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Article abstract

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Abstract: The distortion of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in American popular media has spread to Canada, where the word "race" has traditionally been avoided in education, but where incidents involving race and "anti-racism" now garner considerable attention. We outline CRT in education and the context surrounding anti-racism work in Ontario. We then analyze important initiatives, such as Ontario's proposed Bill 16 and the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board's "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." module, in terms of their relevance within the CRT theoretical framework. Basic qualitative content analysis shows that the much-discussed provincial-level Bill 16 does not reflect the tenets of CRT—despite what its opponents, notably organizations such as Parents As First Educators (PAFE), have argued. However, the district-level "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." initiative *does* reflect some tenets of CRT. This latter equity initiative is suggested as a model, starting from the local level in school districts, that other Canadian educators supportive of CRT should feel justified in following, as progressive Canadian districts move from anti-racism towards the next phase of district reform.

Keywords: *Ontario schools, Critical Race Theory, Race, Racism, Bill 16, Canadian schools*

School policies geared towards anti-racism are common today, even as the notable boogeyman of the current decade—critical race theory (CRT)—is condemned by conservative elements and as neoliberal government policies remain focused on quantitative results. A familiar conflict thus exists in school communities and school policy between emphasizing social justice matters, notably anti-racism—which necessitates acknowledging the fundamental flaws of Eurocentric education—and emphasizing the measurable, quantitative results of the established education system. One battleground of this conflict, as ever, is district and provincial-level politics.

The province of Ontario, and particularly certain districts, has made some strong moves towards anti-racism policy and/or curricula, for which they deserve credit. However, the pace of provincial politics is necessarily slow, while the agency of individual teachers and local districts to effect positive change in matters of anti-racism can occur more quickly. This paper considers that certain teachers and educators in Ontario (or elsewhere in Canada) may be sympathetic to or supportive of CRT and anti-racism in general, but may not yet feel comfortable or supported, on the provincial level, in exploring CRT's edicts in classroom lessons. The paper suggests that examples already exist in Ontario of districts engaging core aspects of CRT in prescribed lessons and modules, and that teachers in any area of Canada may similarly work together from the ground up to incorporate greater anti-racism content into current education. The paper engages a CRT-focused document analysis of two educational documents: One a bill presented to the province of Ontario, and one a learning module employed at the local level in one of the more progressive districts in terms of racial policy in Ontario. Critics of the first document— Ontario's proposed Bill 16—charged that it invoked CRT. The second document was created locally by the Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board and thus has not engendered a province-wide response. However, the latter does indeed engage with some aspects of CRT, and, in the authors' view, provides a good example of how educators might do so.

There are two authors of this paper. Regan Tyndall is a white Canadian university instructor of language and literature at the Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, and a doctoral candidate in Education at The University of Calgary. He is also an Ontario College of Teachers member. Dr. Kashif Raza is a Brown, multilingual speaker of Arabic, English, Punjabi, Urdu, and Persian, and originates from the Global South. He works as a postdoctoral fellow at the University of British Columbia, and his work draws upon critical theory, postcolonial theory, and complexity theory. Both authors have employed aspects of CRT in related academic research, and both believe it to be an important and highly relevant academic framework for application in public education.

Race and Racism

Historically, white people in North America and Europe have understood race to reference phenotypic differences in skin colour and other visually distinguishable physical attributes. From a CRT perspective, however, racism is a form of oppression that occurs when the prejudice of one or more groups is enacted as discrimination towards another group or individual, particularly when supported by a legal system and the control of institutions (DiAngelo, 2018). The manifestations of racism are sometimes categorized as individual, systemic, or cultural (Este et al., 2018), but racism is a complex, dynamic, and ongoing force. It is important to note that racism likely preceded race (DiAngelo, 2018; Kendi, 2016): An unfair system of oppression (racism) was later justified by its beneficiaries with a socially constructed hierarchy of human types (race).

Today, any ideas regarding the biology of race have been undermined scientifically; more genetic variation exists within recognized racial groups than between them (Este et al., 2018). Whiteness, for example, is not a biological identity but a social one. Race

identifies a power relationship because it is a means by which status and privilege are allocated (Laughter & Han, 2019). In the West, white people have typically been the beneficiaries of the privilege arising from racism, a situation exacerbated by European colonialism—which involved white people dominating non-white people and the Enlightenment in Europe—and the geopolitical dominance of the United Kingdom and the United States (Laughter & Han, 2019).

Race in Canada

It is the authors' observation that the word "race" is infrequently applied in Canadian government reports about schools and in media coverage of education. Students in Canadian teacher training programs are sometimes enrolled in courses relating to Aboriginal studies (often an option, not a requirement) as well as courses pertaining to equity and diversity. The degree to which each teacher education program emphasizes social justice in relation to race and student diversity naturally varies by institution. It is also something of a moving target, as the current climate has demanded greater focus on anti-racism, which is leading to ongoing changes and new approaches in education programs. (When Regan Tyndall studied a Bachelor of Education at The University of British Columbia in 2010-11, he was not required to enroll in any courses focused on student diversity or anti-racism. Conversely, the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto, which prior to 2015 oversaw a Bachelor of Education degree, had—and has, at the Graduate level—a high degree of CRT-centred teacher training.) At McGill University, one course titled "Equity and Education" mentions (among other things) "activities that foster anti-racism" in its course description; yet, "Race, Class, and Power in Education in Global Contexts" is currently the only undergraduate course in education at McGill University that mentions race or racism in its title (and the course in question is unavailable in the 2024-25 academic year) (McGill University, 2024). The University of British Columbia's 2024-25 course schedule for students preparing to teach secondary school features no courses with race or racism in their titles (University of British Columbia, 2024). Various courses may or may not specifically address race and racism in content, but the reluctance to identify race in course titles is reflective of a bigger cultural issue. Fo Niemi, executive director of Montreal's Centre for Research-Action on Race Relations, has suggested that "Fundamentally, Canadians have an unease with the concept of race . . . We have a Canadian way of avoiding race issues . . . We don't collect data based on race" (Grant & Balkissoon, 2019, para. 13). Grant and Balkissoon (2019) further added, "Canada has long been reluctant to collect or publish data based on race and ethnicity" (para. 5).

Despite this reluctance, Canada's history has included several officially racist government policies and practices, both beyond and within education. These have included the enslavement of Black people in New France and British North America from the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries (Henry-Dixon, 2016/2022); numerous legal and ethical transgressions committed against Indigenous peoples throughout Canada's history; the Chinese Immigration Act, 1923, which barred most Chinese people from entering the country; the refusal to allow Jewish immigrants to Canada in the period immediately after World War II; and the internment and the banishment from British Columbia of Japanese-

Canadians during and after World War II, as well as the seizure of their property. Within school systems, for over 100 years the residential boarding school system isolated Indigenous children from their families and cultures for the purpose of assimilating them into Euro-Canadian culture. As early as 1850 Ontario (then Canada West) legislated the Common School Act, which institutionalized the segregation of religious and racial groups by allowing separate schools for non-Protestant white people, in turn forcing many (especially Black people) into isolated schools due to racial prejudice (Aladejebi, 2024; Henry-Dixon, 2021). Ontario's last segregated school would not close until 1964, and it was not until the end of the 1960s that the legal framework justifying Black segregation in schools was discarded (Aladejebi, 2024).

Given this racist history, why has "race" rarely appeared in most Canadian discourses about diversity and identity, notably those related to education? One reason may derive from the government-promoted policy of "multiculturalism" and the effect of this on the Canadian identity. For many years, Canada was populated by—in addition to Indigenous people—immigrants from the United States, Britain (or other Commonwealth nations), Ireland, and Western and Eastern Europe. After World War II, a more heterogeneous body of immigrants arrived, but immigration remained overwhelmingly white (Knowles, 2016) until after 1962 when the House of Commons virtually abolished its covertly racist policies (Knowles, 2016). The term multiculturalism was then heavily promoted by government from the early 1970s (Knowles, 2016; Peach, 2005). The reason for the emergence of multiculturalism under the Pierre Trudeau administration was a backlash from non-Anglo/French immigrants towards Canada's official policy of bilingualism and its evident favouring of the English and French languages (Knowles, 2016). Trudeau's wording was that these non-Anglo/French communities were "essential elements in Canada", despite their languages not being recognized officially, and that they would contribute to the nation in "ways that derive from their heritage and yet are distinctly Canadian" (Knowles, 2016, p. 219). Since the 1970s, multiculturalism has remained the officially approved concept of diversity at the national level. For three or four generations, Canadians have been schooled and acculturated not to conceive of the nation as a metaphorically assimilationist "melting pot" as in the United States, but rather as a "cultural mosaic" in which bits of ethnicity, culture, racial identity, and language are embedded side by side (Peach, 2005; Schneider, 1998). From the CRT perspective, the danger is that race may easily be overlooked in preference of "culture," as was the case in the legal oversights that prompted the development of CRT in the first place. As a result, Canadians who do not engage with or embrace multiculturalism in everyday life can nevertheless embrace membership in an outwardly culturally sophisticated nation, despite having no conscious consideration of race (Sato & Este, 2018). One could also argue that an attitude of non-racist or post-racial superiority has permeated the Canadian national character, particularly when Canadians compare themselves to Americans, which they often do (Stewart, 2014).

Although racism is infrequently discussed as a topic in Canada's historical narratives, its long-term effects are similar to those seen in other nations: income equality and a racial wealth gap. The webpage on cultural diversity for the Department of Justice Canada (2022) states: "Most white Canadians enjoy an income premium due to their origin" (p. 6); and "Over time, differential treatments and unfavourable policies targeted

towards racial minorities become in themselves identifiable characteristics of these groups. In this way, superficial characteristics of racial minorities are inseparable from unfavourable social features attributed to them" (p. 6). In the education system, the reluctance to invoke racial matters in a political context of neoliberalism can result in the idea of "racelessness", as aptly outlined by Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, and Martino (2015): "Conceptions of equity are characterized by their racelessness in their erasure of how . . . neoliberal systems of accountability render invisible the achievement of racial minorities in the education system" (p. 143).

