Volume 29, Number 1, 2024 Winter Issue

MESSAGE from the Editors-in-Chief

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We are delighted to be launching our first issue as co-editors-in-chief, and to be doing so with this special focus on graduate student work. It is an honour to step into the footsteps of Dr. Patrick Lewis, who served as editor-in-chief, and Shuana Niessen, the journal's managing editor, each of whom served in these capacities for many years. Our aim is to maintain and build upon the strong international reputation that these editors worked tirelessly to establish for *in education*.

We would like to take an opportunity to briefly introduce ourselves. We are both faculty members of the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina, with Valerie presently in her 12th year and Kathleen in her 24th year as faculty members. Kathleen's research is primarily in the area of mathematics teacher education, informed by critical and culturally responsive pedagogies. Valerie's area of research has largely been focused on arts-based pedagogies, particularly a/r/tography, and informed by an ecological aesthetics perspective. We both bring years of experience with editing books and journal special issues in addition to serving as manuscript reviewers and graduate student thesis supervisors. In our new role as editors-in-chief, we look forward to working with both seasoned and beginning scholars who submit their work to *in education*.

In this, our first editorial for *in education*, we would like to thank our special issue editor, Dr. Twyla Salm, for her insight and organization of this special issue of Faculty of Education, University of Regina graduate student academic articles. Working with editors in the publication process of a peer-reviewed, open-access journal is a helpful learning experience as well as a significant career opportunity for these beginning scholars. While this issue of *in education* was initiated with the journal's previous editor and managing editor and went through a longer than desired hiatus during the journal administrative and editorial change-over, we are delighted to see it finally come to fruition. We have been inspired by the work of these graduate students, and we hope the reader will be also. Finally, we would like to thank our graduate student managing editor, Nadiya Ekhteraeetoussi, for her assistance in preparing the manuscripts in this issue for publication.

Editorial: [Healthy and Transformative Spaces] *in education*

Twyla Salm

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Thank you to the seven graduate students in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina who wrote the insightful articles and book review published in this special issue. Their contributions demonstrate the wide variety of ways that healthy and transformative spaces manifest in education. As McCuaig et al. (2022) suggest, teachers provide a wide spectrum of health-related services that fall within both a pathogenic role and "a more salutogenic role, serving as general resistance resources that seek to promote students' welfare, security and well-being" (p. 160). It is the latter, the salutogenic category, where the authors in this issue focus their analysis. While schools have long been concerned about the well-being of students, the meaning of *healthy spaces in education* changes as social, political, environmental, and cultural forces shift over time. Similarly, as scholars consider how to do education differently, they should guard against *transformative education* becoming cliché; that is, overused to the point of becoming meaningless (Fantuzzo, 2022). Fantuzzo (2022) argues for transformative education as aspirational (p. 159), stating it is not about asking: "Is this school transformative? But rather: Are students changing because they are making contact with educational values and aspiring to better appreciate them?" (p. 171). I invite the reader to use this question as a lens when reading each of these articles, and imagine possibilities for creating and enhancing healthy and transformative spaces in their own contexts in education.

In the first article, Whitney Blaisdell shares her action research study in which she listens to parents share observations of their children at play during the pandemic. In her article, she claims that her findings and imaginings will help school communities re-think healthy, caring spaces for children to play and learn. Next, