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## **Soul Tending and the Pedagogy of Hope: A Mixed Method Study Examining the Experiences of Racialized Students in Southern Ontario Catholic Schools**

### **Abstract**

This study seeks to answer the following question: How effective are the equity and inclusive policies, implemented by Catholic schools in Ontario, in supporting the culture and identity of racially marginalized students who are not Catholic? The effectiveness of these policies, and their grounding in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1995; Gay 2000), are examined within the context of the Catholic interpretation of the Christian gospel message of human right to dignity, and the common theme of education for liberation, found in the philosophical views expressed by writers such as Jacques Maritain (1943), Paulo Freire (1970), and Grant Shockley (1988). Using the explanatory sequential mixed method model, former Catholic school students and teachers were surveyed for this study.

**Keywords:** Soul tending, Catholic education, culturally responsive pedagogy, racialized students, equity, and inclusive education.

Paulo Freire once wrote that, “authentic education is not carried on by “A” for “B” or by “A” about “B,” but rather by “A” with “B,” mediated by the world...”<sup>1</sup> The writer goes on to explain that this mediation is precisely the content on which education can be built. Part of that involves, in Freire’s view, acknowledging the real situations of people. In decrying the need for what he terms “authentic humanism” he echoes Pierre Furter’s call for “permitting the emergency of the awareness of our full humanity.”<sup>2</sup> The opposite in terms of education, Freire purports, is the banking style – knowledge organized by the educator without thought for the student’s situation that is then imposed upon them. “Many political and educational plans have failed,” he wrote, “because their authors designed them according to their own personal views of reality, never once taking into account (except as mere objects of their actions) the *men-in-a-situation* to whom their program was ostensibly directed.”<sup>3</sup> For over 100 years in Canada, education that failed to recognize the humanity of Indigenous people was delivered in the form of residential schools. Similar models were imposed on brown and black and othered bodies throughout the European colonized world. Evidence shows that remnants of this structure still remain enshrined in our education system, and in the minds of those tasked with implementing it.

This study sought to answer the following question: How effective are the equity and inclusive policies, implemented by Catholic schools in Ontario, in supporting the culture and identity of racially marginalized students who are not Catholic? The effectiveness of these policies, and their grounding in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Ladson-Billings 1995; Gay 2000), are examined within the context of the Catholic interpretation of the Christian gospel message of human right to dignity, and the common theme of education for liberation, found in the philosophical views expressed by writers such as Jacques Maritain (1943), Paulo Freire (1970), and Grant Shockley (1988). Using the explanatory sequential mixed method model, former Catholic school students<sup>4</sup> and school staff were included in this study.

While the overall findings of this study will be laid out in the latter part of this paper, the more extensive report included an overall conclusion summarized thus: “It can be fairly concluded that the Equity and Inclusive policies implemented by Catholic schools in Ontario are not as effective as they could be in supporting the culture and identity of racially marginalized students.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Background and Context – Racialized students in Ontario Schools**

Providing some background on the education experience of racialized students in Ontario is important to contextualize this present study. While very little academic research exists to document the specific experience of racialized students in Catholic schools, recent media stories coupled with academic studies in the public school system, paint an unsettling picture of a system wrought with racism and racially oppressive practices. In 2019 *CBC News* reported a lawsuit filed against the York Region District School Board alleged that a school failed to adequately respond to repeated racially based attacks on a black student. Several physical altercations between the alleged victim and perpetrators were caught on video. *The Toronto Star* reported in 2019 that a mother sued the Toronto District School Board for failing to protect her

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<sup>1</sup> Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2000), 93.

<sup>2</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 93.

<sup>3</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 94.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout this paper I use the word “students” interchangeably with “respondents” to refer to study participants.

<sup>5</sup> Marie Green, “Examining the Experiences of Racialized Students in Southern Ontario Catholic Schools” (PhD diss., University of St. Michael’s College/University of Toronto, 2019) 156.

daughter after a white student allegedly punched her in the face. *The Toronto star* also reported in 2017 on a York Region District School Board school trustee publicly used the N-word to describe a parent seeking racial justice for her children, blamed the usage of the word on a head injury and refused to resign until protest forced her hand. As startling as these events sound, the climate they portray would come as no surprise to scholars like Carl James of York University. James' 2019 report "We Rise Together" documents issues of racism in public school systems. While the 2019 report targeted specific communities within Peel District School Board, it echoed some of the same concerns captured in a previous study for the Toronto District School Board in 2017 also conducted by James. Conducted in order to interrogate the issues concerning schooling, academic performance, and overall education outcomes for black students, both studies highlighted students experiencing low expectations, disproportionate streaming to non-university track courses, and racial profiling. The Peel District School Board study in particular found that the racism black students encountered "fostered a schooling environment that made learning tough and challenging."<sup>6</sup>

Anisef et al (2010) examined the effect of family income and poverty on high school completion rates of immigrants in Toronto and found that "students from the Caribbean are significantly more likely to enter school one year late, live in alternate family structures, find themselves placed in non-academic streams and be at risk of not completing their course of study."<sup>7</sup> Most of the students included in the qualitative portion of the study to be outlined in this paper are first generation or immigrant youth from Caribbean backgrounds. When examining black student high school completion in Quebec and Ontario, Livingstone and Weinfeld (2017) built on Anisef et al by factoring in family structure and concluded that "income and family structure together explain a large part of any black/white gap in high school completion," but "does not imply that antiblack racism in schools is either inconsequential or nonexistent."<sup>8</sup>

Across Canada, Indigenous and Black students are disproportionately represented in academic failure, school to jail pipeline statistics, child welfare cases and incarceration. In the province of Ontario, the disparities between these two groups and the general population do not end with education. A report by the Catholic Children's Aid Society of Toronto (CCAS Toronto) revealed that black children are 28% more likely to be placed in care than white children.<sup>9</sup> A 2018 report by the Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) found that despite making up less than five percent of the child population in Ontario "Indigenous children represent approximately 30% of foster children" and "Indigenous children are over-represented at all points of child welfare decision-making."<sup>10</sup> The Aboriginal Advisor to Ontario concluded that "Children at risk in Aboriginal communities face major issues that include but are not limited to

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<sup>6</sup> Carl James, "We Rise Together," Peel District School Board, March 11, 2019, 33

<sup>7</sup>Paul Anisef, Robert S. Brown, Kelli Phythian, Robert Sweet, Davide Walters, "Early school leaving among immigrants in Toronto secondary school," *Canadian Review of Sociology* 47, no 2 (2010): 122, accessed August 14, 2019, [https://linkgalecom.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/apps/doc/A229302110/CPI?u=utoronto\\_main&sid=CPI&xid=4e71ab59](https://linkgalecom.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/apps/doc/A229302110/CPI?u=utoronto_main&sid=CPI&xid=4e71ab59)

<sup>8</sup> Anne-Marie Livingstone and Morton Weinfeld, "Black Students and High School Completion in Quebec and Ontario: A Multivariate Analysis," *Canadian Review of Sociology* 54: 193, accessed August 14, 2019 <https://doi-org.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/10.1111/cars.12144>

<sup>9</sup> *Interrupted Childhoods: Over-representation of Indigenous and Black children in Ontario child welfare* (Toronto, ON: Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2018), 20.

<sup>10</sup> *Interrupted Childhoods: Over-representation of Indigenous and Black children in Ontario child welfare*, 20.

addictions, lack of suitable housing, poverty, unemployment and one of the highest suicide rates in the developed world.”<sup>11</sup>

Given these dismal numbers, reflection on any progress made since the residential school era requires a reconsideration of how we define education, and in the context of Catholic school, how we understand Christian education. What has been made abundantly clear is that what took place in residential schools, was not Christian education but rather, education delivered by individuals who identified as Christians. For over 100 years, Catholic, Anglican, United, Methodist, Presbyterian, and other Christian denominations, operated residential schools in partnership with the Government of Canada. Indigenous children were ripped from their land, their families, their culture, and religion and forced to adapt the culture of white Europeans, deemed more suitable and acceptable. While their language, food and customs were relegated to the sidelines as savage, children were beaten, raped, starved and sometimes murdered at the hands of their teachers and wardens.

Today, both black and Indigenous students are more likely than their white peers to leave school without graduating, are more likely to be incarcerated and are more likely to suffer from poor health outcomes. Another common thread found among black and Indigenous students is their struggle with identity and how this impacts their school performance. Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac and Zine (1997), Bhyat (2003) and Hallet (2008) confirmed that when students from these communities identify with their culture, it significantly impacts their educational experience and academic outcomes. Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac and Zine (1997) and Tuck (2012) contended that the term “push out”<sup>12</sup> more accurately reflected the fact that non-completion was an outcome of the racism, oppression and marginalization expressed by Indigenous and black youth.