However, there seems to be a slowly growing emphasis on collecting race-based data in education in certain Canadian provinces. In 2017, for example, Ontario published its Anti-Racism Strategic Plan (since updated in 2023), which requires its school boards to conduct a student census to collect and publish race-based data. As to the pace of this, the current Ontario Ministry of Education noted that "School boards across the province are at different stages in the analysis and public reporting of that data based on their research capacity" (A. Tikaram, personal communication, January 31, 2024).

Critical Race Theory (CRT)

CRT originated in the American academy in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Responding to the extremes of those with post-critical and class-based perspectives who often ignored race, several scholars and legal professionals (e.g., Derrick Bell, Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Alan Freeman, and Mari Matsuda) founded CRT (Beachum, 2013; Chapman et al., 2013; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Tate, 1997). From its inception, CRT has been a framework that has attempted to provide new ways of examining and explaining the roles and rules of socially constructed race and racism in society. It views systemic racism as an everyday thing that appears in and affects all aspects of life in academic, professional, and legal contexts (Beachum, 2013). In essence, CRT employs a critical stance against the dominant, normalized ideologies embedded within systemic racism and places the concerns and perspectives of various racial-ethnic groups at its centre. CRT has no single canonical statement, instead tending to view social theory as work in progress (Chapman et al., 2013). However, it does employ a number of core and consistent tenets, though some of these vary slightly according to sources. For Matsuda et al. (1993/2018), the six core tenets of CRT are as follows: (1) Racism is a permanent aspect of life and is endemic in American life; (2) Legal claims of neutrality, objectivity, colour blindness, etc. deserve skepticism; (3) A contextual / historical analysis of the law is essential, as is the assumption that racism informs all contemporary manifestations of the advantages or disadvantages faced by a given group; (4) The voices and experiential knowledge of people of colour are important and should be recognized; (5) Interdisciplinary approaches should be emphasized (Tate, 1997); and (6) There should be a focus on ending racial oppression and eliminating oppression in all forms.

Delgado and Stefancic (2017) organize the CRT tenets similarly. Differences between their and Matsuda et al.'s approach include emphasizing the concept of "interest convergence" elaborated by Derrick Bell as a leading factor in changes to racial conditions or in race-relevant law. Interest convergence implies that legal or institutional

breakthroughs for racially marginalized people are generally led by self-interest on the part of elite whites, who are generally unwilling to relinquish racial privilege, rather than by a genuine desire for racial equality (Bell, 1980). Delgado and Stefancic (2017) also note that intersectionality and anti-essentialism, as well as the consequences of differential racialization, are meaningful: No individual has a single, unitary identity, but rather each has potentially conflicting, overlapping identities and loyalties, some of which may marginalize raced or gendered individuals more than any single identity. Delgado and Stefancic (2017) also reference differential racialization, which refers to how society's views of and uses for particular racialized groups and their identities change over time, often in ways that are convenient or beneficial to the dominant group. Finally, Delgado and Stefancic (2017) agree that non-white voices, particularly in counter-narrative, are unique in knowledge and perspective, but they also suggest that minority peoples have a competence about race and racism that whites are unlikely to have (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017).

CRT in Education

After CRT's basic tenets were consolidated in legal and academic circles, scholars began applying the framework to other disciplines, including education. In 1995, Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995; Tate, 1997) asserted that the general significance of race and "raced" education in the USA was not being adequately addressed by theories of gender or class, and that new theoretical perspectives were needed to move beyond traditional paradigmatic boundaries. These limiting boundaries included the 1960s' sociological and educational terms of "culturally deprived" and "culturally disadvantaged," which were used to describe racial groups struggling in school and the accordant role of the school system in compensating for these students' shortcomings (Laughter & Han, 2019). Ladson-Billings and Tate's (1995) three central propositions were (1) that race remained, well after the Civic Rights era, a factor in inequity; (2) that U.S. society was based on property rights; and (3) that the intersection of race and property could function as an analytic tool to better understand inequity.

In 2020, decades after its establishment, CRT was seized upon as a target of scorn by conservative American groups, leading to its distorted perception in the United States, notably in the education system. As reported by Valerie Strauss in the *Washington Post*: "Republicans began accusing schools of teaching critical race theory . . . to indoctrinate students to reject capitalism and fuel hostility to white people" (Berkshire & Schneider, 2021). By mid-2022, seventeen US states had placed restrictions on education about race; many more were drafting bills or testing policies to do the same (Gross, 2022; Zurcher, 2021). Berkshire and Schneider (2021) referred to the blow-up over CRT as the latest school culture war, driven by conspiracy theories and half-truths.

Thus, much of the conversation surrounding CRT in education has occurred in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 2021; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995/2017; Laughter & Han, 2019), but its media blow-up has inevitably filtered through to the Canadian media and public. In Canada, CRT can also function as a deterrent to stubborn and unconscious racism, and is an important consideration in teaching and educational practice. Racism may factor

into the selection and education of teachers, the definitions and markers of student ability in assessment (encoding the experiences and assumption of whites), and the selection of curricula (Chapman et al., 2013).

