Exploring EDI Mistakes & Successes in a Sporting Context

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A Two Part Presentation

Part 1:

During the first part of the presentation, I will outline some of the most common EDI policy mistakes sport organizations tend to make and offer some high level suggestions for developing new policies.

Part 2:

During the second part of the presentation, Laura will demonstrate how some of these suggestions have been put into practice by providing an overview of some ongoing EDI work being done by sport organizations across the country.

PART 1:
EDI POLICY MISTAKES IN SPORT

The information presented in the first half of this presentation is based on academic research conducted by a group called the **ReCreation Collective.**

Formed in 2019, the ReCreation Collective is a group of academics, practitioners and policy makers from across Canada that are interested in **developing frameworks and learning tools** intended to **change the ways we think about and enact 'inclusion'** in sport, recreation and other movement cultures.

THE RECREATION COLLECTIVE

Members of the ReCreation Collective that contributed to this project include:

- Dr. Danielle Peers (University of Alberta)

- Dr. Janelle Joseph (University of Toronto)

- Dr. Tricia McGuire-Adams (University of Ottawa)

- Dr. Lisa Tink (University of Alberta)

- Dr. William Birdel (University of Calgary)

- Dr. Lindsay Eales (University of Alberta)

- Dr. Bethan Kingsley (University of Alberta)

- Dr. Chen Chen (University of Connecticut)

- Andrea Carey (Inclusion Incorporated)

- Karen O'Neill (Canadian Paralympic Committee)

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

During this research project, we analyzed all of the EDI related polices that were publicly available on the websites of National Sport Organizations (NSO).

This included 134 organization-specific policies (e.g., equity and inclusion policies, trans inclusion policies) and 9 national policies, acts or frameworks (e.g., Canadian Sport Policy, Actively Engaged: A Policy on Sport for Women and Girls).

The type of analysis we did was a discourse analysis. This meant that we examined the ways statements (or groups of words) within the individual policies actually reinforced exclusion.

THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

Using this analytical approach, we found that most EDI policies contributed to exclusion and inequity (often unintentionally).

We also found that almost all of them did this in two ways:

- Their either reinforced the status quo by **alleging inclusivity** and/or **refusing accountability.**

- Or they continued to exclude equity-denied groups by **erasing, problematizing** or **hedging.**

I will walk you through how each of these forms of exclusion operate in the next few slides.

Policies that Allege Inclusivity

What they do:

Policies that fall within this category do two things.

They introduce sweeping EDI statements without making any changes to practices, procedures, decision-making process, or resource allocation.

They also tend to ignore the existence of historical and ongoing oppressions, harms, and exclusions (e.g., settler colonialism, racism, ableism).

Policies that Allege Inclusivity

What this looks like in practice:

An example of an policy that claims to ensure inclusivity without stating what changes will be made to practices, decision-making processes, or resource allocation and/or why these changes are necessary can be seen in this statement:

"All persons associated with [sport] will be provided with equal opportunity to participate in [sport] at all levels including athlete, coach, official, volunteer, and staff."

Policies that Allege Inclusivity

Why this approach is problematic:

As demonstrated by the previous statement, these types of policies serve to declare the organization is inclusive (it states "all persons will be provided with equal opportunities") without naming the structural changes required to actually do so.

In other words, there is no recognition that inequity exists (or why it exists) and no commitment to any actions that might increase opportunities for historically excluded groups to participate.

It's basically rhetorical window dressing.

Policies that
Refuse Accountability

What they do:

These types of policies tend to off-load labour or responsibility to those with less institutional clout (e.g., programmer on the EDI committee) or those being harmed or excluded (i.e., members of equity denied groups).

Policies that Refuse Accountability

What this looks like in practice:

An examples of a policy that refuses accountability by off-loading labour can be seen in this statement:

"Employees are invited to bring forward ideas or observations about practices or policies that may be creating systemic discrimination."

Policies that Refuse Accountability

Why this approach is problematic:

As we can see in that statement, employees are simply invited to bring forward "ideas" about "what may be creating systemic discrimination."

However, boards and management teams (which tend to be made up of middle to upper class, white, cis, able-bodied folks) still maintain full control over any decisions about what structural changes (if any) will be made.

Furthermore, there are no processes in place to hold them accountable to making any of structural changes required to address issues of systemic discrimination.

Policies that
Erase, Ignore or Disregard

What they do:

These types of policies identify specific practices and accountabilities for some groups and not others.

Policies that Erase, Ignore or Disregard

What this looks like in practice:

Most of our sporting organizations have actionable policy statements focused on trans individuals, disabled individuals, Indigenous peoples, and/or women and girls.

However, there are no actionable statements specifically for Black or other racialized people, Newcomers, those living in poverty, or those who experience discrimination based on their culture or religion.

Policies that
Erase, Ignore or Disregard

Why this approach is problematic:

Developing policies for some groups and not others creates an inclusion hierarchy that positions some groups as less deserving of meaningful sport opportunities.

It also ignores the ways these identities intersect. That is, how a policy for women or a policy for trans folks ignores race, ability, religion and income.

Policies that Problematize

What they do:

These types of policies construct historically excluded groups as inherently problematic groups that benevolent sport organizations can, and should, fix

Policies that Problematize

What this looks like in practice:

An example of a policy statement that constructs an excluded group as a problem in need of 'fixing' can be seen in this statement:

"Today's Aboriginal youth—one of the fastest growing segments of the Canadian population— are challenged by rising rates of illness, such as Type II diabetes, heart disease, and fetal alcohol syndrome, and suffer from higher rates of incarceration, substance abuse, suicide, racism, and a sedentary lifestyle."

Policies that Problematize

Why this approach is problematic:

Policies that focus on improving the health or social outcomes of particular groups ignore the systemic impacts of settler colonialism, capitalism, racism, and ableism on social and health inequalities and frame individuals as inherently deficient.

These policies also construct sporting environments as places where individuals can be 'saved' or 'fixed', rather than recognizing our harmful and exclusionary systems (sport included) need to be reimagined.

n other words, they suggest members of equity denied groups should be the targets of interventions instead of intervening in the systems that are harming them.
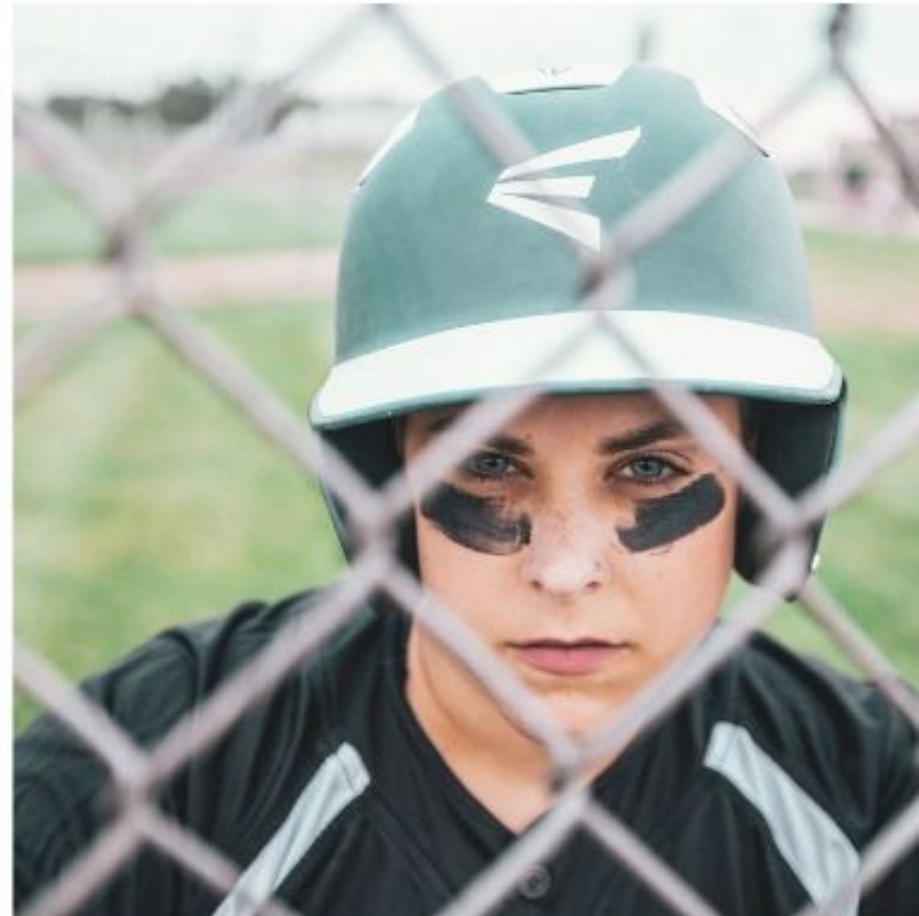
Policies that Hedge

What they do:

These types of policies have actionable statements that are qualified in ways that make certain forms of inclusion conditional or labour intensive for those excluded.

Policies that Hedge

What this looks like in practice:

Examples of policies that make participation conditional and labour intensive can be seen in these two statements:

"[Organization A] will encourage and advocate for aboriginal persons and persons with disability to participate as fully as possible as athletes, coaches and volunteers, with due consideration being given to meeting the criteria for qualification and safety at high performance competitions."

"The athlete must demonstrate that her total testosterone level in serum has been below 10 nmol/L for at least 12 months prior to her first competition."

Policies that Hedge

Why this approach is problematic:

Within this approach to policy development language is often non-committal and offers easy justification for ongoing exclusion (e.g., "*encourage and advocate for persons with a disability to participate as fully as possible*").

This approach also tends to use medical criteria that are invasive and can present financial and/or jurisdictional barriers that might take years to meet (for example, proving a "*testosterone level below 10nmol/L*" requires particular medical care that might be costly or unavailable to rural athletes).

11 WAYS TO AVOID THESE MISTAKES

- Explicitly acknowledge the existence of harms due to the historical, and ongoing, forms of settler colonialism, racism, (hetero)sexism, ableism, islamophobia, and poverty in both sport and society more generally.

- Explicitly acknowledge the exclusionary structures that constitute our current sporting system.

- State your goal/aspiration to becoming more equitable and inclusive and make a commitment to action.

- Be explicit about goals, processes, timelines, resource allocations, and accountabilities.

- Focus on changing exclusionary structures and systems rather than just inviting/including those that have been, and continue to be, excluded (target barriers not people).

- Engage with equity-denied groups when building the policies intended to impact them.

- Engage with all groups as intersectional and internally diverse.

- Compare equity policies across groups and ensure you are equally committed to all forms of equity.

- Be clear that health and inclusion disparities are a product of social inequality not qualities of particular populations.

- Represent equitable sport as a right and ends to itself, not simply a means to an end (e.g., reducing crime).

- Track and share progress.

PART 2:
PROMISING PRACTICES