketball Team Predominantly Black?” (2011), Carl James notes that Amir, a South Asian high school student athlete, mentions that he was not given the same opportunities on the basketball court as his Black teammates because the coach expected him to get an academic scholarship, because the coach saw him as “very smart or highly intelligent.” The coach, Amir said he showed preference for the Black players—he saw them as “natural” athletes and the ones who would win the athletic scholarships. (see James, 2012:478).

Lastly, with regards to being labelled as ‘Troublemakers’ and ‘underachievers’, James (2012) concludes that there is an assumption that African Canadian students who are immigrants (or perceived immigrants), due to their fatherlessness, and inclination to athletic more than academic interests, are unlikely to do well in school. Therefore, any ‘animated reactions by students that demonstrate dissatisfaction and frustration with the educational system’s lack of attention to their needs, interests, and aspirations might be considered disruptive, troublesome, and/or disorderly’ (p. 480). Furthermore, the neighborhood where the students reside contribute to them being labelled as troublemakers. Their supposed “problem” behaviors are associated with the fact that they reside in stigmatized neighborhoods in urban areas—areas that receive disproportionately negative media attention that portray them as deprived, derelict spaces to be feared (Wacquant, 2008, p. 1; James, p. 480). In research that was conducted in a Toronto neighborhood to obtain Black high school student schooling experiences, the participants reported that they were regularly stereotyped as “bad” or “troublemakers,” and assumptions were made
about their academic abilities and behavioral motives based on their skin color, clothing, and the neighborhood (see James, 2012:480, 481).

In order to cope with these stereotypes, Dei(1997) notes that one way in which some African-Canadian students deal with school alienation is to make the conscious choice to hang out with other Black students, regardless of whether or not they are friends, because 'We're Black', 'We all understand each other' and 'We have the same experiences' (p. 249). To them, Blackness is seen as an experience which is felt and understood, and which unites individuals. There is consequently a sense of 'us' and 'them'. In that way, they can be themselves and be 'recognized' in a positive light among their Black peers. This aspect of 'surviving the system' pervades their school experiences. Indeed, Black students share strategies of coping with each other which can be instrumental to their school success (1997:249).

Some student voices in Dei’s research in early 1992 highlight the absence of Black teachers as a challenge that Black students’ face in the classroom. Dei (1996) cites an example of a school dropout called Mary. When interviewed, Mary pointed to the importance of teachers and Black school counsellors having a perspective on matters to which she could relate. Mary suggested that the Black teacher would have to communicate like a “mother," that would be perceived as "caring." (p. 174). She contended that the teacher's qualities would directly influence student behavior and attitude. In an interview conducted by Agyepong (2010) a Black Canadian parent had this to say.

In Canada ... it is unfortunate that there are very few Black teachers in the school system. It is an abomination not to have any Black teachers in the system that Black youth can relate to. Even if it is not at the teaching level, at least at a psychological level. You can open an all-Black school and I can tell you that it will be filled with White teachers again. So, what do you do with the mainstream system? I think the mainstream system should do more than they are doing. Let’s see more Black teachers. Let’s see more Black administrators. Let’s see more custodians. Let’s bring in more Black speakers to speak and encourage the children. Bring faces that are represented in the schools. (Agyepong, 2010).
Similarly, Jean-Brenda, a Grade 12 student-activist, commented on the difference it made to her if there were a Black teacher on staff. Jean-Brenda talked of understanding perspectives, sharing experiences, developing relationships, and seeing the Black teacher as a source of inspiration and motivation (Dei, 1996: 174). Black students generally make a direct connection between the problem of student disengagement and the scarcity of representation of Black role models in the school system. They desire to be taught by more Black and racial-minority teachers, although they readily agree that Black teachers would not necessarily make a major difference in the classroom without other fundamental changes to the educational system. There seems to be an indication that in order to challenge White dominance, authorities must actively recruit racial minority staff in the schools (Dei, 1997: 248). Students similarly make a strong case for Black guidance counsellors who they feel can trust and relate to such counsellors given shared historical, social and cultural experiences as Black peoples. (p. 249).

