

Legitimization and Normalization of EQAO Standardized Testing as an Accountability Tool in Ontario: Rise of Quantifiable Outcome-Based Education and Inequitable Educational Practices

ARDAVAN EIZADIRAD
Ryerson University

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between curricula and standardized assessments and the philosophies that inform their relationship in the context of Ontario, Canada. The philosophical origins of Ontario's curriculum and assessment policy and practice are explored to see if there is evidence of a trilateral symbiotic relationship between the Ontario curriculum, the Tyler Rationale referring to the central questions Ralph Tyler identified as significant for effective curriculum development, and Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) standardized testing. It is argued that the legitimization and implementation of EQAO standardized tests beginning in 1996 contributed to the rise of quantifiable outcome-based education within the Ontario curriculum justified via philosophical underpinnings of the Tyler Rationale. Furthermore, it is argued that the way EQAO standardized tests are administered and the results used, with a focus on quantifiable outcomes, perpetuates inequitable educational practices particularly disadvantaging racialized students and those from lower socio-economic status.

Keywords: Standardized testing, EQAO, equity, accountability, assessment

Introduction

This paper investigates the philosophical origins of Ontario's curriculum and assessment policy and practice to see if there is evidence of a trilateral symbiotic relationship between the Ontario curriculum, the Tyler Rationale referring to the central questions Ralph Tyler identified as significant for effective curriculum development, and Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) standardized testing. The theorization of this relationship is explored and described as symbiotic referring to the notion that all three components need each other to survive, thrive, and legitimize one another. In order to critically understand the rise and normalization of the use of standardized testing, administered by EQAO in publicly funded schools in Ontario with its emphasis on accountability, we must first take a step back and examine various historical junctions leading up to our current context. This includes examining the operationalization and use of the word *curriculum* in mainstream schooling, development and changes within the field of Curriculum Studies over time, the philosophical underpinnings associated with the Tyler Rationale for developing curriculum, and the historical roots behind legitimization and implementation of standardized testing as a thermometer for checking mastery

of curriculum content by students and providing accountability to the general public about the quality of education offered by schools. Finally, this paper examines to what extent the current way EQAO standardized tests are administered and the results used, with a focus on quantifiable outcomes, perpetuates inequitable educational practices particularly disadvantaging racialized students and those from lower socio-economic status.

Historical Overview of What Constitutes as *Curriculum*

Before examining how the development of the Ontario curriculum was largely influenced by the Tyler Rationale and its philosophical underpinnings, we must first briefly examine the operationalization and use of the word *curriculum* from a historical perspective and changes within the field of Curriculum Studies over time. Egan (1978) points out that *curriculum* is “a Latin word carried directly over into English” (p. 10) rooted in the Latin word *currere* with its literal meaning being “a running,” “a race,” “a course,” which can be interpreted as “the course to be run” (p. 10). From this perspective, *curriculum* is the content students study which is considered important to master, and by end of “the course” students are expected to demonstrate mastery and understanding of the knowledge presented to them. Secondary questions that arise from viewing *curriculum* as a “course to be run” are “what should the curriculum contain?” and “what is the best way to organize these contents?” (Egan, 1978, p. 11) Egan (1978) argues it was not until many decades later that societies began to consider the significance of “How should things be taught (p.12)?” which began a transitional shift towards considering teaching pedagogy rather than focusing on absolute course content when developing curriculum. This symbolized a monumental shift from *what* questions to *how* questions. Transition to “How should things be taught?” led to exploring curriculum in relation to various factors ranging from the way the classroom space is set-up to considering specific needs and interests of students relative to their preferred learning styles and other variables that individualized learning to maximize teaching and learning effectiveness. This is exemplified through the metaphor of the teacher role being changed from “*teacher as master*” to “*teacher as facilitator*” (Egan, 1978, p. 14).