### **The Literature on Catholic School Experience**

Currently, more than half of Ontario’s 29 Catholic school boards admit students who are not Catholic.<sup>13</sup> Catholic schools are the second largest providers of education in Canada, exceeded only by the public secular school system. As Brennan (2010) notes, despite belonging to different faith backgrounds, one in two parents in the province of Ontario choose to send their children to Catholic school.<sup>14</sup> The present study reveals that many black parents view the Catholic school as a better option than the public school system. Before embarking on a study to examine the experiences of racialized students in Southern Ontario schools a review was undertaken in order to determine what the literature says about the experiences of racialized students in current Catholic school systems in Ontario and what gaps might exist in that literature.

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<sup>11</sup> Laurel Broten, *Children First*, Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2012, 18.

<sup>12</sup> George J. Sefa Dei, Josephine Mazzuca, Elizabeth McIsaac, Jasmine Zine, *Reconstructing Drop-out: A Critical Ethnography of the Dynamics of Black Students’ disengagement from School* (Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 3.

<sup>13</sup> Louise Brown, “Ontario Catholic elementary schools quietly admitting students of all Faiths,” *The Toronto Star*, August 29, 2014, accessed March 28, 2017, [https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education/2014/08/29/ontario\\_Catholic\\_elementary\\_schools\\_quietly\\_admitting\\_students\\_of\\_all\\_faiths.html](https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education/2014/08/29/ontario_Catholic_elementary_schools_quietly_admitting_students_of_all_faiths.html)

<sup>14</sup> Terri-Lynn Kay Brennan, “Spiritual Diversity in Modern Ontario Catholic Education: How Youth Imbue an Anti-Colonial Identity through Faith,” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 107, accessed March 8, 2019, <http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/docview/869528120?accountid=14771>.

The main themes that emerged from the literature review include the prevalence of “othering” in Canadian school systems, marginalization experienced by certain communities in the school curriculum, school environment and education policy making, and challenges with cultural and religious diversity and Catholic schooling. The overall findings indicate that positive academic performance, the existence of policies, and the Christian posture of Catholic School Boards have not provided an atmosphere “where all students feel encouraged to express their individual faith and celebrate their differences, especially differences that do not align with Catholic teaching.”<sup>15</sup>

Donley (2009) acknowledged the need for a comprehensive response to the changing cultural and religious demographics of the Catholic school system. Bhyat (2003) found that black students in two Toronto Catholic schools encounter the “playing white” and “black athlete” phenomenon<sup>16</sup> which affects their overall experience in the education system. The study concluded that, “Curriculum, teachers and extra-curricular activities made up a significant part of the school experience for students and made an important difference in how students experienced racism in school.”<sup>17</sup> The study also found that “the impact of racism flowed from society into the schools and that schools were able to filter and mitigate racism in varying degrees depending on how anti-racist and effective they were.” Brennan (2010) found that despite 54 percent of parents identifying concerns with spirituality as the number one reason for sending their students (both Catholic and non-Catholic) to Catholic schools,<sup>18</sup> students were “not experiencing the complete freedom of identity that is unique and valued in their schools.”<sup>19</sup> Ellwood (2014), Patridge (2014) and Segeren and Kutsyuruba (2012) all point out that the Ontario’s *Equity and Inclusive Policy* failed to trickle down to the classroom level and bring about the meaningful changes for which it was intended.

### **Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Policy**

In an attempt to acknowledge the “poorer outcomes for disproportionate numbers of students from low-income environments, racialized students, Indigenous students, students who identify as LGBTQ,”<sup>20</sup> the Ontario government released the Capacity Building Series on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy as part of *Ontario’s Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*. The strategy was later accompanied by Policy Program Memorandum or PPM 119, which required all school boards to implement equity and inclusive education policies. In addition to the policy, programs such as The First Nation, Métis, and Inuit Policy Framework (2007) Ontario Black Youth Action Plan (2017), specifically targeted the two communities (black and Indigenous) most adversely affected by negative academic outcomes.

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<sup>15</sup> Green, “Examining the Experiences of Racialized Students in Southern Ontario Catholic Schools,” 17.

<sup>16</sup> Alice Janet Bhyat, “The Impact of Racism on Black Students in Two Catholic Schools” (PhD diss., University of Toronto – Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, 2003), 232.

<sup>17</sup> Bhyat, “The Impact of Racism on Black Students in Two Catholic Schools,” 229.