An ongoing concern among students in Canadian schools is the marginalization of Black history narratives in the curriculum. Henry (2015, pg. 1) contends that the inclusion of Black history in Ontario classrooms remains relatively marginalized and stagnant after several decades of advocacy by Black individuals, educators and groups to make the curriculum more inclusive of the Black experience in Canada and across the Diaspora. In Ontario Social Studies and History classrooms, the African Canadian historical narrative continues to be underrepresented and marginalized contributing to the persistence of stereotypes of Blacks in Canadian culture and the absolute disengagement of African Canadian students (Henry, 2015: p. 3,4). The curriculum takes a Eurocentric and homogeneous approach to the teaching/learning process that invariably contributes to the stereotyping that takes place towards the Black youth. Hence, the idea that schools operate on principles of cultural freedom (or multiculturalism), democracy, merit, racial
neutrality, and equality of opportunity is not conveyed in the experiences of mostly Black students whose experiences in schools and society are affected by constructions of Black masculinities that are linked to fatherlessness, hopelessness, deviance, low expectations, and poor academic performance (Hernandez & Davis, 2009, p. 19; McCready, 2010). Dei (1997) also indicates that aside issues of race identity, representation and social difference in schooling, African-Canadian students raise concerns with regards the gaps in curricular content; that is, the exclusion of contributions of African people. When this happens, these students find it difficult to identify with the curriculum and also resist attempts at forced assimilation that negate their individual and collective identities (p. 247). Although there are some African-Canadian history curriculum units that exist, not enough of these resources present a diverse lived experience of Blacks in Canada by including the complicated intersectionality of race, class, and gender. Further, only certain elements and stories are featured (Henry, 2015: p. 7).

Dei (1996) cites an example of an interview from his research in 1992 about a resident of Toronto called Jane. Jane complained of the absence of Black scholars in academic texts and the absence of representation of Black peoples in important aspects and segments of the school curriculum. Her worry was that "all those who have done something worth mentioning in the school books are White men" (p. 173). Jane's concerns are shared by other Black students like Michael, a 19-year-old originally from Jamaica. His frustrations and the emotions with which he speaks about the de-privileging of Black peoples' history and contributions to society throughout his public schooling requires attention. Similarly, from another student, Marlo, the researchers learned how the official school curriculum can be very disempowering to the minority student, to the point where the student is disengaged from the classroom (p. 173).
Aisha, a grade 12/OAC (Ontario Academic Credit) student, takes the issue of adequate representation in curriculum a step further. She establishes complex connections between the politics of historical record and the production of racist knowledge, and the application of both systems of knowledge in the classroom. When interviewed, Ayisha revealed the system of identity erasure and resists the knowledge that some teachers impart as both inaccurate in content, as well as racist in context (see Mirza, 1992, also Dei & James 2006:100). For instance, she says;

I would change all the textbooks in not only history [but also] in other subjects like science and math when they attribute everything to the Greeks. You know the Pythagorean theorem which built the pyramids a thousand years before the Greeks were even around. And then in science when you look through the science textbook and it's like all these white people invented everything, and even one science teacher said, 'Every civilization has contributed to science except African'. He actually said that! (File 009: Lines 840-869) (see Dei & James 2006:100)

This student has learned to engage in a struggle with her teacher because she perceives that teachers can be agents of subordination thus, her fight for the recognition of the contribution of African people. The result of the inclusion of contributions of non-European peoples in the curriculum is a dual strategy which compels the teacher to re-educate himself or herself, and offers strategies of 'alternative knowledge' to all students. Furthermore, by demanding changes in all courses/subjects, not just history, the student acknowledges that Africans have contributed to all disciplines. Aisha displays a perceptive understanding that educational change must be deeply rooted and broadly applied. (Dei & James 2006:100)

According to the Toronto District School Board, many of schools in Toronto express concerns about “the achievement gap” that exists among Black students, particularly males, and others in terms of their successful completion of high school (2010). James (2012) contends that in most cases, standardized measures such as test scores are used as evidence of students’ ability, skill level, and knowledge of educational material—as well as to identify students “at risk”. The
overreliance on tests scores as James notes, has the effect of stigmatizing schools and reinforcing stereotypes (p. 483). Levin (2004) defined an “at risk” student as “one whose past and present characteristics or conditions are associated with a higher risk of probability of failing to obtain desired life outcomes” (p. 2) (see James, 2012: p. 465). Wotherspoon and Schissel further argued that, “The language of risk can serve as a euphemism for racism, sexism, and biases” based on factors such as class, immigrant status, family makeup, neighborhood of residence, cultural assumptions, and other “risk-inducing” constructs (p. 331) (see James, 2012: p. 465). The continuous disengagement, poor academic performance, and low educational outcomes of Black male students and the tendency for them to be identified as youth “at risk” who need special educational supports, is an ongoing concern among students, parents, educators, and youth in Canadian schools (Abada & Lin, 2011; Caldas, Bernier, & Marceau, 2009; Codjoe, 2006; James, 2009-2012). Codjoe (2006) however points out that existing studies have tended to focus on the “poor academic performance” (p. 33) of Black students by further strengthening stereotypes such as lazy, dumb, athletic, stupid, intellectually inferior, deviant, dangerous, and mentally incompetent in the process of understanding their academic problems. (James 482, 483).

James & Turner (2017) find that anti-Black racism and the systemic discrimination against black students can be accounted for their poor educational performance. The Ontario education system which centres on neoliberal policies does not help black students because of the systemic nature of anti-Black racism and the structural differences that evident in the classrooms. Also, the racial gap in education can only be understood when put within the context of racial oppression. Put differently, racial equity in education can only be achieved when the systems that discriminate against blacks are carefully acknowledged and addressed (James & Turner, 2017, Pg. 45). Carpenter et al (2012) explain that neoliberalism impedes efforts to create more inclusive schools
because standardized tests puts undue pressure on teachers to ‘work to the test’ at the detriment of being open-minded to other learning. This does not encourage students to ‘think outside of the box’ because alternative form learning is not encouraged as school funding is mostly constrained to area such as literacy, the improvement of scores as well as the overall ‘effectiveness’ and ‘productivity’ of schools (Carpenter et al., 2012).

To conclude this section, it is evident, from the available literature how the black youth are ridden with several challenges in the Ontario school system. Among some of the challenges faced include racial discrimination and stereotypes, the lack of representation of Black/African perspectives in the school curricula, the absence of Black teachers, and a prevailing culture of White dominance. Despite the much-touted multicultural framework in Canada, there still exist structural and racial inequalities in the society, specifically in terms of the education of the black youth. This is largely due to the inequities in the education system which had led to several dropouts among black students partly due to the psychological and emotional effects they encounter. As discussed, neoliberal education policies leave little to no room for dissent which can be accounted for some of the challenges faced by the black youth in schools. When policies aim at standardizing tests, it encourages a rigid system without dissent among students which is problematic towards the advancement of having a multicultural education. The call for an Africentric school was made by several educators to address the challenges faced by the black youth in the schooling system. Even though a black-focused school was suggested in each of the six metropolitan Toronto municipalities, there is only one existing Africentric junior high school in Toronto, established in 2009. As suggested by Dei (1996), in order to overcome the stereotypes faced by black students, it is prudent to have Africentric schools due to shared experiences.
Additionally, there is the need to include the study of Black history in Ontario classrooms even though it remains largely marginalized.
Section Four: Re-envisioning Ontario Educational System to create more inclusive and equitable schooling Environment

Scholarship on improving education in Ontario have attempted to propose a myriad of education strategies in anticipation of a diverse, equitable and inclusive school system. We may begin this chapter by first defining these key immanent concepts, summarily captured by the Ministry of Education’s report (2009) on Ontario’s equity and inclusive education strategy. The 31-page report defines **Diversity** as the presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society, which include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status. **Equity**, the report defines, is a condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people, and does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences. Lastly, **Inclusive Education** is that type of education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. That is, students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected (pg. 4). Indeed, the ministry, as well as UNESCO believe that an equitable, inclusive education system is fundamental to achieving the ministry’s core priorities and is recognized internationally as critical to delivering a high-quality education for all students (UNESCO, 2008).

Prior to the Ministry of Education’s report in 2009, there had been some attention given to inclusive schooling at the provincial level in the past. In Ontario, several policy documents such as Common Curriculum, Grades 1-9 (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993), Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines Policy Development and Implementation (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training, 1993), and Changing Perspectives: A Resource Guide for Antiracist and Ethno-cultural Equity Education (Ontario Ministry of
Education, 1992) were initiated to encourage inclusivity. These policies, however, are not easily translated into specific plans for action and often left to the discretion of either individual school boards or school principals, who often complain about the lack of resources to effect government policies (Dei, 1996: 176). This section will therefore synthesize some inclusive strategies proposed, some of which have been acted upon, to ensure a sound educational system in Ontario.

According to Dei, inclusivity means dealing foremost with equity: the qualitative value of justice. It also means ensuring representation: a multiplicity of perspectives in academic discourse, knowledge, and texts. Furthermore, inclusivity requires pedagogies that respond to the social construction of difference in the school system, and in society at large (issues of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, and ability). In addition, it demands the development of a broad-based curriculum, the institution of diverse teaching strategies, and the establishment of educational support systems that enhance conditions conducive to success for all students (1996:176). Also, he explains that the best practices in terms of inclusive schooling is to have educational strategies that promote both equity and academic excellence as well as produce a positive learning experience for both students and all stakeholders.

Dei & Karumanchery (1999) adopt an antiracist analysis of Ontario's educational reform initiatives by pointing to the consequences for equity and access in education. They argue that the focus on market-driven reform policies rather than equity considerations in schooling has serious consequences for teaching, learning, and the administration of education. By considering events in Ontario education, the scholars suggest that the educational reforms provide clear examples of the problems inherent when school reforms are conceived and undertaken without a proper, well-informed consideration for the centering of equity issues. They also highlight the role that consecutive governments play in educational reforms by "favouring privatization, reduced
government expenditures, user charges and difficult choices between sub-sectors in education" (Jones, 1997, p. 373) that invariably have forced many communities, in Ontario and many parts of the world to face reforms that effectively undermine public schooling (p. 113). A classic example is the impact that the education agenda of the Progressive Conservative government had in Ontario public schools after they unveiled an agenda that, among many things, included an all-out assault on antiracist education and inclusive practice (Dei & Karumanchery, 1999:115).

In re-envisioning Ontario Educational System especially for black youth, Dei advocates for the philosophy of the African-centered school in Ontario education. As far back as 1995, Dei argues that an African-centered school involves imagining new forms of classroom teaching and pedagogy, new ways of fostering student-peer and student-teacher interactions, as well as developing new and alternative strategies for inclusiveness in the educational curriculum. From Henry’s observation, the teaching of Canadian history for instance, in Ontario public schools excludes the African Canadian perspective and privileges Eurocentric histories. She notes that the history of African Canadians in the field of history is marginalized and is treated as ethnic history that is separate and apart from the dominant national narrative. In effect, the inclusion of Black history in Ontario classrooms remains relatively marginalized and stagnant after several decades of advocacy by communities, scholars, and educators to address this systemic exclusion and silencing through a more inclusive curriculum (2015:2,4). Due to this, Dei notes that his call for an African-centered school is valid as it will be organized around communal principles and non-hierarchical structures, fostering the social and academic learning of students. An African centered school should also be an avenue for broader definitions of students' success, to include measurements not strictly defined in the academic sense. An African-centered school would be guided by Afrocentric principles, and classroom pedagogical styles would stress holistic learning.
and teaching about African cultures as historically, ideologically, politically, and spiritually collective and communitarian (see Dei, 1994, also Dei, 1995: 188). This form of schooling hinges on the concept of communality which comprises the involvement of parents, community workers, elders and caregivers. Dei presumes that a holistic education should involve the creation of sites for these different groups of people in the community to come in to teach and learn from students. This may require some form of adult education in that students would also be part of the process of teaching parents and community workers. In that case, students and parents become part of a team running the school; they sit on school committees to make major decisions affecting students' school lives, staff hiring, retention promotion, library acquisitions, curriculum changes, and review teachers' academic work (1996:181).

An Afrocentric curriculum and pedagogy will encourage student-student, student-teacher, and student-teacher-parent interactions that will lead to mutual learning. The school would be structured around the African traditional values of community belongingness, group unity, and social responsibility (Dei, 1995:188). According to Henry (2015), excluding or only marginally representing the experiences of African Canadians has an impact on Black students’ formation of a positive self-identity. It can cause African Canadian youth in the educational system to feel disconnected from society and affect how they locate themselves in the public sphere. Persistent exclusion has also been linked to the under-achievement of some Black students in Ontario schools, evident in the 23% dropout rate among youth of African descent in Toronto alone and the consistently low achievement gap of Black children in Ontario public schools (Toronto District School Board, (2009; Toronto District School Board, 2012). Therefore, a culture-specific curriculum built on Afrocentricity could be designed to incorporate school teachings for the benefit of everyone, and particularly for African-Canadian students, the intention being not to exclude
other "centric" knowledge but to contribute to a plurality of perspectives and knowledge about schooling in the Euro-Canadian context (Dei, 1996:177). This would be a form of education that will assist Black youth particularly to re-invent their African-ness within a Diasporic context, and to create a way of being and thinking congruent with positive African traditions and values. Afrocentric discourse offers alternative "ways of knowing," informed by the histories and cultural experiences of all peoples of African descent (Dei, 1996:179).

Dei (1996) posits that the call for an African-centered school is part of the on-going antiracist struggle in the schools to empower youth to assume their legitimate positions in society and to fulfil corresponding responsibilities. Black students need "free space" in school where they can engage in political dialogue with educators, community workers, and parents about the issues affecting them as participants in a predominately White society (pg.191). Aside addressing racist issues and dealing with stigmatization, an African-centered school, hopefully, could solve other intellectual and emotional problems by demystifying the false separation between the school and the family-home, the workplace, and the wider community. This is important because Black/African-Canadian students in mainstream schools worry about the extent of parental responsibility and involvement in their schooling.

Finally, Dei offers some steps that should be taken for effective Afrocentric education. They include the following: Firstly, school library collections can be improved and expanded to include critical material on Afrocentric fields of study. Secondly, appropriate staff can be retrained to be antiracist and inclusive. Additionally, post-secondary educational institutions can introduce courses on the relationship race, class, and gender to schooling, and create centres for the pursuit of indigenous forms of education and alternative knowledge. Lastly, institutions of higher learning
could be at the forefront of promoting integrative antiracism studies that addresses the dynamics of social difference (Dei, 1996:182).

Following several calls from scholars and stakeholders for an equity and inclusive education, the Minister of Education, in 2008, proposed strategies for Ontario schools that will continue to improve student achievement, reduce achievement gaps, and increase public confidence in the education system. The strategies aim to promote inclusive education, as well as to understand, identify, and eliminate the biases, barriers, and power dynamics that limit students’ prospects for learning, growing, and fully contributing to society. A team of educational leaders and specialists was formed to review research, reports, and existing policies and programs at school boards, and to consult with educators, parents, students, community members, and organizations across Ontario. The strategies were founded on four major items: the ministry was to provide direction, support, and guidance to the education sector, so that every student has a positive learning environment in which to achieve his or her highest potential; 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 (Ministry of Education, 2009:10,11).

The ministry’s goals are rooted in its three core education priorities as follows: Shared and committed leadership by the ministry, boards, and schools will play a critical role in eliminating discrimination through the identification and removal of bias and barriers. Achieving equity is a shared responsibility, that is, establishing an equitable and inclusive education system requires commitment from all education partners. The second goal suggests that Equity and inclusive education policies and practices will support positive learning environments so that all students can feel engaged in and empowered by what they are learning, supported by the teachers
and staff from whom they are learning, and welcome in the environment in which they are learning. Also, students, teachers, and staff learn and work in an environment that is respectful, supportive, and welcoming to all. Finally, **Accountability and transparency** will be demonstrated through the use of clear measures of success (based on established indicators) and through communication to the public of our progress towards achieving equity for all students. Accountability is necessary to maintain and enhance public confidence in the education system (pg. 12).

Already, there are some examples of equity-related work that is under way in school boards and schools across Ontario. One major instance is the Toronto District School Board’s policies that is established on the principles of fairness, equity, and inclusive education. It also comprises comprehensive guidelines for religious accommodation designed to ensure that students and staff can observe the tenets of their faith free from harassment or discrimination. Staff attend workshops and seminars that focus on social justice and human rights issues all in an attempt to promote equitability and inclusiveness. Another is the Peel District School Board which annually offers Grade 5 students the opportunity to study racism, sexism, ableism, and other “isms” as they enhance their literacy skills through song writing, drama, visual art, and social studies. The *Conseil des écoles publiques de l’Est de l’Ontario* is another equity-related work that is in line with Dei’s call for a community-based pedagogy by providing programs in schools to parents and preschool-aged children who are new to Canada and come from a French-speaking country. These programs focus on helping children learn to play, work in groups, acquire classroom routines, and develop early vocabulary and reading skills. In addition, the programs offer parents important information on local community services and resources that promote integration and a sense of belonging. We may also acknowledge the role of the *Conseil scolaire de district catholique du Nouvel-Ontario* in providing sensitivity training to school staff so they can support Grade 7 to 12 students who are at
risk of suicide. With this training, staff are better able to identify and support these students when they experience harassment and discrimination and connect them with appropriate school and community partners who can provide the help they need. Lastly, the Greater Essex County District School Board has developed a comprehensive diversity training program called “Diversity Matters” as part of its New Teacher Induction Program (NTIP). This mandatory one-day workshop consists of four modules specifically designed to help teachers meaningfully address the changing needs of our increasingly diverse classrooms.