Philosophical Underpinnings of the Tyler Rationale and its Role in Development of the Ontario Curriculum and Use of Standardized Testing in Schools

The relationship between subject specific curriculum content and implementation of standardized testing to assess mastery of learning content is facilitated by the Tyler Rationale and its philosophical underpinnings. Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery and Taubman (1995) in their foundational book titled *Understanding Curriculum: An Introduction to the Study of Historical and Contemporary Curriculum Discourses* provide a holistic description and analysis of how the meaning of *curriculum* has changed over time and re-conceptualized based on different schools of thought and societal expectations. Their timeline of curriculum examination begins with an early historical focus on the notion of curriculum development as a field and transitions to explore more modern uses of curriculum in more recent years. Pinar et al. (1995) argue that “curriculum reconceptualization” (p. 17) has occurred in more recent years where curriculum is deconstructed from specific disciplines including but not limited to understanding “curriculum as historical and political text” and arguing now more than ever the importance of “understanding curriculum as racial text” (p. 23). Understanding curriculum as racial text involves critically questioning the power dynamics in the implementation of curriculum and standardized testing

and making visible the processes involved in perpetuation of subtle racism in schools enacted through institutional policies and practices such as the use of standardized testing for accountability purposes. We have to constantly ask, who does the current enactment of curriculum and standardized testing benefit and who does it oppress and at what costs (Kearns, 2011; Masood, 2008)?

Ralph Tyler is well-known for his contribution to the field of Curriculum Development for the central questions he identified as significant for effective curriculum development in his book titled *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* published in 1949. His work is referred to by many scholars as “the Bible of curriculum making” (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 33) due to its profound impact in establishment of the field of Curriculum Development as a discipline. The questions identified by Ralph Tyler became known as the *Tyler Rationale* in the field of Curriculum Studies and Curriculum Development. Tyler outlines four important questions:

- 1) What educational purposes should the school seek to attain? [Objectives]
 - 2) What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes? [Design]
 - 3) How can these educational experiences be effectively organized? [Scope and Sequence]
 - 4) How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? [Evaluation]
- (Kleibard, 1970, p. 259-260)

Tyler’s questions have been used as a step by step guide to develop curriculum content in a linear manner that begins with outlining learning objectives and ends with assessing mastery of the learning content often via assessment methods such as standardized tests. As Hunkins and Hammill (1994) state,

Tyler gave us a techno-speak that enabled us to be part of the modernism of this century. In a very real sense, the Tyler Rationale gave us slogans and shared ideals and views of curriculum and its creation. We could share common visions; we could communicate with a shared language. (p. 8)

Tyler’s vision was influential in establishing the field of Curriculum Development as a discipline but as Eizadirad, Martinez and Ruminot (2016) argue, Tyler’s approach towards curriculum development aligned with a positivist and technocratic approach coinciding “with the paradigm of social functionalism which views education as scientific, observable, and a measurable phenomenon; a process that is quantifiable” (p. 67). According to this paradigm, the learning process is prompted by a rationale curriculum that is linear and captured in a quantifiable manner structured in learning objectives, observable behaviours, and a system of evaluation (Tyler, 1949). Hunkins and Hammill (1994) point out that Tyler’s Rationale towards curriculum development quickly became very popular due “to the very reasonableness and workability of the rationale, regardless of one’s context” (p. 7). They go on to expand:

It could all be mapped out in linear fashion. In a sense, all we had to do was connect the dots and the outline of the program would become evident. Then our task was just to color within the lines and the curriculum would be covered. (p. 8)

The evaluation process, which is the last step of the Tyler Rationale, is known as the checking step for mastery of curriculum content. As Tyler (1975) states, “evaluation needs to be conducted to find out the extent to which students are actually developing the patterns of behavior that the curriculum was designed to help them learn” (p. 32). This is where the justification for the use of tests, including EQAO standardized tests for accountability purposes, arises as a technocratic evaluation apparatus with a focus on outcomes via test scores to check the extent to which students have mastered the curriculum content.

