

Editorial

Reconsidering and Refiguring Presences: Supporting Transformational Potential in Education

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As Sharon Todd (2010) eloquently argues drawing on the scholarship of Hannah Arendt and Adriana Cavarero, the transformative potential of education lies in the “centrality of one’s presence in the world and the specific ways in which our presence is always an engagement with a particular context” (p.2), and within a network of relations. The notion of *presence* in educational relationships is a common consideration for all educators. The idea that a teacher must be present to their students with a certain quality of awareness and mutual recognition is a key part of what educators attempt to establish in practice. In this regard, the embodiment of the educator in educational relations has been considered central. Yet, as Fikile Nxumalo (2016) convincingly argues, settler colonialism fosters erasures of what is actually present within our educational practices to maintain exclusions for Indigenous knowledges and experiences and more-than-human relations. In this sense, she argues for ‘refiguring presences’ in educational research and practice attentive to exclusions. As educational practice is also immersed in a contemporary shift to an increasingly online world with a rise in exposure to artificial intelligence, what else might educators need to refigure in terms of presence? The articles in this Spring issue of the Canadian Journal of Education invite educators to qualitatively reconsider and refigure educational presences in support of the transformational potential of education.

The article “Teaching about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and 2SLGBTQQIA+ People: Implications for Canadian Educators”, Catherine Vanner, Jillian Goyeau, Meegwun Logan, Kendal Ryan, Angelina Weenie and Claudia Mitchell

draw attention to the need for educators and curriculum designers to refigure presences by centring the voices and working in partnership with Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGT-BQQIA+ people. Their study based in Treaty 6 territory, engages the experiences of eight Grade 8-12 teachers teaching about Murdered and Missing Indigenous women and girls and two spirit people (MMIWG2S), and 11 Indigenous girls aged 11-17 who participated in a 2-day workshop at an Indigenous-led program *Young Indigenous Women's Utopia* that was designed to challenge colonial and gender-based violence. Through a team of Indigenous and settler scholars, they ask: "How can teachers enhance the critical consciousness of Canadian young people about MMIWG2S" (p.4)? Through interviews and narratives of lived experience the researchers find education in this area "could only be accomplished by Expanding the Curriculum, Centering Indigenous Identity and Lived Experiences, and Creating a Safe Space for All Voices" (p.11). They note the continued absence of curriculum and teaching around MMIWG2S in K-12 and the imperative to bring presence to this issue in curriculum, but importantly the need to contextualize the violence as rooted in the ongoing and usually unacknowledged presence of settler colonialism. Within the concerns of identity, the study finds that the presence of teachers' identity is important, and the need for non-Indigenous educators to centre Indigenous voices.

Engaging in a different form of educational presence and absence, Kaye Hare delves into the embodied sense-making of educators in a sexual health training certification program in British Columbia. In her article "'Sandpaper Yeah.': Educators' Embodied Insights into Comprehensive Sexual Health Education Pedagogy", Hare engages in an "arts-informed, sensory ethnographic" (p.29) study to consider "how educators use their bodies to negotiate contested pedagogical terrain" (p.27). While noting the important influence in sexual health program educator certification of centring a rights and equity lens, yet the consistency of seemingly neutral discourses, Hare seeks to contextualize how "pedagogical practices are known, (re)produced, empowered, questioned, and disputed via educators' experiences" in certification programming (p.31). Her study provides insight into the lived experience of learning to be a sexual health educator and the felt experience of negotiating power and identity in public spaces that are seeking transformation yet reliant on institutional and legal configurations. Her study suggests greater recognition of how a legalistic structure in sexual health education training can be felt as abrasive and gritty, as in sandpaper, causing educators to lose their own sense of presence as an educator.

In their article “Love and the Distance: The Role of Presence in Online Learning”, authors Keith Brown and Anne Zhang study how holistic and contemplative educators managed the move to online learning during COVID-19 shutdowns when “two cornerstones of a holistic notion of presence – undivided attention and embodiment – were challenged” (p.77). In their study, Brown and Zhang ask how “contemplative or holistic teaching and learning foster interconnection and ‘being presence’ without physical, in-person presence? What rituals, tools and attitudes are needed for teachers’ presence to be mobilized and adapted to an online learning environment” (p.64)? The authors structured interviews with four holistic educators that taught online during the shutdown through Whiteside’s (2015) theory of social presence which considers affective association, community cohesion, instructor involvement, interaction intensity, and knowledge/experience. Brown and Zhang contend that these educators were primarily concerned with managing the emotional tone of the virtual classroom through establishing safety and trust to encourage personal disclosures while balancing student privacy within a shared learning community. The researchers share participants’ concerns and practices that supported the online environment, but ultimately find that the teachers “adapted the online technologies according to their preferred ways of inviting presence rather than using technologies to challenge their pre-existing philosophies and notions of presence” (p.79). The study suggests that online realities may be positioned to transform enduring notions of presence.

Our final article in this issue also takes up the absence of teacher presence through technologies that produce student assessment. Matthieu Cisel’s article “Digital Dashboard for Summative Assessment and Indicators Misinterpretation: A Case Study”, engages the complications of the increasing digital technologies in the context of classrooms in France, and the scarce research on both relevance and accuracy out of lab settings. Through studying the classroom implementation of these digital dashboards, Cisel found that the dashboards are overly cumbersome and to be accurate the teachers “would have to refrain from spontaneously interacting with students” (p. 103) – something they are not inclined to do. Cisel also found that the technology “incentivizes teachers to behave like students were in a perpetual examination” and is also “contradictory with the principles of inquiry-based learning” (p. 105). In sum, Cisel finds the accurate implementation of this technology would actually require practices that negatively impact learning. The lessons in this study are instructive for Canadian educational settings where pressure to engage with technologies that replace teacher presence is gaining momentum.

We are excited as always to share a new issue of CJE. As scholars and journal editors, we grapple with presence and absence in our research and teaching, and pay great attention to how we might refigure presences in support of equity. We appreciate the complexity and methodological innovations in this issue and look forward to the newness of Spring!

References

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