Anti-Racism in Ontario Schools

What is "Anti-Racism" and how did it emerge as a focus, particularly in Ontario policy? Its conceptualization in Ontario emerged from the perceived limitations of multiculturalism. In the mid-1980s, the Ontario Ministry of Education's Advisory Committee on Race Relations suggested that the practice of multiculturalism was uncoordinated, involved untested assumptions, and focused too much on the exotic aspects of culture (Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, & Martino, 2015). Multiculturalism was also seen as critiquing diversity more than celebrating it (Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, & Martino, 2015). Thus, anti-racist education emerged as a concept in which the ultimate goal was empowerment leading to social change. Unlike multiculturalism, anti-racist policy instead emphasized social institutions' (notably schools') existing roles in reproducing various inequalities, including race, and by implication challenged such institutions to change (Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, & Martino, 2015). If the goals of anti-racism were achieved, students would be provided a learning environment free of discrimination and differing levels of advantage for various groups (Davidson, 2009).

In 1992, the Education Act of Ontario was amended; thereafter, school boards were required to implement policies focused on anti-racism and ethnocultural equity. A document titled *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity* was published by the Ontario Ministry of Education in 1993 to help guide school boards' implementation of the new policies. The document attempted to provide a vision for identifying and changing institutional policies as well as individual behaviour that might be racist in effect (Davidson, 2009). The mid-1990s, in general, were a time of greater attention focused on issues of equity and social justice in Ontario schools, partly coinciding with the brief election to power of the New Democratic Party (Rezai-Rashti, Segeren, & Martino, 2015).

Shah, Cuglievan-Mindreau, and Flessa (2022) have suggested the history of Ontario's district reforms has consisted of four approaches: The Politics of Race Evasion (an absence of race analysis); the Politics of Illusory Equity (closing achievement gaps and/or raising achievement bars for only *select* types of students, and ignoring analyses of power); the Politics of Representation and Recognition (shift away from neoliberal approaches to critiques from critical stances, and considering achievement gaps by race, gender, and sexuality); and, currently, the Politics of Anti-Racist Resistance (race, racialization, and anti-racism are central to ideas of reform). Shah, Cuglievan-Mindreau, and Flessa (2022) also conceive of a potential fifth approach, called The Politics of Regeneration, which "makes space for generative conflict and centers multiple and contradictory truths . . . districts are cultural and political mechanisms that raise the collective consciousness of the communities within and beyond the district" (p. 47).

Documents Analyzed

Ontario's Bill 16 (originally Bill 67) emerged after a series of racialized incidents in Ontario schools. For example, in 2022, at a Catholic school in the Kitchener-Waterloo region, school authorities called the police to report on a four-year-old Black boy who was described as acting violently. This response was interpreted as a racist action, given the boy's age. Loretta Notten, then the Director of Education for the Waterloo Catholic District School Board, initially "[took] umbrage to the allegation that there is systemic racism in our board" (Duhatschek, 2022, para. 3). Both the incident and Notten's denial led parents in the district to create the Black Parent Council KW. After the story hit news headlines, Notten changed her opinion about systemic racism, stating on the Waterloo Catholic District School Board website that "Across society, our structures are systemically racist. Our organization is part of those structures" (Notten, 2022, para. 4).

At least two other Ontario student-teacher incidents that were race-related inspired Laura Mae Lindo, an NDP Member of Provincial Parliament (MPP), to challenge the Ontario government to do more to combat racism in public schools. Lindo specifically called for an equity audit that would take seriously incidents of racism, define a budget line for combatting it, and collect race-based data not only on students but on faculty and leadership. Lindo stated that "What we don't know . . . is who it is that's in positions of leadership and the representation on that level compared to the diversity that exists among our student body" (Groleau, 2021, para. 8).

In late 2021, Lindo introduced an education bill (then Bill 67) that amended various acts relating to education in Ontario for matters of racial equity. Prior to the 2022 Ontario provincial election, the bill was, surprisingly to many, supported by the Progressive Conservative (PC) party. After the election, however, the PCs revoked their support of the original bill. It was then revised and reintroduced as Bill 16 with further contributions from MPPs Jill Andrew and Lise Vaugeois. Bill 16 was carried after its first reading in the Legislative Assembly, but at the time of writing has not, since 2022, progressed to a second or third reading, and has not been passed. It is thus in political limbo and is essentially off the table.

Documents pertaining to anti-racism have also been drafted at a local level in Ontario. According to *The National Post*, "In Ontario, at least, some large school boards have recently taken on ideas that form part of critical race theory, though largely without referencing the term" (Blackwell, para. 31, 2022). Ontario's Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board has drafted lesson guidelines for across the grade-range titled "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." (HWDSB, 2021). These guidelines include themed modules, including "Understanding Identity and Intersectionality" and "Exploring Human Rights, Equity and Anti-racism" (HWDSB, 2021). The former's learning goal is to "explore different aspects of identity and to see racial identity as an important aspect of who we are"; it also suggests having discussions about colour-blindness and white supremacy, the complex definition of race, and why only non-whites are racialized (HWDSB: Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild., 2021).

Predictably, such proposals for policies promoting anti-racism have met resistance. Parents As First Educators (PAFE), an Ontario-based organization that was founded in response to perceived government encroachment on the rights of the province's Catholic

schools, claims 75,000 members across Canada. According to its website, one of PAFE's core areas of activism is "opposing the promotion of harmful ideologies such as gender ideology and critical race theory in schools" (Dellandrea, 2023). PAFE designated Samuel Sey, a Black Canadian media contributor, to be a Critical Race Spokesperson in April 2022. Sey claimed that he would "encourage public officials to remove critical race theory from schools" (Pierre, 2022a). In his PAFE self-introduction, Sey correctly identifies standpoint epistemology as one of the core concepts of CRT. However, in a podcast interview, he states incorrectly that CRT is really "a newer version of Marxism" (Dykstra, 2022) and that conflict between whites and non-whites is at its core. Sey ignores central CRT tenets such as the social construction of race; its legal aspects, such as interest convergence; and CRT's skepticism towards colour-blindness. PAFE's Teresa Pierre informed parents on the organization's website that "Bill 16 pushes the tenets of Critical Race Theory (CRT)", arguing that in Canada too many people are oblivious to the insidious nature of CRT and the threat it poses to children's education (Pierre, 2022b). She further stated that "CRT deliberately negates the integrity of the individual and eschews the virtues of talent, work ethic and personal excellence, reducing everyone to being a member of one race or another, and judged only by that criterion" (Pierre, 2022b). Pierre's anti-CRT outpouring concluded with a call to action to "Protect our children from the toxic tentacles of Critical Race Theory" (Pierre, 2022b).

Methodology

Our purpose here is to determine if Bill 16 or Hamilton-Wentworth district's "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." proposals, respectively, actually invoke CRT. Our methodology is qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis refers not to counting words but rather to classifying the text into meaningful categories for interpretation (Hsieh & Shannon, 2009). This close reading is an inductive process wherein categories are derived from data (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) and typically follows the following pattern: Studying content and determining units of analysis; developing codes and then coding the documents; identifying categories across codes; identifying themes and patterns; and finally drawing interpretations and considering their implications (Columbia University, 2024; Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Roller, 2019). Roller and Lavrakas (2015) note two phases within qualitative content analysis. In phase one, the researcher essentially specifies, or "creates," the data to be analyzed. In our case, we have summarized the proposed amendments to Bill 16 (Table 1) and summarized the suggested lessons for teachers to use within "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." (Table 2). Next, in phase two, data are analyzed and commented upon, bearing in mind the research question (in our case, the data's relation to CRT). We present a brief discussion following each tabled summary.

We analyzed the 37 amendments of Bill 16 and the 16 example lessons within the modules of "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild.," coding each amendment or lesson as one of four categories. The self-created codes employed are for the purpose of determining each document's relation to CRT and are based on the specific tenets of CRT—those of Matsuda et al. (1993/2018) and Delgado and Stefancic (2017) outlined above. The four coded categories are as follows: (1) Has a clear and direct relation to the specific tenets of CRT;

(2) Has a potential or indirect relation to CRT; (3) Is related to racial issues but does not fall under the tenets of CRT; and (4) Is not applicable; that is, the topic has nothing to do with race.

Findings

Bill 16

Bill 16 is a proposed legislative act consisting of 37 amendments to existing Ontario legislation. Some of these amendments are merely matters of lexical preference or additions to lists (i.e., adding "anti-Asian racism" to a list of categories), while other amendments are longer and include new points, details, or definitions.

Table 1 *Categorization of Bill 16 Amendments in Relation to CRT*
Education Act, 1990

Amendment	Content	Category of Relation to CRT
Amendment 1	defines racism and anti-racism; includes the concept of racism as "socially constructed ideas of race"	category 2
Amendment 2	concerns anti-racism training / accountability programs	category 3
Amendment 3	broadens statements to include racism and racial equality	category 3
Amendment 4	regards professional development programs and protocol for educating and supports students and staff	category 3
Amendment 5	identifies racist language or activities in schools as an offence and as possibly facing conviction	category 3
Amendment 6	adds "racial equity" to part of a definition	category 3
Amendment 7	adds "racial equity" to part of a definition	category 3
Amendment 8	adds words regarding "anti-racism and racial equity training"	category 3
Amendment 9	mentions the education system being safe and promoting respect and racial equity	category 3
Amendment 10	regards performance appraisal of teachers including "competencies related to . . . anti-racism awareness and . . . efforts to promote racial equity"	category 2
Amendment 11	mentions the education system being safe and promoting respect and racial equity	category 3

Amendment 12	mentions promotion of racial equity in schools	category 3
Amendment 13	emphasizes that the Minister should establish training, resources, strategies, procedures, and disciplinary measures for students and staff when incidents of racism occur	category 3
Amendment 14	mandates the creation and public sharing of a racial equity plan that elicits ideas from students, staff, and community members	category 3
Amendment 15	adds racist activity to a list of unacceptable behaviours	category 3

Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario Act, 2005

Amendment	Content	Category of Relation to CRT
Amendment 16	defines racism and anti-racism; includes the concept of racism as "socially constructed ideas of race"	category 2
Amendment 17	notes that at least one (post-secondary) Council member must have expertise in racial equity; all members must have "commitment to racial equity" or else undergo training in it	category 3
Amendment 18	note about the Council assisting the Minister in anti-racism	category 3
Amendment 19	explains that a racial-equity strategy must be developed and implemented; later, it must be evaluated and its results reported to the Minister	category 3
Amendment 20	concerns the council's annual report, which is to document "racism, anti-racist initiatives and steps taken towards racial equity"	category 3
Amendment 21	adds racial equity objects and functions to a list of prescriptions for the Council	category 3

Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities Act, 1990

Amendment	Content	Category of relation to CRT
Amendment 22	This section is amended in numerous ways: defines racism / anti-racism; outlines the necessity of an anti-racism policy and its periodic review; states the necessity of reporting to the Minister any race-related services, complaints, or requests, as well as any race-related initiatives and the effectiveness of	category 2

	them; states that the Minister shall conduct a survey, every three years, of students, faculty, and staff about the institution's anti-racism policy and any incidence of racism; notes that the Lieutenant Governor in Council may make any number of regulations regarding racial matters.	

Ontario College of Teachers Act, 1996

Amendment	Content	Category of Relation to CRT
Amendment 23	adds an anti-racism training requirement for OCT (Ontario College of Teachers) certification	category 3
Amendment 24	further clarification of the possibility of anti-racism training	category 3

Ontario Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology Act, 2002

Amendment	Content	Category of Relation to CRT
Amendment 25	defines racism and anti-racism	category 3
Amendment 26	concerns anti-racism training / accountability programs	category 3
Amendment 27	(re: a board of governors): requires at least one board member to be a person who has expertise in racial equity; allows the Minister to task any person who doesn't have a "proven commitment to racial equity in the education sector" to take anti-racism training	category 3
Amendment 28	adds the importance of noting complaints of racism	category 3
Amendment 29	states that every college shall develop and implement an anti-racism policy with input from students, faculty, and staff; notes that the college will review its policy every three years	category 3
Amendment 30	(re: a college employer council): requires at least one member of the board of directors to be a person who has expertise in racial equity; allows the Minister to task any person who doesn't have a "proven commitment to racial equity in the education sector" to take anti-racism training	category 3
Amendment 31	adds a short clause related to racism, anti-racism, and racial equity	category 3

Anti-Racism Act, 2017

Amendment	Content	Category of Relation to CRT
Amendment 32	adds the term "anti-Asian racism" to a list of types of racism	category 3
Amendment 33	defines racism and anti-racism	category 3
Amendment 34	defines racism and anti-racism; includes the concept of racism as "socially constructed ideas of race"	category 2
Amendment 35	adds one mention of anti-Asian racism (to a list) and one of Asian (to a list of racialized peoples)	category 3
Amendment 36	adds one mention of Asian (to a list of racialized peoples)	category 3
Amendment 37	replaces the term "Lieutenant Governor in Council" with "Minister"	category 4

It is clearly not the case that Bill 16 "pushes" CRT, as PAFE argued. Only one core tenet—race as a social construction (Amendment 1)—is clearly acknowledged within the bill: The proposed amendment defines racism specifically as "the use of socially constructed ideas of race to justify or support . . . the notion that one race is superior to another" (Bill 16, p. 3). While it is conceivable that the CRT tenet of listening to the unique voices of people of colour *could* be implied via Bill 16's recommendation that a survey about anti-racism be conducted every three years (Amendment 22), the survey is proposed only for the college or university level, where it seems inevitable that the voices of the white majority would outnumber those of non-whites. This would mean the CRT concept of emphasizing non-white narratives would not apply. Most significantly, nothing about interest convergence, differential racialization, anti-essentialism, or intersectionality is described or implied in Bill 16, which refers to anti-racism and racial equity several times without specifying what these terms mean in practical terms. Bill 16, in fact, has only the most marginal connection to CRT.

Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild.

The Hamilton-Wentworth school district's "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." webpage includes 16 example lessons. There are four lessons presented within each of Primary, Junior, Intermediate, and Secondary grade divisions:

Table 2 *Categorization of "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." Lessons in Relation to CRT*

Primary Example Lessons:

Lesson content	Category of Relation to CRT
Physical Safety, Mental Health and Wellness	category 4
Understanding Fairness – This lesson suggests how young students can begin to understand "Identity & Intersectionality". The module suggests engaging students with simple situations of fairness and unfairness, and then suggests ways to have them reflect on this.	category 2
What Are Human Rights? – This lesson suggests how young students can begin to understand "Human Rights, Equity & Anti-racism". The module suggests having students illustrate their own daily activities to show the right to play, survival, protection, and participation.	category 2
Understanding BLM – This lesson suggests that students watch a Sesame Street video of Elmo's father explaining protest and racism to him. Students are also asked what they know or have heard about BLM, and later they are asked to reflect on what they have learned.	category 2

Junior example lessons:

Lesson content	Category of Relation to CRT
Physical Safety, Mental Health and Wellness	category 4
Identity & Self-Portraits – This lesson is for students to learn about identity and intersectionality, and it specifically denotes "racial identity" as an important marker of this. Students are encouraged to create a self-portrait that includes cultural markers.	category 2
Gender Affirming Pronouns – This lesson is to teach why we use gender-affirming pronouns, in the context of exploring "Human Rights, Equity & Anti-racism".	category 4
Anti-racist Allyship – In a module for "Empowering Action and Allyship", this lesson focuses on anti-racism and being an ally in the fight against racism. It encourages students to think about the roles they have played (aggressor, bystander, ally, etc.) in racialized situations.	category 3

Intermediate example lessons:

Lesson content	Category of Relation to CRT
Physical Safety, Mental Health and Wellness	category 4
Intersectionality – This lesson encourages students to outline their own "intersectional self". It mentions that not being aware of others' identities can cause a lack of recognition of the privilege that some identities carry. In a suggested reflection, it asks students how they would explain intersectionality to a friend or family member.	category 2
The Three I's of Racism –This lesson focuses on the "interpersonal, institutional, and ideological expressions of racism". Students are also encouraged to think about the definition, categories, and labels of racism. In defining institutional racism, the lesson notes "how society is organized through laws, education and government".	category 1
Two Spirit LGBTQIA+ Allyship	category 4

Secondary example lessons:

Lesson content	Category of Relation to CRT
Physical Safety, Mental Health and Wellness	category 4
Visible and Invisible Identity – This lesson asks students to consider the "unseen" aspects of people's identities, and to think about stereotypes that may exist about others' identities or about one's own.	category 3
COVID, Xenophobia, and Hate Speech – This lesson focuses on racism and xenophobia toward Asian-Canadians during COVID-19, and it deals with the issue of hate speech online.	category 3
Representation Matters – This lesson focuses on representations of groups of people in the media. It notes Hollywood films that focus on non-white characters and asks why these are important. It asks how Black characters are portrayed and asks if students can identify an indigenous lead actor or main character in such films. Conversely, the lesson also asks how many "white, heterosexual, cisgender, male, able-bodied main character(s)" students can think of. It asks students about "the norm" and whether we should accept such representations.	category 2

"Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." veers closer to representing a CRT-related perspective. Two of its broad modules are titled "Understanding Identity and Intersectionality" and "Exploring Human Rights, Equity and Anti-racism" (HWDSB, Building a Community of Care,

2021). It is particularly in the former where steps commensurable with CRT are observable. This module defines race as "an idea" and a "made-up social construct to uphold European and white standards" (HWDSB, Module 2, 2021), though of course this is not a definition unique to CRT. A later learning task explains that "a person's racial identity is more than the colour of their skin; it is also about how they see themselves based on their culture, life experiences, family life, language, where they were born, etc." (HWDSB, Module 2, 2021). Further to the suggested lessons outlined, one module's proposed "Educator Pre-reflection" includes a paragraph on racial colour-blindness. This draws from academic sources to evaluate colour-blindness as posited "on the premise of equality for all, rather than equity and thus, at its core is an insidious practice of racism in itself" (HWDSB, Module 2, 2021). This accords with CRT. To address the practice of colourblindness, the same pre-reflection for teachers states that its intent is to "bring race into the conversation in primary classrooms" (HWDSB, Module 2, 2021). Later, under "Ideas for Going Deeper", the module suggests the possibility of asking students the following question: "If each person belongs to a certain race, why is it that only non-white people are called 'racialized'?" (HWDSB, Module 2, 2021). It is noted that this question may lead to further class discussion on matters such as anti-Black racism in Canada, the myth of white supremacy, systemic inequalities resulting from racism, and the reasons for current tensions regarding race in North America. This module also explains that COVID-19 highlighted two pandemics—the virus itself and the social inequities, including anti-Black and anti-Asian racism, that intensified during and after the pandemic. As such, the module expresses the CRT tenet of differential racialization, recognizing that levels of racialization towards particular groups can change over time. "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." also points to the reality of intersectionality and anti-essentialism, asking secondary-level students (in a suggested lesson) to analyze their own identities, including aspects of them that may be unseen, but which they would like others to know about. The lesson thus implies that there are numerous layers to everyone's identity, which accords well with CRT. "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." also encourages discussion about matters such as why only non-whites are racialized in society and why it is difficult to identify, for example, Indigenous celebrities in Canadian popular culture.

In sum, "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." affirms the CRT core tenet of racism's permanent and everyday existence, while also delving deeply into very pointed considerations of other CRT-related understandings of race or racism that may be important in the lives of public-school students.

From Anti-Racism to CRT?