Henry (2015) is particular about the exclusion or marginalization of Black History in the education curriculum and notes that Hegemonic structures of the school system determine what is taught or not. This results in the validation of one group, usually Europeans, while marginalizing or silencing other groups such as people of African descent. In her research has identified some concrete effects of exclusion from the curriculum on African Canadian students (see Dei and James, 2002; Dei, 2001; Dei 1996; James, 2003). Moreover, in “Teaching and Learning African History”, George Dei (2010) critiques the lack of meaningful inclusion of African Canadian history in Ontario history school courses through an analysis of the secondary curricula. Dei argues that although recent revisions of curriculum documents offer the potential for more diverse stories to be taught, specific learning expectations in the elementary, Social Studies, History, and Geography (SSHG) curricula remain missing. To resolve this, Dei provides an historical timeline spanning 400 years of African Canadian history that is supplemented with a lesson plan that teachers can use to engage students in learning about the extensive history of Africans in Canada (Henry, 2015).

However, in response to concerns raised in the exclusion of Black history in the curriculum, some unions have over the past few years, made efforts to manage the situation. For instance,
members of the Ontario Secondary School Teachers’ Federation (OSSTF) wrote a socially based curriculum unit called *African Contributions to the Development of Canada* to supplement the grade 12 course *Canada: History, Identity, and Culture*” (CHI 4U). Also, the Elementary Teachers’ Federation of Ontario (ETFO) published *Black Canadian Women: a Legacy of Strength* in 2014 in order to support the primary, junior, and intermediate divisions. Two school boards have also developed curriculum to assist teachers in teaching Black history. *African Heritage: Activities and Resources for the K-8 Classroom* was developed by the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). Furthermore, the Greater Essex County District School Board (GECDSB) first released *African-Canadian Roads to Freedom Guide - Essex/Kent County African-Canadian Connections to the Ontario Curriculum* in 2010. An updated version was published at the beginning of the 2015/16 academic year. In terms of private endeavors, the education division of the *Toronto Star* newspaper, Classroom Connections, published its first Black History Month teacher’s resource in February 2014. The Ontario - based teacher resource publishing company S & S Learning Materials has printed a Black history teaching guide titled, “Moments in Canadian Black History.” The Archives of Ontario, the Nova Scotia Archives, and the University of New Brunswick Atlantic Canada Virtual Archives all have individual lesson plans related to African Canadian history. As well, course profiles *African Canadian Studies 11* and *English 12: African Heritage Language Arts* in Nova Scotia and *The History of African and Peoples of African Descent* grade 11 course in Ontario have been developed quite recently (see Henry, 2015:6).

Although there are some African Canadian history curriculum units that exist, very minimal resources present a diverse lived experience of Blacks in Canada by including the complicated intersectionality of race, class, and gender. Furthermore, only certain elements and
stories which are often deemed to be more acceptable are featured, while shying away or minimizing stories that present the deep realities of racism in Canada (Henry, 2015).

Having said this, it is important to realize how neoliberal education does more harm than good in terms of creating a level-playing field for all students and encouraging diversity. When these policies are made, it makes it difficult for both educators and learners to weave discussions that acknowledge the presence of diverse groups, rather it enforces a monolithic narrative which does not provide room for diversity. In order to mitigate this problem, Gosine & Tabi (2018) suggest that educators must be democratic and open-minded in the classrooms which can be realized by allowing black students to discuss their lived experiences and realities. When this happens, it challenges the neoliberalisation of education and promotes inclusivity as well. Citing hip-hop as an example, Gosine & Tabi (2018) further explain that it serves as a yardstick through which black youth use rap and spoken word to voice out their experiences of being black, and the discrimination and exclusion they face by their skin color. Essentially, it is prudent for educators to include and recognize the experiences of black youth as ‘‘pedagogical’’ because they have the potential to educate teachers, researchers, and policymakers about the effects of prevailing cultural practices, representations, and ideologies in urban communities and schools” (Gosine & Tabi, 2018, pg. 3). To have an equitable schooling system, this suggestion is very crucial because neoliberal education policies stifles innovation, hence the onus lies in the hands of the educator to include informal pedagogical practices that will ensure an equitable schooling environment. Also, when educators include the lived experiences of black students, it prevents a monolithic form of teaching and learning which is the forte of neoliberal education policies. When this form of learning is adopted, it does not only serve the purpose of diversifying pedagogy, but it also helps in dismantling negative stereotypes associated with blacks.
According to James & Turner (2017), Ontario has the highest population of Blacks, which makes the need for diversity in schools more important. As part of the neoliberal framework, race-based data collection is not mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Education. Clearly, this is a strategy to overlook the growing numbers of diverse groups to make provisions to ensure that diversity is achieved. James & Turner (2017) believe that changes in education is not possible without the amalgamation and analysis of disaggregated race-based data (Pg. 46).

To conclude, this section provides a critical analysis of how we can re-imagine Ontario schooling to create a more equitable and inclusive schooling system. The available literature provides some insights and feedback as to how this can be attained. Even though there has been a myriad of equity policies put in place by various provincial governments, these policies are not easily translated into specific plans of action. This section synthesizes some of the inclusive strategies proposed, some of which has been acted upon to create a sound and equitable schooling system. Key among issues discussed include dealing with equity and inclusivity as suggested by Dei (1999), adopting an antiracist analysis of Ontario's educational reform initiatives by pointing to the consequences for equity and access in education, as well as having structured and firm philosophies in the Africentric schools which will ensure the realization of success among Black students in Ontario. Also, neoliberal policies are inimical to the advancement of having an inclusive form of education as it strays away from the core problems faced by minority students, in this case Black students in Ontario schools.
Section Five: Summary of Findings & Conclusion

As the first country in the world to have a multiculturalism policy, it is expected that equality and inclusion will thrive in all facets of the lives of Canadians. Even though the policy is laudable and has mitigated the discrimination faced by minority groups in Canada, there is still more work to be done in ensuring that minority groups in Canada live free of any form of exclusion and discrimination. This paper has extensively discussed multiculturalism in Canada, multicultural education and neoliberal education policies adopted and implemented by selected governments in Ontario from 1993-Date. The second part of this paper tackles the challenges faced by the Black youth in Ontario schools and provides a broad literature review of various suggestions provided by scholars and educationists as to how to re-envision the Ontario schooling system to create a more inclusive schooling environment. It is key to note that neoliberal education policies are antithetical to the creation of an inclusive schooling environment. This is why there is a dire need to shatter these policies to allow for a more resilient and fluid education system that will be friendlier to the diverse needs of students and educators.

As various provincial governments have the sole prerogative of adopting education policies, it is important to know how previous Ontario governments have handled education and the various policies they put in place in ensuring that minority groups, especially Blacks have a level playing field in the schooling environment. In this research, I explain how Bob Rae, the then NDP leader in 1993 implemented policies that sought to improve the lives of minority groups, thus adopting the *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity in School Boards: Guidelines for Policy Development and Implementation* which required all school boards to adopt antiracism and ethnocultural equity policies. Unfortunately, this policy did not see the light of day as the progressive conservative government cut down expenditures to education drastically thus closing
down the Anti-Racism Secretariat created by the NDP. However, the Ontario Ministry of Education re-introduced PPM No. 119, now titled *PPM No. 119: Developing and Implementing Equity and Inclusive Education Policies in Ontario Schools* which sought to address discriminatory issues like sexual orientation, race, physical or mental disability, gender, and class and how they create barriers for students (Rezai-Rashti, 2015). This was a very key step in closing the gap that existed between students in minority groups like Blacks and the privileged. Currently, the Ford government led by the conservatives have made several cuts to education in Ontario which is a replica of the commonsense revolution in 1993. With this, minority groups are the most affected as funded programs are usually granted to minority groups. Most of these neoliberal education policies end up affecting black students which hitherto affects the purpose of multicultural education which seeks to promote equity of information and high standards of academic scholarship in an environment that respects the potential of each student (Anderson & Jafaar, 2015).