Leading up to the 1990s, the province of Ontario had “no history of large-scale assessment and none with high-stakes for students, schools, and districts” (Volante, 2007, p. 2). Due to political pressure to produce better student results in international comparison tests and to better prepare students for the rise of a knowledge-based Canadian economy, the Ontario government responded to public pressure by establishing “higher standards through the development of common curricular outcomes across schools district and regions” (Grey, 2017, p. 7). This resulted in the publication of *Common Curriculum Grades 1-9* by Ontario Ministry of Education in 1995. Prior to this there was no standardized curriculum in Ontario outlining specific objectives to be achieved by the end of each grade. The introduction of a standardized curriculum by the government was part of the larger agenda to centralize control of education via accountability discourse to ensure taxpayers and the public that a high quality education was offered by schools across various geographies. This was accomplished by developing a common curriculum which explicitly as a document described specific standards and objectives to be achieved by the end of each grade.

The Tyler Rationale and its philosophical underpinnings were at the core of designing and developing the Ontario subject specific curriculum documents produced by Ministry of Education beginning in the 1990s where standardization was the hallmark of educational reforms being introduced and implemented by the government. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education website (2018), “The Ministry of Education is responsible for the development of curriculum. School boards and schools are responsible for the implementation of curriculum.” The Ontario Ministry of Education (2018) website further states:

Curriculum policy documents identify what students must know and be able to do at the end of every grade or course in every subject in Ontario publicly funded schools.

Curriculum documents are made up of three components:

- The front matter provides critical foundational information about the curriculum itself and about how learning connects to Ministry of Education policies, programs, and priorities.
- The curriculum expectations (overall and specific expectations) are the knowledge and skills that students are expected to demonstrate in each subject at each grade level by the end of the grade.
- Additional supports, glossaries and overviews are included to provide further guidance and information to support the implementation of the curriculum. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2018, para. 3)

In 1997, the *Common Curriculum* was replaced with subject specific curriculum documents titled the *Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8*. Grey (2017) outlines, “the new curriculum promised to be more dynamic and efficient than the previous one” (p. 7). As stated in the Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8 document (1997), the intention of the curriculum was to explicitly

outline, “the required knowledge and skills for each grade set high standards and identify what parents and the public can expect children to learn in the schools of Ontario” (p. 3). The Ontario Curriculum Grades 1-8 (1997) further states:

The provisions of detail will eliminate the need for school boards to write their own expectations, will ensure consistency in curriculum across province, and will facilitate province-wide testing. Province-wide testing will be helpful to students who change schools, and will help parents in all regions to have a clear understanding of their child’s progress. (p. 3)

Hence, the need for Ontario’s large scale standardized testing was justified under accountability purposes to fill the need for quantifiable results as a means to demonstrate to the public that students are mastering the curriculum content and therefore schools are offering high quality education. Mastery of content by students was judged via standardized tests and their quantifiable scores. Standardized tests were introduced and implemented by establishment of EQAO as an independent testing agency.

Implementation of Large-Scale EQAO Standardized Testing in Ontario

EQAO functions as a technocratic assessment apparatus, justifying the need for quantifiable outcome-based results, to demonstrate to the public the quality of education offered by schools. According to the EQAO website (2018), under “About the Agency,” they state:

EQAO is an independent agency that creates and administers large-scale assessments to measure Ontario students’ achievement in reading, writing and math at key stages of their education. All EQAO assessments are developed by Ontario educators to align with *The Ontario Curriculum*. The assessments evaluate student achievement objectively and in relation to a common provincial standard.

According to the document *EQAO: Ontario’s Provincial Assessment Program- Its History and Influence* (2013), the main objective of the EQAO agency is “to monitor students’ achievement at key points in their learning as a way of assuring the public that all students were being assessed in the same way and according to an established set of standards” (p. 5). Grades 3, 6, 9, and 10 were chosen as key points for students to be assessed in various subjects. The launch of yearly large scale EQAO census style, criterion-referenced assessments began in the 1996-1997 school year where all Grade 3 children in Ontario wrote the EQAO test in domains of Reading, Writing, and Mathematics “which required approximately 12 hours of testing over two weeks” by completion of two language booklets and one math booklet (EQAO, 2013, p. 7). The implementation of Grade 6 yearly EQAO assessments began in the 1998-1999 school year taking up the same amount of time as the Grade 3 test. End of Grade 3 was specifically chosen for administration of the first set of EQAO standardized tests as it represented end of schooling in the Primary division referring to Grades 1 to 3, and Grade 6 was chosen for administration of second set of EQAO standardized tests because it represented end of schooling in the Junior division referring to Grades 4 to 6. In 2004, after a systemic review of its practices, EQAO reduced the amount of testing time by half to approximately six hours which resulted giving students two hours to complete each testing booklet. The Grade 9 Assessment of Mathematics