<sup>18</sup> Terri-Lynn Kay Brennan. “Spiritual Diversity in Modern Ontario Catholic Education: How Youth Imbue an Anti-Colonial Identity through Faith” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 2010), 106, accessed March 9, 2019, <http://myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/login?url=https://search-proquestcom.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/docview/869528120?accountid=14771>.

<sup>19</sup> Brennan, “Spiritual Diversity in Modern Ontario Catholic Education: How Youth Imbue an Anti-Colonial Identity through Faith,” 144.

<sup>20</sup> *Ontario’s Education Equity Action Plan* (Toronto, ON: Ontario Ministry of Education, 2017), 14.

Catholic school boards for their part, seat the Equity and Inclusive policy within what Mario D'Souza has termed "the distinctiveness of Catholic education."<sup>21</sup> This distinctiveness is attributed to the view that Catholic education shares the vision of the mission of the church, affirms our Imago Dei characteristic, has union with God as its ultimate God and commands the cooperation of the three main spheres of education, Church, family and school.<sup>22</sup> In short, culturally responsive education is purported to be imbedded in the DNA of the Catholic school by Catholic education leaders and therefore thought to be a natural progression for an evolving education system. Teachers interviewed for this study, confirmed receiving training for the implementation of PPM 119. But they also acknowledged that it was not mandatory, and teachers could decide if they wanted to participate or not. One teacher noted that only a handful or teachers in her school had participated in any kind of training.

Based on the Ontario Human Rights code prohibited grounds of discrimination. the *Equity and Inclusive Policy*, along with its forebearer *Ontario's Equity and Inclusive Education Strategy*, was heavily influenced by the concept of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP), which had its theoretical base in the work of Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995). When read separately, there appears to be little connection between education theory largely pursued from a secular standpoint and a philosophical approach imbedded in a religious system perceived to be dominated by white, Eurocentric values. However, when taken together, similarities between the concept of CRP and the Christian Philosophy of Education (CPE) are glaring. Since both provide the lens through which the present research was pursued, a brief exploration of both will shed light on the significance of the findings. I begin with comparing the two concepts and end with a concept that compels a paradigm shift in the delivery of Catholic education and Christian education in general.

### **The Christian Philosophy of Education and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy Theory**

One would be remiss to embark on any discussion about the relationship between the Christian Philosophy of Education (CPE) and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) without considering the work of Paulo Freire. The activist educator seemed to possess an almost perspicacious ability when it came to education theory and practice. This clear insight left the education community with a body of work that is still widely revered today. Part of the appeal of Freire is how his theories are in fact interdisciplinary in nature. They can be applied to political, philosophical, educational, anthropological, religious, and sociological topics. As such, his theories present as an appropriate basis upon which alignment between CPE and CRP can be established and illustrated. The main Christian education philosopher relied on for the theoretical framework of this present study, Jacques Maritain, heavily influenced Freire's work. While the fact of Freire's Christian grounding and inspiration has largely been ignored by an academia in its tendency to strive for that which is secular, neutral, and void of any religious affiliation or motivation, several recent books have revealed this important aspect of his life.<sup>23</sup> The central thesis of Freire's work, as borne out in his seminal publication *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is education as the facilitator of human formation. Ultimately, Freire contends, education must

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<sup>21</sup> D'Souza, "The Distinctiveness of Catholic Education," in *Discipline, Devotion and Dissent: Jewish, Catholic and Islamic schooling in Canada*, edited by Graham Patrick McDonough, Nadeem A. Memon and Avi Mintz, 45. Waterloo, Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2012.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> See Irwin Leopando's *A Pedagogy of Faith: The Theological Vision of Paulo Freire* (Bloomsbury, 2017) James Kirylo and Drick Boyd. *Paulo Freire: His Faith, Spirituality, and Theology* (Sense Publishers, 2017).

serve to fulfill the human ontological quest for completion, to become who we are, to accomplish the creator's potential for our lives. He defined "authentic liberation" as the "process of humanization" and "liberation" as "praxis."<sup>24</sup> He called for the rejection of the "banking concept" of education and for educators to instead embrace "problem-posing" education, which essentially responds to the consciousness inherent to a student's humanity.<sup>25</sup>