The black youth in Ontario schools face a lot of challenges in the Ontario schooling system which can be partly attributed to the neoliberal education policies put in place by governments. In this paper, I examined some of the challenges the black youth face in the schooling environment. Most of the content that exist in the curriculum is largely Eurocentric which is largely opposed to the notion of multiculturalism which seeks to promote equity among all ethnic groups in the country. Dei (2006), for instance questions how the state of education can be advanced to engage all multiethnic populations which will be beneficial to the current state of education. This is a very important and relevant issue because students largely learn through the curriculum and it will be prudent to ensure that student feel a sense of belonging in what they study. Also, when students relate to what is being taught in schools, it provides them with a sense of confidence which in the
long run ensures equity and inclusion in the schools. To mitigate this challenge, Africentric Alternative schools in areas with large numbers of Black students was suggested by the 1994 Ontario Royal Commission of Learning. The only existing Africentric school in Ontario was established in 2009 to ensure that Black students learn about black history as well as have a sense of belongingness. In as much as some critics view the Africentric school as a replica of the segregation school system, I believe it is not entirely the case as students who face exclusion and discrimination will feel more secured in the Africentric school. Also, the curriculum in Africentric schools is not largely Eurocentric which is important in teaching Black students about black culture and history. When the curriculum is standardized, it does not encourage educators to be innovative in order to create classrooms that are inclusive. As espoused by Gosine & Tabi (2018), the neoliberal educational system shuns the experiential knowledge and lived experiences of the black male youth making it difficult to include an all-encompassing pedagogy that can promote equality and diversity in the classrooms. Consequently, the black male youth in schools are further marginalised, stigmatized, and penalized in schools for demonstrating community cultural wealth, which Yosso (2005) describes resistant capital “knowledges and skills fostered through oppositional behavior that challenges inequality” (pg. 14). In order words, the pedagogical structure of the neoliberal schooling system leaves little to no room for the black male youth to include their experiences which does not help in achieving an inclusive education.

In a study conducted by Dei (1992), it was discovered from the responses of 150 Black students from four Toronto high schools that student narratives about school experiences bothers on the following: differential treatment by race, the absence of Black/African Canadian teachers, and the absence of Black/African-Canadian history in the classroom (p. 183). Indeed, these issues are against the core values of multiculturalism which seeks to ensure that all ethnicities are treated
equally and have equal opportunities regardless of their skin color or where they come from. Clearly, this study proves that the differential treatment given black students based on their race defies the key tenets of multiculturalism which seeks to promote fairness and equity. The psychological effects of racism among Black students prevents or widens the gap between them and other students. This is due to the stereotyping they face as well, for instance, Black students being labelled as troublemakers and school dropouts. As part of the othering of black students, they are mostly seen as immigrants who come from elsewhere with different cultures. Again, this is not sound and inimical to the concept of multiculturalism we so much cherish. Also, black students are seen as athletes who have little to contribute in terms of having education, therefore, they are perceived as unlikely to do well in terms of academics. This is stereotypical as the fact that a student is athletic does not mean they do not have the capability of excelling in education. Dei (1997) suggests that in order to face these stereotypes, Black students should make a constant effort of hanging out with their fellow black students as there is a mutual understanding and experience. However, let me quickly add that, this solution is not entirely viable as it is also important for school authorities to teach students the concept of equality and mete some form of punishment to those who racially discriminate against minority groups like Black students. It is also the responsibility of educators to provide suggestions to provincial governments on the need to include black history in the curriculum to make it more robust and inclusive.

There is a need for re-envisioning the Ontario schooling system in order to create an equitable and more inclusive schooling environment based on the discussions above. These measures, when put in place will at least ensure that Black students in schools do not face any form of discrimination and are confident in the schooling system as well. There is the need for educators to teach students about the need to engage all students regardless of their racial differences. This
is very key as teachers are key figures in the lives of students and what they teach or direct students to do have an immense impact on students and their ability to respect all others regardless of their differences. As suggested by Dei (1995) there is also the need to have a philosophy of the African-centered school in Ontario education with new forms of teaching and new ways of fostering student-peer and student-teacher interactions. Henry (2016) for instance argues that public schools should include African Canadian perspectives. Hence, the inclusion of Black history in schools will go a long way in addressing the systemic exclusion and silencing of minority pedagogy like the study of black history. Therefore, the call for more Africentric schools is valid because it will be centered on teaching black history and culture which will at the end of the day foster the social and academic learning of students. As part of government’s efforts to ensure that achievement gaps are reduces among students, the Ministry of Education proposed some strategies for Ontario schools which includes the review of research, reports, and existing policies and programs at school boards across Ontario.

This paper emphasizes how neoliberal education policies affect the Black youth in Canada citing several policies like the common-sense revolution which was detrimental to the advancement of minority students in Ontario. The standardization of the curricula in Ontario schools which is the result of neoliberal policies limits the ability of educators to invite the lived experiences of the black youth in the classroom due to the homogenous nature of the school curriculum. As explained in this paper, neoliberal education policies largely obstruct multicultural education because of its racialized nature, as well as its failure to have a culturally inclusive pedagogy as termed by Sleeter (2012). As a country that values multiculturalism, it should be reflected in all facets of the country especially education which is crucial in the advancement of
any country. To emphasize, it is key to have a more fluid and flexible system which provides a level playing field to all students regardless of their privileges in the society.
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