began in the 2000-2001 school year with the administration of different set of tests for applied and academic streams. Lastly, the high-stakes Grade 10 Literacy test was implemented in 2002 consisting of two booklets. It is evaluated on a pass or fail criteria and successful completion is a requirement for obtaining a high school diploma. EQAO standardized testing continues to be implemented today in Grades 3, 6, 9, and 10 across the province of Ontario costing approximately \$32 million dollars annually to administer.

The Fraser Institute; Ranking of Schools and Property Values

According to Eizadirad et al. (2016), “Despite the fact that many initiatives are being implemented to respond to students’ needs rather than to tests needs, the efficiency of the educational system including its plans, programs, resources and technical efforts are still indirectly evaluated predominantly through EQAO test results” (p. 90). This is exemplified by the fact that there is a great deal of effort to rank schools based on school EQAO test results published annually by the Fraser Institute, as well as the amount of time devoted by schools to increase EQAO scores via investing in various initiatives. The Fraser Institute website (2018) expresses it “provides a detailed report on how each school is doing in academics compared to other ranked schools. It also shows whether the school’s results are improving, declining, or just staying steady over the most recent five years”. Many parents, particularly wealthy parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds, use public ranking of schools to judge the quality of education offered by schools and consequentially select their children’s school (Morgan, 2006; Knoester & Au, 2017). The publication of a yearly report ranking schools based on EQAO test results places greater pressure on schools to improve their school’s scores. This can lead to unethical practices such as teaching to the test and narrowing of the curriculum by focusing more on tested subjects at the expense of marginalization to the Arts and Health and Physical Education (Miller, 2000; Portelli & Konecny, 2013).

The data the Fraser Institute uses to rank schools annually is “based on seven indicators, all of which are province-wide tests of literacy and mathematics administered by the province’s Education Quality and Accountability Office” (Gardener, 2017, p. 19). The ranking formula does not take into consideration each school’s unique student population such as number of students who are English as Second Language learners, students who have an Individual Education Plan outlining their exceptionalities and their required accommodations, and contextual factors such as social issues and systemic barriers impacting the community in which the school is spatially situated within. Since the inception and implementation of standardized testing in schools, there has been opposition and resistance from teacher unions against the publication of school rankings based exclusively on EQAO standardized test results as it creates a competitive environment that “pits both schools and school boards against one another” (Morgan, 2006, p. 134). EQAO test scores have gained so much currency in recent years that increases or decreases in property values are highly correlated to school rankings according to their EQAO test results (Morgan, 2006; Pinto, 2016). This greatly disadvantages schools that are ranked low on the list because it can lead to lower enrollment of students and less funding since “school funding is tied to school enrolment and if enrolment falls, then the money allocated to the schools under the per-pupil funding formula also falls” (Morgan, 2006, p. 134).

Rise of Quantifiable Outcome-Based Education via Standardized Testing and its Role in Perpetuation of Inequitable Educational Practices

The introduction of subject specific curriculum documents in mid 1990s in Ontario was largely influenced by the Tyler Rationale and its philosophical underpinning associated with a positivist technocratic paradigm which viewed learning as observable and quantifiable. This view towards education and how mastery of curriculum content can be judged and assessed provided the political niche and context for the introduction and legitimization of standardized tests in schools under accountability purposes. The assumption was that standardized tests would provide quantifiable indicators to judge the quality of education offered by schools calculated by how students did on EQAO administered standardized tests.

The rise of quantifiable outcome-based education, supported by the Tyler rationale and introduction of subject specific curriculum documents for each grade, created an environment that homogenized the needs of all students under a one-size-fits-all approach and contributed to perpetuation of inequitable educational practices. The implementation of the Tyler Rationale in developing curriculum documents created an environment where technocracy, neoliberalism, and racism flourished in the educational system leading to inequitable practices that expected all students to be achieving at a certain level by the end of each grade regardless of their socioeconomic status and lived circumstances such as access to opportunities, support, and social services. If students did not achieve at an expected level, they were judged for being incompetent and potentially labelled as “at risk” (Kearns, 2011; Masood, 2008).

Reliance on rankings to judge the quality of education offered by schools narrows what education means and how proof of learning manifests itself which is currently predominantly judged by quantifiable factors such as standardized test scores. As Figazzolo (2009) expresses, “when education is restrained to mostly being an issue about how high we rank and quality of education and student performance therefore can be measured in quantitative terms, it automatically narrows the solution to educational problems to a matter of simply ranking higher” (p. 23). The hunger and thirst for ranking higher can lead to unethical practices such as teaching to the test and viewing students who do poorly on tests as liabilities towards the school image and reputation. Instead of focusing exclusively on rankings and outcomes measured through standardized tests, media, politicians, and the Ministry of Education needs to begin questioning the intended and unintended consequences of over-reliance on EQAO standardized tests and how the testing impacts students, particularly racialized students and those from lower socio-economic status.

Kearns (2011) interviewed sixteen youth who failed the Grade 10 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test administered by EQAO and found,

Youth who pass the OSSLT are privileged, rewarded, deemed to be good future citizens and active contributors to society, whereas those who fail are named as different, deemed not up to the standard, are considered to be not thriving, and, therefore, must work harder to become good future citizens. (p. 123)

More importantly, “the literacy test was alienating for some youth... because it undermined some of their positive identity-confirming experiences, and forced them to negotiate a negative label” such as being “illiterate” (p. 124). Kearns’s study depicts how standardized tests can inscribe an identity on students, one that is powerful enough to create doubt in students, lower

their self-confidence about their competencies, and lead to reduction of motivation for striving to succeed in school. As a nation and as caring educators, we have to dissect assessment policies and how they are enacted in schools and how they uniquely impact different identities and social group. This involves recognizing that “there are cultural, social, political, and economic norms that exist within standardized tests that privilege some youth’s cultural capital and devalues that of others” (Kearns, 2011, p. 125).

Neoliberal market-driven ideologies of education blame the individual for their failure, without considering how systemic barriers contribute to creating social conditions that oppress some students and hinder them from reaching their full potential (Knoester & Au, 2017). As Kearns (2013) concludes,

Ultimately, the state continues to marginalize people who are differently located due to gender, race, ethnicity, language and social class through a seemingly neutral “literacy” policy. The legacy of colonialism and masculine domination is seen in whose knowledge is valuable in the state, and whose knowledge is challenged and further marginalized in a standardized, fast paced, humiliating, and competitive educational environment. (p. 19)

When education and quality of education offered at schools is perceived and judged predominantly through an economic model that focuses on test scores, accountability discourse is normalized and legitimized leading to justification of the use of standardized tests. The virus of standardization penetrates all spheres of education managing education from a business model proclaiming efficiency and accountability. Although at the surface this idea and style of managing education might be appealing to taxpayers, it contributes to widening of the achievement gap through standardization of assessments, standardization of the curriculum, and standardization of teaching practices particularly having harmful effects on racialized students and those from lower socio-economic status (Dei et al., 1995; Portelli & Konecny, 2013; Pinto, 2016). As a result, discussions about equity are glossed over by hegemonic discourses expressing equality for all.

In Ontario, “schools with high dropout rates are those with the highest number of racialized students” (Colour of Justice Network, 2007, p. 5). According to Brown (2009), within the Toronto District School Board, which is the largest and one of the most diverse school boards in Canada covering a vast geographic area with 583 schools and serving more than 246,000 students, “students of African ascendance experience a 38% dropout rate and students from Central and South America had a 37% dropout rate” (p. 4). This is an alarmingly high rate and a statistic that is not captured via exclusive focus on test scores. Critiquing the current education model with its focus on test scores, Nezavdal (2003) emphasizes,

[S]tandardized tests seek to assess individuals, young people who bring a different range of experiences to the classroom, through a most peculiar claim: that all students can learn differently and come from inequitable backgrounds but be evaluated in the same way, at the same time, by the same test- designed of course, by those who are the social power-holders. (p. 69)

Blaming of poor results on standardized tests often gets narrowed down to two perpetrators: teachers and their ineffective teaching methods or students and their lack of effort or incompetency. The emphasis on tested subjects leads to hierarchization of subjects with

numeracy and literacy constructed as more superior relative to other subjects such as Arts and Health and Physical education. This contributes to a marginalization of a holistic model of education that takes into consideration domains beyond academics as part of overall healthy development of students (Kohn, 2000; Miller, 2000). Giving priority to quantitative indicators gained via standardized tests undervalues higher level critical thinking that cannot be quantified. The assumption from a positivist philosophy is that numbers can measure learning accurately and consistently. This is problematic as it exclusively focuses on outputs, and subjects, skills, and learning experiences that cannot be quantified can be overlooked and excluded from being assessed. Portelli and Konecny (2013) emphasize:

The way of life that has emerged from neoliberalism is not consistent with the soul of democracy, for it has put aside the power of the humanities and thoughtful social sciences in favour of privileging standardization and promoting empirical evidence to the exclusion of the domains of the moral, critical, spiritual, artistic, and philosophical. Evidence has been reduced to one kind, empirical, and no other forms of evidence qualify as such. (p. 93)

Although neoliberal market-driven ideologies about how education should be managed and learning content assessed are expressed as ideal solutions to reducing the achievement gap through constant references to accountability and equality for all, what is often silenced is the devastating impact of such policies and practices on certain identities from an equity perspective. Instead of reducing the achievement gap, standardized testing since its implementation provincially has contributed to further intensifying and widening the achievement gap particularly for racialized students and those from lower socio-economic status (Dei et al., 1995; Masood, 2008; Eizadirad et al., 2016; Grey, 2017). As Ricci (2004) emphasizes, “the curriculum ignores student needs by implementing a standard curriculum that is expected to fit all students” (p. 359). This results in the promotion of a one-size-fits-all curriculum which ignores the unique needs of communities and their local contexts. Instead, standardization promotes competition associated with rewards and punishment; those who conform are rewarded with access to well-paying careers whereas those who fail and get poor results risk their survival by dropping out and not having accreditation to apply for well-paying careers.

Similar concerns can be raised for newly arrived immigrants and English as Second Language learners who struggle to master the dominant language used as part of EQAO standardized tests. Toplak and Wiener (2000) examined “whether the demands placed on the children are consistent with what we know about the cognitive development of 8-9 year old children” and concluded “although the Grade 3 Assessment is based on the Ontario Curriculum, many items exceed what should be expected from a typical Grade 3 student when children’s cognition is considered” (p. 65). Toplak and Wiener (2000) further explain:

A fair test of reading in the third grade should, therefore, rely heavily on skills in sounding out words (decoding) and reading simple passages, and less heavily on making inferences and extending ideas from the text. The Grade 3 Assessment clearly falls short from the perspective of this developmental model. There is a heavy emphasis on text comprehension and inferences in the Grade 3 Assessment, and very little on reading and identifying words. (p.71)