Ladson-Billings invokes Freire's contribution to the promotion of social and cultural critique<sup>26</sup> in describing the traits of successful students of African American students.<sup>27</sup> Due to the lack of research into academic success among African American students, Ladson-Billings' 1995 work "Toward a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy" was a welcome breath of fresh air. Ladson-Billings challenged preconceived notions about how culture intersects with the institution and the tendency to locate student failure within the "culture mismatch between student and school."<sup>28</sup> Rather than the goal of education being how to make students fit into the educational structure, she identifies this approach, which had been conceived by previous educational theorists, as cultural congruence,<sup>29</sup> she proposes the concept of "culturally responsive" as a preferred way to conceptualize the necessary "relationship between home/community culture and school culture."<sup>30</sup> What Ladson-Billings identifies as cultural congruence, Freire identifies as the outcome of the banking model of education where "bank-clerk" teachers see their students as containers into which they make knowledge deposits. In this model, "the educated individual is the adapted person," which is ideal for the oppressor because "tranquility rests on how well people fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it."<sup>31</sup>

Grant Shockley also based his Intentional Engagement Model on the liberation education theories of Paulo Freire. Shockley held the black religious experience as a model for addressing the inequities in education. He charted the history of a people who developed a relationship with God and a theology made up the wholesome pieces that could be gleaned of the colonizer's Christianity. Black people, he said, selected from this religion what they needed to survive and rejected what was meant to destroy them.<sup>32</sup> Shockley's work would inspire one of his students, James H. Cone, to pursue this line of inquiry and become one of the most influential liberation theologians of our time. When Cone insists that overcoming oppression requires one to embrace that which the oppressor "ridicules,"<sup>33</sup> he is foreshadowing what Django Paris would later theorize about the need for education to act in maintaining "our multiethnic and multilingual society."<sup>34</sup> It is not good enough, Paris asserts, for education to be "relevant" or "responsive," it must actively help to maintain the student's culture.<sup>35</sup> In Paris' model, language and cultural

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<sup>24</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Gloria Ladson-Billings, "Towards a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," *American Education Research Journal* 32, no. 3 (Autumn, 1995): 477.

<sup>27</sup> Ladson-Billings, "Towards a Theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy," 478.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 475

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 467

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 467

<sup>31</sup> Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 76.

<sup>32</sup> Grant Shockley, "Christian Education and the Black Religious Experience." In Charles E. Foster *Ethnicity in the Education of the Church* (Nashville: Scarritt Press, 1987), 38.

<sup>33</sup> James H. Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, (Seabury Press, 1969), 18.

<sup>34</sup> Django Paris, "Culturally sustaining pedagogy: A needed change in stance, terminology, and practice," *Educational Researcher* 41, no. 3 (2012): 93.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 93

differences are not seen as “deficiencies to overcome.”<sup>36</sup> He echoes what Ladson-Billings promoted regarding the sociolinguists’ notion about the likelihood of students to experience better academic success if their home language could be incorporated into the classroom.<sup>37</sup> Further support for the necessity of authentic cultural inclusion in the classroom can be found in the work of Geneva Gay whose seminal work *Culturally Responsive Teaching* is often referenced as part of the CRP canon. Writing in 2013, Gay lays out some specific characteristics of what she terms “culturally responsive teaching.” Teachers can do culturally responsive teaching by “restructuring attitudes and beliefs about ethnic and cultural diversity; resisting resistance or countering opposition to cultural diversity; centering culture and difference in the teaching process; and establishing pedagogical connections between cultural responsiveness and other dimensions or areas of teaching.”<sup>38</sup> Banks and Banks (2010) assert that students learning is improved and students are more highly motivated “when the school curriculum reflects their cultures, experiences, and perspectives.”<sup>39</sup>

When it comes to education, there is broad agreement between CPE and CRP which fall into three main areas: Recognition of the student’s humanity, the critical role of the spheres of education (home, church, community, school), and willingness to engage social justice issues. Due to the context of the present study being Catholic schools, the Christian philosophy of education emphasized herein will be that which is embodied in Catholic education.

The common thread of humanization that runs throughout CPE and CRP is amply present in the work of Shockley, as well as Maritain and Catholic education documents. The Christian Anthropological idea of personhood, the idea of existing as a being with divinely endowed rights, is emphasized by Maritain who disavows the relegation of training people merely for the service of the state but allowing for the special giftedness to shine through into “fulfillment of the deepest potentialities of the human being.”<sup>40</sup> Catholic school boards, for their part, seat this in the concept of Imago Dei which is promoted through reference to Genesis 1:27 across their literature. Many school board websites stress their belief that “all people are created equal, in the image of God, with inimitable characteristics and deserving of dignity.” The idea of not seeing the student as empty vessels to be filled, is also echoed in the work of Maritain, who decries students being treated as “tabula rasa” or something to be molded.<sup>41</sup>

Maritain also espoused the importance of the spheres of education<sup>42</sup> in his 1943 work the *Education of Man*. These spheres of education are acknowledged through education documents produced from the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican (Vatican II) such as *Gravissimum Educationis* (Declaration on Christian Education). The document invokes the spheres of education by identifying the family as the “first school of the social virtues.”<sup>43</sup> D’Souza (2012), affirms that Catholic education is dependent “upon the cooperation of the three agents: school,

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ladson-Billings, “But that’s Just Good Teaching: The Case for Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.” *Theory into Practice* 34, no 3 (Summer 1995): 159.

