

Editorial

Transformational Opportunities through New(er) Stories: Research Addressing Educational Inequalities

Jeannie Kerr

Simon Fraser University

Spring is a season of renewal and transformation and each of the articles in this March, 2023 issue reflect that spirit. As curriculum scholar Dwayne Donald reminds us: “A significant curricular and pedagogical challenge faced by educators in Canada today is how to facilitate a new story that can repair inherited colonial divides and give good guidance ...” (Donald, 2021). The articles in this issue contribute to our collective understanding of transformative possibility addressed at historic patterns of educational inequality. The first three articles engage a story that looks at the genesis of inequitable educational outcomes as being sourced from educational structures and practices, rather than the entrenched deficit orientation that sources students and their communities as the problem. For some this is a new story, for some an old story that needs recognition, but the key point is how do we facilitate this new(er) story? These educational researchers do this work through naming the colonial and white supremacist nature of schooling in Canada, and shift the focus of analysis and intervention from *fixing students* to fixing educational structures that unfairly impact Indigenous and Black students. They provide sorely needed analysis and guidance to address long-standing inequalities, highlighting the significance of engaging with community voice and involvement in supporting transformative possibilities in educational settings. The fourth article in this collection helps us consider the affective nature of this work as we tell new(er) stories, and the demand to look backwards and forward in time as we consider our present through more than the intellect.

In their article “Achieving Equity in Graduation Rates and Other Indicators of Success for Indigenous Learners in Canada” Dustin Louie and Leona Prince examine their collaborative interventions to foster Indigenous student success in a school district in Northern British Columbia. With deep, long-standing, and ongoing connections to this school district as researchers, leaders and Indigenous community-members, as well as being former students in this district, they take us through the significance of Indigenous-defined notions of success and ask: “How can we harness Indigenous student and community voices to guide change in K–12 education?” In their work, they designed interventions to “disrupt and dismantle” the colonial presences in the schools. Recognizing student identified priorities of seeing themselves in the curriculum and feeling safe and welcomed, the researchers sought to Indigenize curriculum and pedagogy and focused on relationships that promote welcoming. The researchers highlight significant positive results in terms of graduation rates being almost on par with non-Indigenous students in the district, as well as the historic significance in influencing outcomes for on-reserve students. Their strong collaboration with 14 local First Nations is notable in this work, but significantly, they point out the need for more widely available professional development, as well as the negative influence of peer-based racism – suggesting the need to design interventions addressed at the racism enacted by non-Indigenous students.

Frank Deer and Rebeca Heringer similarly look at district-wide transformation for Indigenous students but from a different location in Canada. In their article “Indigenous Perspectives at the Cultural Interface: Exploring Student Achievement through School/Community Based-Interventions” they share a study of a Manitoba school district that is meaningfully working to positively influence Indigenous student achievement through designing and implementing Indigenous educational programming in collaboration with researchers. The authors share a smaller part of this study focused on finding patterns within the experiences of Indigenous students who engaged in specific district-wide programming and identifying issues and factors that could shed light on this important concern. Sharing the positive results that emerged from the interventions, they found that engaging parents, communities, and particularly Elders, in support of Indigenous programming and cultural events were key to student perceptions and outcomes. While they found the interventions supported Indigenous learners’ positive self-image and belonging, they noted the importance of engaging all students in Indigenous programming. Noting the need to attend to the specificity of context, they encourage other school divisions with

similar goals to attend to transforming the physical space of classrooms, promote professional development of the entire staff across the district, and engage in active recruitment of qualified staff and language speakers.

The third article in this issue shifts focus to the experience of Black Refugee students. Rebeca Heringer, in her article “Hospitality, Self-Determination, and Black Refugee Students in Manitoba”, similarly approaches her work in examining schools through the lens of students historically pushed to the margins within Canadian schooling systems. Through the theoretical lenses of Hospitality and Self-Determination Theory, she engaged with the intersectional experiences and perspectives of Black Refugee students to examine the issues identified in the research literature. Her article provides nuance to the established research drawing closer attention to the ways white Canadian teachers and administrators in Manitoba schools enact a generally friendly, welcoming, positive regard towards Black Refugee students, yet ultimately create an inhospitable climate in showing little interest in who these students actually are, how they feel, or what they think, as well as the peer-based racism they endure. The normalization of peer-based anti-Black racism within the school experience, by staff and the students, is troubling and also suggests interventions directed at white supremacy. Heringer’s analysis aligns with the argument put forward by Ann Lopez and Gaëtane Jean-Marie (2021) that we need to understand the embodiment of “anti-Black racism, colonialism, and white supremacy” and pay attention to the mechanisms of oppression as they manifest in schooling practices (p. 51).

These articles in different ways have pointed back to the need to disrupt racism and white supremacy in schools, and in particular with white, non-Indigenous students enacting white supremacy. It is in this regard we look to Sara Karn’s article “Historical Empathy: A Cognitive-Affective Theory for History Education in Canada” that considers the affective work of teaching about the past in relation to the present. Karn recognizes the contributions of focusing on historical consciousness and citizenship, yet also argues for the need to deconstruct dominant narratives through decolonizing and anti-racist histories. Highlighting the deep historical roots and lasting legacies of societal inequalities in Canada, she argues that we need to recognize, but also go beyond, an informational/analytical approach through directing our pedagogical efforts towards encouraging all students to care about these issues and see themselves in relations of responsibility. The articles in this issue draw our attention to the importance of professional development for teachers to be able to engage in the kind of work that Karn is suggesting. I would argue a

key focus of this work should be engaging teachers' greater self-reflexive consideration of their investment in old stories that unfairly impact Indigenous and Black students.

I hope that the articles in the Spring Issue of CJE inspire transformations in understanding, practice and pedagogy that pay careful attention to our collective responsibilities for promoting educational practices that all students deserve.

References

- Donald, D. (2021). We need a new story: Walking and the wâhkôhtowin imagination. *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 18(2), 53-63.
- Lopez, A. E. & Jean-Marie, G. (2021). Challenging anti-Black racism in everyday teaching, learning, and leading: From theory to practice. *Journal of School Leadership*, 31(1-2), 50-65.