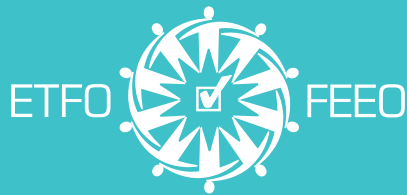
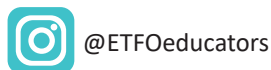
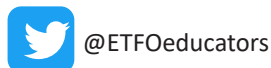


Anti-Oppressive Framework: A Primer



The Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO) is the union representing 83,000 elementary public school teachers, occasional teachers and education professionals across the province of Ontario.

Stay connected with ETFO online at:



Copyright © March 2021

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)
136 Isabella Street, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 0B5
416-962-3836 • 1-888-838-3836 • etfo.ca



Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario

Equity Statement

It is the goal of the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario to work with others to create schools, communities, and a society free from all forms of individual and systemic discrimination. To further this goal, ETFO defines equity as fairness achieved through proactive measures, which result in equality, promotes diversity, and fosters respect and dignity for all.

ETFO's Equity Initiatives

ETFO is a union committed to social justice, equity and inclusion. The Federation's commitment to these principles is reflected in the initiatives it has established as organizational priorities, such as: ETFO's multi-year strategy on Anti-Black Racism; Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning education; and addressing First Nations, Métis and Inuit issues. ETFO establishes its understanding of these issues within an anti-oppressive framework. The Federation ensures its work incorporates the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, addresses individual and systemic inequities, and supports ETFO members as they strive for equity and social justice in their professional and personal lives.

Definition of An Anti-Oppressive Framework

An anti-oppressive framework is the method and process in which we understand how systems of oppression such as colonialism, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism and ableism can result in individual discriminatory actions and structural/systemic inequalities for certain groups in society. Anti-oppressive practices and goals seek to recognize and dismantle such discriminatory actions and power imbalances. Anti-oppressive practices and this framework should seek to guide the Federation's work with an aim to identify strategies and solutions to deconstruct power and privilege in order to mitigate and address the systemic inequalities that often operate simultaneously and unconsciously at the individual, group and institutional or union level.



Purpose of the Resource

The Anti-Oppressive Framework: A Primer is a foundational resource to support the building of capacity and understanding of an Anti-Oppressive Framework for the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario. This resource will establish common terminology, proactive strategies and accessible tools to further develop understanding. ETFO is committed to removing individual and systemic barriers in order to allow members to feel safe and fully participate in their workspaces.

This resource contextualizes the comprehensive work that has been done over the years by ETFO members/staff and will support everyone moving forward by providing a shared language to discuss the ongoing work that we, as an organization, still need to do in order to continue the work towards a more just society.

ETFO members and local leaders are looking for tools to interrupt the conversations, to support one another and to understand the challenges for those most affected.

**Eight minutes and 46 seconds on May 25, 2020.
This time stamp is forever marked in many of our
minds for a sight that can never be unseen.**

Through social media, the world became a bystander to George Floyd’s murder, an event that would heighten the already high tide of racial violence in not just the United States, but here in Canada as well. With the American election and a global pandemic exacerbating the effects on every marginalized group at an alarming rate, 2020 was the perfect storm for racial tension.



In August of 2020, the ETFO Annual Meeting approved a motion to adopt action-oriented additions to the organization’s priorities, specifically numbers five and six:

ETFO Priorities for 2020-2021

5. To advocate for social justice in the areas of peace, anti-poverty, non-violence, equity and anti-racism.
6. To fight against anti-Black racism.

To do this work, this resource can support members to move beyond being a bystander and to deepen their own understanding of anti-oppression work. To understand the dynamics, one must first become aware of the conditions and barriers and then act to safely intervene to support members, staff or students.

The purpose of anti-oppression work is to look at systems, not just the individual. Research demonstrates that when professional development and actions are directed at addressing structural/systemic changes, its impact is greater and more deeply felt. When we look at how we, as ETFO, are working across the organization to effect change consistently and across programs, members, leaders and staff can see the concerted effort being made to have a real and impactful difference. This tool is created to move our organization to the next level.

It is our hope that this resource will complement the learning happening in many of our ETFO programs, as well as in worksites and school/community spaces by addressing power and privilege, moving us toward a more equitable world.

Think and Reflect

Consider ETFO’s Equity Statement and Priorities and the rationale for this resource. How does it challenge or align with our personal beliefs? Where do we need to go in order to deepen our own commitment to equity and anti-oppression? How do we behave intentionally to intervene and disrupt events of discrimination we experience or witness? How can our actions and goals mobilize for systemic change?

Unpacking The Anti-Oppressive Framework

ETFO's Equity Initiatives

ETFO is a union committed to social justice, equity and inclusion. The Federation's commitment to these principles is reflected in the initiatives it has established as organizational priorities, such as: ETFO's multi-year strategy on anti-Black racism; addressing anti-Asian racism; two spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning education; and addressing First Nations, Métis and Inuit issues. ETFO establishes its understanding of these issues within an anti-oppressive framework. The Federation ensures its work incorporates the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, addresses individual and systemic inequities, and supports ETFO members as they strive for equity and social justice in their professional and personal lives.

Using the anti-oppressive framework is one of the ways that ETFO is operationalizing its Equity Statement and Initiatives.

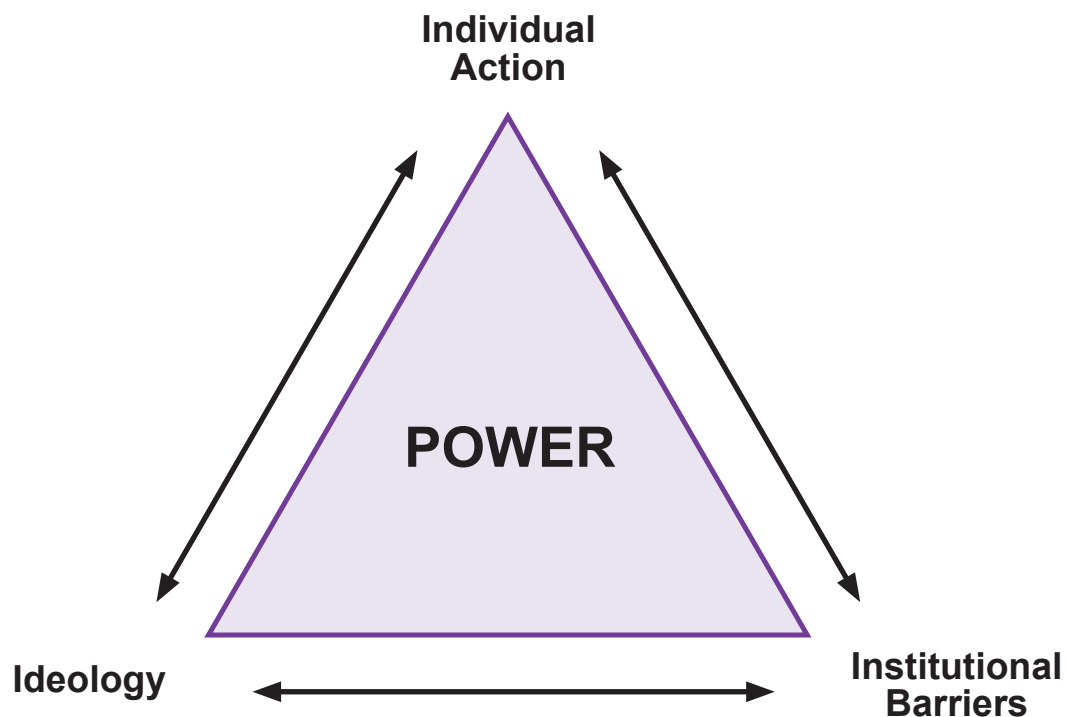
Definition of an Anti-Oppressive Framework

An anti-oppressive framework is the method and process in which we understand how systems of oppression such as colonialism, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism and ableism can result in individual discriminatory actions and structural/systemic inequalities for certain groups in society. Anti-oppressive practices and goals seek to recognize and dismantle such discriminatory actions and power imbalances. Anti-oppressive practices and this framework should seek to guide the Federation's work with an aim to identify strategies and solutions to deconstruct power and privilege in order to mitigate and address the systemic inequalities that often operate simultaneously and unconsciously at the individual, group and institutional or union level.