<sup>38</sup> Geneva Gay, “Teaching to and through Cultural Diversity.” *Curriculum Inquiry* 43, no. 1 (2013): 48, [http://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/03626784/v43i0001/48\\_ttatcd](http://resolver.scholarsportal.info/resolve/03626784/v43i0001/48_ttatcd).

<sup>39</sup> James A. Banks and Cherry A. McGee Banks, *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*, 7<sup>th</sup> Ed., (New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 234.

<sup>40</sup> Gallagher, Idella and Donald Gallagher. Eds. *The Education of Man*. New York: Doubleday & Co. Inc.1962, 10.

<sup>41</sup> Jacques Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1943, 30.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>43</sup> Declaration on Christian Education: *Gravissimum Educationis*. Proclaimed by His Holiness Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965. The Holy See, 2018, 2, accessed March 25, 2019.



family, and Church.”<sup>44</sup> Paris (2012) also advocated for a “third space” where school and family could coexist.

Furthermore, the declaration upholds that the true purpose of education is the formation of the human person which ultimately benefits society.<sup>45</sup> In keeping with the CRP emphasis on social justice critique, the Vatican II documents insists that the school community exhibit an “atmosphere” that is “animated by the Gospel spirit of freedom and charity.”<sup>46</sup> The declaration goes further to state the importance of taking cultural and religious pluralism of society into consideration by “respecting religious freedom” and delivering education “according to the individual moral and religious principles of the families.”<sup>47</sup> With the foresight worthy of an organization of the Vatican’s status, the declaration insists that teachers be suitably qualified and upgrade their skills to keep up with current theories and practices.<sup>48</sup> Finally, the declaration calls for teachers to “bear witness to Christ” through their teaching as well as their life.

Indian residential schools were still being operated by the Catholic church many years after Vatican II. Kuper Island Residential School, for example, operated up until the 1970s and was included in the list of settlement schools for residential school survivors.<sup>49</sup> As recent as 2016 a lawsuit was brought against an Ontario Catholic school (with more than 50% non-Catholic student body)<sup>50</sup> regarding exemption from religious education classes. This is evidence that just as the *Equity and Inclusive Policy* did not trickle down to schools, teachings from Vatican II and the philosophers, theologians, and theorists, have also failed to resonate in many schools and classrooms. Many respondents to the present study, spoke about the discomfort with emphasis on pro-life teaching. In fact, when questioned about any negative experiences they had with the religious nature of Catholic schools, the pro-life program was a recurring theme. One student spoke about feeling somewhat imposed upon by Catholic religiosity:

Lots of interesting points in terms of participating in religious services. I had never taken Eucharist. There was a lot of symbolism – iconography – it was quite jarring at first. By the end of Grade 12 I had become agnostic.<sup>51</sup>

Though not explicitly stated, many of these theorists are implicit in their invocation of the spiritual aspects of a student’s being. Most cultures have a seamless bond between their faith and culture. From the Muslim students who leave my classroom for a few minutes to pray during Ramadan, to the mother who launched a complaint against the York District School Board for allowing her child to participate in yoga, which she believes is contrary to their Catholic beliefs, religion and the faith connected to that religion, cannot be ignored if we are intending to educate the whole student. Several of the students I interviewed for the purpose of this study, spoke of the importance of being able to be their authentic selves in a Catholic school setting. Two respondents who identified as members of a Pentecostal denomination, said it meant a lot to

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<sup>44</sup> Mario O. D’Souza, “The distinctiveness of Catholic Education,” 45.

<sup>45</sup> Declaration on Christian Education *Gravissimum Educationis*, 1.

<sup>46</sup> *Gravissimum Educationis*, 4.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> A list of residential schools included in the settlement can be found here <http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/schools.html#British%20Columbia>.