It is perhaps too simple to describe CRT as the potential next step in policy beyond anti-racism. (Perhaps Shah, Cuglievan-Mindreau, & Flessa [2022] are correct in proposing a "Politics of Regeneration" phase—the creating and dismantling of structures, allowing generative conflict and centering multiple and contradictory truths, which may or may not include the essence of CRT—to follow in Ontario district reform.) Still, it is evident that the anti-racism derived measures proposed by Bill 16 and the current provincial policies in Ontario are *not* (yet) CRT. They tend to focus on vague terminology and end-goals of equity and non-discriminatory settings, without breaking down the specific points of systemic racism that led to CRT's creation. George et al. (2020) have argued that British Columbia

and Ontario's education policies demonstrate mere "symbolic anti-racism," in part due to the veneer of multiculturalism. However, it is equally evident that Hamilton-Wentworth's "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." modules outline sharper and more socially relevant points of how racism functions in contemporary culture, encouraging classroom teachers to imbed those points into lessons. We might say that "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." has one foot solidly in anti-racism and the other foot *partly* in CRT. But this is very significant. It demonstrates how an ambitious school board can, working from the ground up, develop and share lesson-content (among instructors and the public) that engages anti-racism *and* encourages teachers to take a deeper dive into CRT, should they wish to go there.

Indeed, teachers should feel safe and supported in engaging with CRT. Aspects of the theory are already indirectly embedded in Canadian laws and charters—policies such as employment equity and affirmative action are protected by the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Such policies invoke the uniqueness of racism as a permanent factor in society in attempting equity through policy. And all Canadian provincial education curricula explicitly state that equity is a priority. The Hamilton-Wentworth "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." project correctly notes that "All [of its] content aligns with the Ontario Curriculum and Ministry of Education directions" (HWDSB, Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild@ HWDSB, 2021). The government of Ontario itself notes that "Boards have flexibility to adapt their equity and inclusive education policy to take into account local needs and circumstances" (Ontario Policy/Program Memorandum 119, 2024). And Davidson (2009), in reviewing the discussion of curriculum in *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity*, noted that it

> reveals a lack of specific or mandated initiatives . . . . *Antiracism and Ethnocultural Equity* lists the core objectives that board policy-makers must bear in mind when developing their anti-racism and ethnocultural equity policy . . . . [but] it becomes evident that implementation of policies is more discretionary in nature than mandatory or compulsory. (p. 3)

As such, any school board in Ontario should feel justified in promoting and sharing CRT-related curricula if it can be demonstrated that they are needed within local circumstances. Teachers who are sympathetic to CRT and who feel that not enough is being done in their classrooms to present a critical perspective on race in society should work together and direct their local boards to promote modules and lessons, akin to those advanced by "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." Provincial-level policy making is slow. It is at the local level where instructors and school-leaders can make a more immediate impact.

This will require bold leadership and brave educators who will face resistance from conservative elements, including from some parents. But Canada is changing. The context of the current era has exposed all Canadians to discourses surrounding race and racial issues. Today's (older) teachers who grew up with the promotion of assimilation and were taught to embrace liberal multiculturalism—as opposed to *critical* multiculturalism, a politicized view of multiculturalism that engages discussion of anti-racism and anti-oppression (Sato & Este, 2018)—will not easily shift to a framework such as CRT. And it may still be out of the question for educators to employ the name "critical race theory" without meeting considerable resistance, not only from parents but from education executives. Indeed, the executive secretary of the Alberta Teachers' Association, Dennis Theobald, tweeted in 2022 that "CRT is an advanced analytical framework used to identify

how discrimination on the basis of race has influenced law and legal structures in the United States. It has no place in a Canadian elementary school curriculum" (Theobald, 2022). Despite CRT's being an accordant next step beyond anti-racism, it is unlikely to be identified by name in school policy or lessons in the short-term future.

However, one area where CRT *could* be immediately implemented is in university teacher-education programs. As discussed, many such programs offer courses relating to social justice and equity, but few if any focus exclusively on racial matters. Pre-service teachers' exposure to the edicts of CRT (and other theories and perspectives on race in education) could serve to accelerate future teachers' willingness to consider and engage with progressive anti-racist theories.

Conclusion

As Hamilton-Wentworth district's "Learn. Disrupt. Rebuild." module and Shah, Cuglievan-Mindreau, and Flessa's (2022) analysis of the history of Ontario districts show, educators keen to continue race-aware foci and lessons may need to work from the ground up. In Hamilton-Wentworth, the site of collective parent and community action in disrupting school racism has been at the district level. At the school and district levels, initiatives that address racial matters are urgent and should not wait for the slow-turning wheels of provincial education (such as those that failed to pass Bill 16). Educators must increasingly make a choice, which we hope will defy neoliberalism. Maharaj, Tuters, and Shah (2024) outline what is at stake:

> [If] we accept that a core rationale behind public schooling should be to bring together children from different backgrounds, increased school choice and privatization represent a direct threat that will have dire consequences for equal educational opportunity and social cohesion. As we have seen in the United States and are starting to witness in Canada, choice advocates will use any opportunity to advance the privatization agenda and increase social polarization. This is why the work of defending our public education systems against anti-CRT attacks is so crucial. (p. 32)

Canadian educators should feel very justified in using the framework of CRT to combat unconscious racism and to allow clearer pictures of student (and faculty) identities to emerge with the respect they deserve—especially when recent edicts and curricular updates from Ministries of Education increasingly support educators in this, and all the more so as the public education system's moral integrity and the future of Canadian social cohesion, hang in the balance.

Declaration

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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