The commonalities between the anti-oppressive framework and other-equity related structures, such as [critical race theory](#), anti-racism, anti-homophobia, [intersectional feminism](#), [decolonizing education](#), are that they all share concepts of addressing and seeking to disrupt ideologies/assumptions, discriminatory behaviours and structural barriers. What is unique is that unlike other methods, an anti-oppressive framework provides opportunities to strategically centre certain marginalized voices (e.g., Black lives, Indigenous identities) and at the same time takes up as an integral component, intersectional identities and barriers.

In unpacking the concept of an anti-oppressive framework, it is helpful to consider the dynamics of oppression. Historically and currently, people experience varied forms of individual and [systemic discrimination](#). Oppressions are often experienced in multiple and overlapping ways. As human beings, we are complex and hold multifaceted identities and the barriers faced, both as individuals and within systems, are also often intersected.

The Triangle of Power Provides a Helpful Approach



Each corner holds a specific part of oppression.

Ideology

If we are to consider that as human beings, we are all informed by our ideas (ideology) which in this case, can be displayed through generalizations, assumptions, [implicit](#) or [explicit biases](#) and stereotypes that one may hold about individuals or groups, it is these constructed and learned ideas that inform the way one behaves towards people. A person may hold assumptions or biases about women, religions, immigrants, homelessness, etc. Assumptions and biases develop whether or not a community is homogenous or has access to diversity. For example, stereotypes about racialized or Indigenous Peoples are still prevalent in predominantly white school populations partly because of exposure to media messages and outdated curricular sources.

Individual Action

Discriminatory behaviours, often unintentional, can take the form of actions towards individuals or groups of people. These acts may appear in the form of conducts such as name-calling, inappropriate comments to more violent and pervasive physical acts such as bullying, assault, segregation or omissions. Some behaviours are more insidious and less able to be obviously detected. For example, comments about a racialized or Indigenous person's hair, or [asking someone where they are from](#), can be identified as [microaggressions](#).

Institutional Barriers

The corners of the triangle — ideas and actions inform and result in institutional inequities. This can be seen in systems/structures such as the media, the justice system, politics, education, religious institutions and union spaces where inequities based on lack of representation, over-representation, omissions, discriminatory policies are present. For example, in the education setting, there is the systematic omission of lives and experiences of racialized and Indigenous women in the provincial curriculum. Who is celebrated and honoured in most texts and resources for Remembrance Day? Holidays woven into the school calendar? How accessible is a program for an occasional education worker or designated early childhood educator?

“We can’t dream our way out of Oppression.”

— David Chariandy

Power

[Power](#) is the ability or (with institutional power) official authority to decide what is best for others. The ability to decide who will have access to resources. The capacity to exercise control over others. The mechanism that fuels this triangle is when all three corners work together, to inform, impact and perpetuate each other. What drives them together is power. Without institutional power, ideologies are just that — ideas. Behaviours are seen as isolated. When power is involved, they form patterns of inequities that result in structural violence and disparities. Systematic ideologies of power result in [white supremacy](#), [colonialism](#), [patriarchy](#), and [heterosexism](#).

The Triangle of Power in Action

An example of how the triangle of power becomes operationalized is in the hiring practices of an institution. Many organizations hold policies on equity, highlighting the priorities focused on creating an inclusive and a diverse work environment. However, if the organization’s practices and the staff’s decision making does not align with its policy, then inequitable practices occur. The representation in employees and hiring may not align with the values and ideology of an organization. This can be due to implicit biases, or stereotypes held by those who do the hiring, resulting in practices that may perpetuate inequities and disproportionate staff representation.