<sup>50</sup> Michelle McQuigge, “Students can opt out of religious class after complaint settled,” *The Toronto Star*, June 13, 2017 <https://www.thestar.com/yourtoronto/education/2017/06/13/students-can-opt-out-of-religiousclasses-at-Catholic-school-after-complaint-settled.html>

<sup>51</sup> Interview transcript B-08-2019

them to be in an environment where worship and praying, though different in form, was similar in content. A number of respondents spoke of how much it meant to be taken by their religious education teacher to a mosque, a synagogue, or other places of worship where they could learn about other faiths.

What I have termed Soul Tending Pedagogy can serve as a uniting force for CPE and CRP, wherein the similarities are fused, and differences reconciled. Elsewhere, I have defined Soul Tending Pedagogy as “teaching with the perception of students as the embodiment of what Jacques Maritain refers to as “metaphysical mystery”<sup>52</sup> and, acting as a partner on the human journey to fullness and completeness, buoyed by a willingness to employ praxis such as culturally responsive education.”<sup>53</sup> Soul Tending Pedagogy is the theological and ecclesiological retort to the challenges posed by racial inequities in education systems. It immediately requires a paradigm shift in the way that education, particularly Christian education, is delivered.

## Methodology

Given the sociological nature of this study, which sought to examine the experiences of racialized students, a mixed methods model served as an appropriate method to facilitate the voices of students being heard. No longer thought to be anomalistic, mixed methods qualitative inquiry is often employed when there is a need to explain the quantitative data collected. This study employed a mixed methods explanatory sequential method (Creswell, Clark 2007).<sup>54</sup> Qualitative research was carried out with the specific aim of shedding light on data that might not fully tell the story of research subjects. In such instances, the stories of research subjects act as a cynosure for the entire project. The quantitative aspect of the project was used as a sampling framework to gain access to respondents who were representative of the population. This approach was further framed within a constructivist-transformative worldview (Creswell 2014), which is elsewhere described as a constructivist paradigm (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). The mixed method approach facilitated the “insider” or what Ladson-Billings describes as the “native” researcher element. I am a member of the community which is the subject of this research in more ways than one, as black woman, as a teacher and as a Christian. While the features of mixed methods qualitative research serve to validate my work, a benefit of my insider status can be found in the constructivist transformative worldview, similar to “action research” (Bhyat 2003), which gives me the ability to apply the research in my life as well as my practice.

Research subjects included individuals from racially marginalized groups 18 and over, and who attended a Catholic school between September 2014 and December 2018, and identify as racialized and/or Black (African, African-origin, African-Canadian, African-Caribbean, Caribbean origins), Indo- Caribbean, West Indian, Indigenous Canadian (Inuit, Metis, First Nations, North American Aboriginal), as well as teachers who teach in Catholic schools. Catholic school employees were also interviewed in their roles as administrators in order to inform school board policy. Multiple forms of data collection were used to support triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). Data collection instruments included cross-sectional self-administered questionnaires, interview forms, audio recording, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Documents analyzed included reports from the ministry of education, Equity

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<sup>52</sup> Idella Gallagher and Donald Gallagher, Eds., *The Education of Man* (New York, NY: Doubleday & Co. Inc., 1962), 164.

<sup>53</sup> Green, Examining the Experiences of Racialized Students in Southern Ontario Catholic Schools, 12.

<sup>54</sup> John W. Creswell and Vicki L. Plano Clark, *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research*. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2007), 156.

and Inclusive Policy documents and Catholic education documents including related Church documents.

A quantitative survey was implemented online and in paper format. Respondents to the survey were given the option to participate in a follow-up semi-structured interview. The results of the survey were analyzed to both inform the follow-up interview and identify prospective interview subjects. Forty-nine valid surveys were gleaned from a total of 211 responses to the survey and 11 semi-structured interviews were eventually carried out. Below, I share the overall findings of the research.

## Findings

This study revealed that despite the implementation of equity and inclusive policies across all 72 Province of Ontario school boards, representations of diversity and inclusiveness still come across as token and superficial. Major changes to textbooks and curriculum, teacher training, need to be made in order for all students to feel the impact of what it is like to be in an environment where their culture and identity is supported. In the conclusion to my forthcoming dissertation, I summarize the findings thus:

“What this study found is that racialized students still experience racism in Southern Ontario Catholic schools. For many students, the Catholic school is not a place of safety and all students do not feel that they can live authentically within its walls. There are students who feel that their culture and identity is not respected and acknowledged in meaningful ways. Yet, despite the racism and the lack of a culturally nurturing environment, most students have maintained strong links to their ethno-cultural community and ethnic identity, and many do well academically. A major finding of this study is that positive outcomes, including academic and sustainability of culture and identity, for racialized students is due in large part to their families. This study confirmed family support as an important protective factor. Additionally, friendships and the health of those relationships, as well as the space for those relationships to flourish and not be impeded by school policies or school social norms, are of extreme importance to students.”<sup>55</sup>

I consolidate the major findings of the study thus:<sup>56</sup>

- Catholic school boards have formally implemented equity and inclusive policies in accordance with the Ontario Ministry of Education mandate, including providing training to teachers; however, the non-mandatory and selective nature of this programming results in inequities in how the principles are brought to life and practiced in the classroom and schools.
- Racialized students still experience discrimination based on race, cultural background, and religious faith in Southern Ontario Catholic schools.
- Catholic schools in Southern Ontario are still failing to be a place where all students feel they can be their true and authentic selves.
- Most students feel that the school environment recognizes that all people are created equal, in the image of God, with inimitable characteristics and deserving of dignity (Gen 1:27)
- Despite the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, the work of the First Nations, Metis, Inuit Education Policy Framework, and implementation of Equity and

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<sup>55</sup> Green, *Examining the Experiences of Racialized Students in Southern Ontario Catholic Schools*, 155.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

Inclusive policies, Indigenous students are still experiencing discrimination based on race, culture, and religion in Catholic schools. They overwhelmingly rate their experience at Catholic school as not good or horrible.

- Despite the discrimination and a lack of more extensive experiences of acknowledgement of their community and culture, most of the racialized students who participated in this study have still managed to graduate from high school and go on to post-secondary education
- Despite the discrimination and a lack of more extensive experiences of acknowledgement of their community and culture, most racialized students have maintained strong links to their ethno-cultural community and ethnic identity
- The strong support of family and friends was a determining factor in successful academic outcomes for racialized students

## Conclusion

Soul Tending Pedagogy offers a pedagogy of hope that will allow for teacher, student, and their families to coexist in divided spaces. Over time, divisions may come to be seen as the outcome of the attributes that make us human, our ability to think for ourselves, and the ability for others to value those thoughts. What I heard loud and clear from respondents is the need for differences to be respected, for their humanity to be recognized. They eschew any attempt at assimilation, to make everyone they same. They want to be in an environment where they can stand in their full cultural context, in the blackness or brownness of their skin, and still be given equal footing with their white counterparts. They echo the words of James Cone who said that “mutual meaningful dialogue is possible” in an atmosphere where “integration means that each man meets the other on equal footing, with neither possessing the ability to assert the rightness of his style over the other.”<sup>57</sup>

Jacques Maritain wrote that “What is most important in education is a respect for the soul as well as for the body of the child.”<sup>58</sup> When teachers begin to see students as souls, the embodiment of a higher being, which is even higher than their authority in the classroom, they will be compelled to transform their treatment of students. Another aspect of being able to perceive students as souls, is the acknowledgement of the presence of evil and the possibility of its counterpart which is “good.” In the course of my research, one of the experiences relayed involved a presentation being made by a group of students who happened to all be black. The respondent shared that as they gathered at the front of the classroom to make their presentation, “the teacher said, ‘Turn on the light’ and she did this little laugh - he heh - ‘I can’t see you.’”<sup>59</sup> I think of incidents such as this and the other micro-aggressions described by respondents and I cannot help but place them in the same category as the evil that produced the abuse suffered by thousands of Indigenous students in residential schools.

Christian educators cannot lose sight of what is a core teaching, a similarity shared with many other faiths, about the presence of good and evil. By ignoring spiritual things and speaking only the language of secular theorists and practitioners, we run the risk of only addressing the symptom of poor educational outcome, and not the root cause, part of which is the withholding of equitable education. Another tenet of Christian education is the common good, and the failure of individuals impacts our overall society. As D’Souza states, “The common good has material,

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<sup>57</sup> Cone, *Black Theology and Black Power*, 17.

<sup>58</sup> Maritain, *Education at the Crossroads*, 9.

<sup>59</sup> Transcript from group discussion, Group - A28

moral, and intellectual dimensions, but if human flourishing is relegated to the private spheres of religion and ethnic culture, then even the constricted liberal depiction of the common good as life bound by economic and political union will be compromised, leading to the further miniaturization of human beings.”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> D’Souza, *The Distinctiveness of Catholic Education*, 60-61.

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