Lastly, one of the common cited negative harms of exposing students to standardized testing is complications arising from stress rooted in fear of failure and anxiety from the impact of the test on their future educational outcomes such as marks or advancement to the next grade (Kohn, 2000; Knoester & Au, 2017). This refers to the subjective perceived stress from the student's perspective. For example, even though the Grade 3 EQAO standardized test does not count towards student report cards or their advancement to the next grade, the emphasis placed on the importance of the test by the vast amount of time and effort dedicated to preparing for the test as part of the curriculum gives students the perceived impression that if they don't do well they are disappointing themselves, their parents, teacher(s), and potentially the perceived image of the school, hence creating a highly pressurized stressful learning environment. As Pinto (2016) points out, "students who abstain from the test without a valid reason automatically receive a score of zero, thus pulling down the aggregate performance for that entire school" (p. 105). Whereas a medical issue with a note from a doctor can be a valid reason for being exempt from writing the test, opting out of the test as a political stance or as a form of resistance is not considered a valid excuse. Regardless of the reasons, "exempted students are assessed as not achieving the provincial Level 3 standard" (Pinto, 2016, p. 105) and are included in the process of compiling the school's final results. As Russo (2012) expresses, "By placing unrealistic demands upon children who are not developmentally ready, we are asking teachers to spend most of their time attempting to push children in ways that may set them up to fail" (p. 144).

Conclusion

Based on the historical analysis provided throughout this paper, there is evidence of a trilateral symbiotic relationship between the Ontario curriculum, the Tyler Rationale, and EQAO standardized testing. The theorization of this relationship is symbiotic as all three components need each other to function as a cohesive entity providing the niche for the rise of outcome-based education in Ontario implemented under accountability discourse. Although theoretically the market-driven model of education, largely influenced by the Tyler Rationale and its philosophical underpinnings leading to the introduction of subject specific curriculum documents in Ontario in mid 1990s which outlined overall and specific expectation to be achieved by each student by end of each grade, appears to be a model that would be beneficial for everyone, in practice this has not been the case. The current way EQAO standardized tests are administered, with a focus on quantifiable results to judge the quality of curriculum content and overall education offered by schools, perpetuates inequitable educational practices disadvantaging racialized students and those from lower socio-economic status evident by higher drop-out rates for the aforementioned populations.

If we, as educators who pride ourselves on continuously questioning hegemonic assumptions about what is an effective model of education and how learning should be demonstrated and assessed within the curriculum in a way that is empowering to students, then we also need to pay attention to discussions about the standardization of education. We should participate in discussions across multiple facets therein, particularly the links between curriculum and standardized testing. Discussions need to shift from an equality paradigm to an equity lens that asks "Whose values and knowledges are established as the "norm" and consequentially utilized as a baseline measure for judgement and comparison?" and "Whose interests does this approach serve and at what costs?" More research is needed in various areas to make education

more equitable. Some areas to further explore include investment in studies focusing on alternative assessment models, experiences of racialized students with standardized tests, how parents and community members can be more involved with design and implementation of curriculum content, and how curriculum content can be tailored relative to specific needs of the community in which the school is spatially situated within.

Overall, the symbiotic fusion of the Ontario curriculum, the Tyler Rationale, and EQAO standardized testing constructs a narrow definition of success focusing on quantifiable indicators that are based on a neoliberal market-driven ideology of education justified and legitimized by efficiency and accountability discourses. This model of education is counter-productive as it has harmful effects on marginalized students including racialized, indigenous, English as Second Language learners, and students from lower socio-economic status. Since the introduction of subject specific curriculum documents and implementation of EQAO standardized tests in schools starting in late 1990s in Ontario, the achievement gap across social groups in education has intensified and widened rather than reduced. Questioning and critiquing this model and transitioning to an equity model is at the core of the power struggle to revolutionize our minds, imaginations, and educational systems in order to open it up to alternatives and new possibilities to address the needs of all students in various communities and learning environments.

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Author Biography

Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad is an instructor at Ryerson University in the School of Early Childhood Studies and a teacher with Toronto District School Board. His PhD thesis is titled *Assessment as Stereotyping: Experiences of Racialized Children and Parents with the Grade 3 EQAO Standardized Testing Preparation and Administration in Ontario*. He may be reached: ardavan.eizadirad@mail.utoronto.ca