If not intentionally investigated and anti-oppressive practices implemented, designated groups may experience perceived inequities if the hiring practices do not match with the organization’s equity policies and ideologies, illustrating a barrier to being hired or promoted. All three corners of the triangle of power need to be addressed in order to enact change that has behavioural, structural and systemic impact.

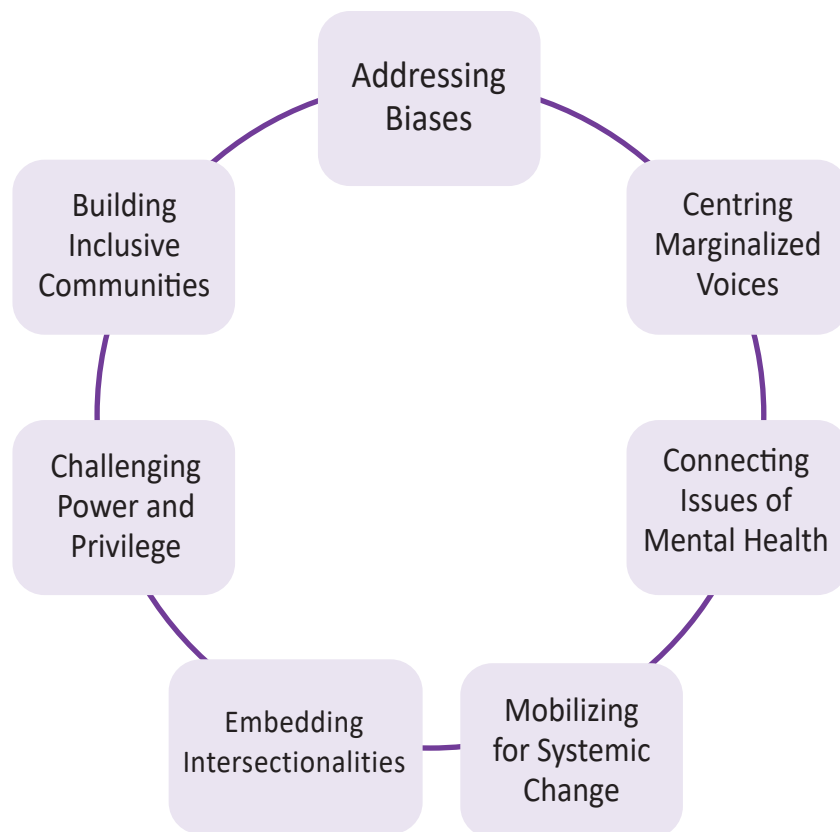
Think and Reflect

Can you recall an example of discrimination you have experienced or witnessed?

Identify what types of discrimination are present (racism, homophobia/transphobia, classism, ableism, sexism, ageism). Where do you think this example falls within the triangle metaphor (ideology, individual action, [institutional barrier](#))? What are the implications of bias, microaggressions, [white privilege](#) in your example? Does your example connect to more than one concept on the triangle? How do the three parts of the triangle impact each other with respect to your example?

Strategies and Tools

Seven Components of Anti-Opressive Framework



“If you are conditioned not to care, you are conditioned to indifference, and there is a violence to that indifference.”

— Tanya Talaga

An anti-oppressive framework functions most effectively when concepts and processes are applied to operationalize it. There are seven key components of an anti-oppressive framework that are necessary to implement in order to set strategies and goals for effective outcomes. The components outlined below are concepts and terminology identified and taken up in the different corners of the triangle of power. It provides for a more tangible and layered way to support the work in action planning, completing an environmental survey, identifying a specific goal for work and educational spaces.

Each component supports the engagement of an anti-oppressive framework. Below, each component is identified and guiding questions are provided for reflection and strategizing.

1. Building Inclusive Communities

Developing a working/learning space where people feel safe and respected in being themselves and expressing all aspects of their identities.

Guiding Questions

- In what ways are inclusivity of identities and voices represented?
- How are we building an inclusive community, where diverse lived experiences and multiple ways of knowing are taken up, respected?

2. Addressing and Challenging Implicit Biases

Unpacking and challenging stereotypes and assumptions, both one’s own and others, often unconscious and unintended.

Guiding Questions

- How are we intentional in providing opportunities for individuals and groups to identify and interrogate their own implicit biases?
- Are we developing the tools in ourselves, with each other to address implicit biases in a constructive and action-oriented way? Are we addressing issues that arise equitably?

“My activism has to do with my conscience; I cannot let certain things slide without doing something.”

— Lee Maracle

3. Centring Marginalized Voices

Intentionally creating space for oppressed and marginalized people (e.g., racialized people, women, two spirited, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer+ folks, Indigenous Peoples, people with disabilities) to share, contribute, lead and to be heard. This also means that dominant groups (e.g., men, white people, able-bodied, heterosexual people, etc.) might need to step back and listen more actively.

Guiding Questions

- How are we considering the voices, lived experiences, ideas of marginalized groups in society? Even if they are not part of our community?
- Do we recognize whose voices are not present? Do we have actions to address this absence of voices? Are conversations focused on the needs of the oppressed groups?

4. Challenging Power and Privilege

Understanding personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels of power and privilege, and working intentionally to dismantle these actions through the different forms of oppression (racism, sexism, homophobia/transphobia, ableism, classism).

Guiding Questions

- Where do you feel that you have power in your interactions with others?
- How do our behaviours silence others? What kinds of spaces do certain bodies take up? How are certain members stepping up and stepping back? How can you use power to support others?

5. Embedding Intersectionalities

Understanding that human beings are complex and made up of multi-faceted, intertwined identities (e.g., gender, race, class, religion, etc.) and that societal barriers also often occur in intersectional and intertwined ways (e.g., anti-Black racism impacts Black women and girls differently).

Guiding Questions

- How do we understand and help others make critical sense of the complexities of identities?
- How does intersectional and multi-dimensional identities inform our understanding of intersectional barriers and multi-dimensional forms of systemic oppression?

6. Mobilizing for Systemic Change

Directing actions against discrimination and oppression to address not just individual behaviours but work purposefully to impact social/institutional change (e.g., action plans consider goals that impact policies and constitutional language, hiring practices, budget allocation, institutional representation, etc.)

Guiding Questions

- In what ways has the program, initiative, goal informed equity goals and priorities?
- What specific pathways exist in your space and work to mobilize for systemic change?

7. Connecting Issues of Mental Health and Wellness

Recognizing that systemic oppressions impacts mental health and wellness of individuals and communities, and addressing issues of mental wellness with this in mind.

Guiding Questions

- How have mental health issues impacted the work and lives of diverse participants and members?
- In what ways can a program, initiative, space support people who are struggling with mental health and wellness?

Think and Reflect

Identify one or two components as learning goals to develop a deeper understanding of an anti-oppressive framework. How does this component inform you to modify or enhance a current practice? Consider one to two actions that could further your growth and relationship with this component.

Operationalizing the Anti-Oppressive Framework: A Situation

Reflecting back on the seven components, what does this look like in day-to-day interactions? Perpetuating privilege and oppression in the workplace is not always conscious, as many people are products of their environments and “this is how it has always been done” or “it is tradition” are ideas some fall back on. However, it is important to filter actions through a framework of anti-oppression to work towards making change in our working environments. Being conscious helps minimize the miscommunication of [Intent vs. Impact](#).

Guiding questions as listed above, challenge our planning and thinking to ensure we are consciously considering the impact of our actions. We must intentionally make choices to “do better, when we know better.”

As of late, Spirit Days have become a critical discussion in schools and workplaces. The intention is to lift people’s spirits, create community and bring people together. Instead, they can be stressful, exclusionary and perpetuate stereotypes. Common Spirit Days such as, “Crazy Hair Day” can become problematic quickly. For example, someone comes to school/work in a wig of dreadlocks or an adult recognizes a child with a mohawk, braids, or an afro as a “sure winner” of the day, who wasn’t participating. These are scenarios that have occurred, while not intentionally meant to be offensive, are nonetheless. They are examples of microaggressions, implicit biases and stereotyping.

Crazy Hair Day has become a more prevalent conversation in both homes and classrooms. As a community we are trying to move towards more inclusive workspaces with respect to mental health. To do that, the language used in the workplace needs to be assessed as well. “Crazy” is a term that is [ableist](#). It is demeaning to those living with a mental illness and unfairly stigmatizes those whose hair does not conform with the norm on a daily basis as “crazy.” Words matter!

What is normal hair? This becomes a critical question to consider.

The term “[norm](#)” sets a standard, and whether or not we intend to, it becomes reinforced. Days like “Crazy Hair Day” perpetuate this norm attributed to the dominant Euro-centric culture, further excluding the “others” who don’t conform. The issue is rooted in race and privilege and reinforces the [hidden curriculum](#) in schools. Hair is a powerful expression of culture and communication. Instead of being celebrated as such, it continues to be a [human rights conversation](#), particularly for Black women and children for what is acceptable in the classroom and [workplace](#). For students and colleagues who for example, wear hijabs, turbans, or have complex medical needs, are their voices being included in days such as this?

The guiding questions of the seven components of an anti-oppressive framework, support being conscious and intentional, building inclusive communities and centring marginalized voices in these conversations and can help to minimize negative impact and move towards building a truly inclusive, anti-oppressive community and environment.

By being conscious, we can be purposeful in disrupting *ideology* in current practice (hidden curriculum, ableist language), take *individual action* (plan with purpose, including marginalized voices, considering intent vs. impact) and *remove structural barriers*, allowing all to take part in a collective activity, shifting the power in a community to the whole instead of a few and foster a sense of community.

Think and Reflect

Identify one or two Spirit Days that you have enjoyed or witnessed in the past. Consider the intent vs. impact of the day. Who was impacted? What are the equity issues as you reflect back? What would you do differently, personally in behaviour and in planning? How would you change the day to be more inclusive for all participants? Which of the seven components of the anti-oppressive framework would you address in your action?

ETFO Resources



- 365 Black Canadian Curriculum
etfo.ca/supportingmembers/resources/pages/365.aspx
- Addressing Anti-Asian Racism: A Resource for Educators
etfo.ca/BuildingAJustSociety/EquityResources/Pages/Anti-AsianRacism.aspx
- Anti-Oppressive Framework Definition and Primer
etfo.ca/BuildingAJustSociety/EquityResources/Pages/Anti-OppressiveFramework.aspx
- ETFO's First Nation, Metis and Inuit Education
etfofnmi.ca/
- Everyday Mental Health
etfo.ca/link/MentalHealth
- Intersectionality: An Equity Framework Webinar
etfo.ca/link/Webcast
- Social Justice, Equity and Environmental Calendar
<https://etfo.ca/link/socialjusticecalendar>
- Two Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ Resources
etfo.ca/link/resources
- White Privilege Lesson Plans
etfo.ca/link/LessonPlans

Highlighted VOICE Articles

- Learning to Critically Address Anti-Black Racism: Voice in Conversation with Kike Ojo-Thompson, Principal Consultant, Kojo Institute
efovoice.ca/feature/interview-kike-ojo-thompson
- Claiming Space: Self-Identifying with my Union
efovoice.ca/feature/claiming-space-self-identifying-my-union
- Culturally Relevant and Responsive Pedagogy
efovoice.ca/feature/never-too-early

Other Resources

- Racial Equity Tools Glossary
[Glossary](#)
- Learning for Justice
[learningforjustice.org/Safe at School](https://learningforjustice.org/Safe%20at%20School)
- Rethinking Schools
rethinkingschools.org/

Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario (ETFO)

136 Isabella Street, Toronto, Ontario M4Y 0B5

416-962-3836 • 1-888-838-3836 • etfo.ca

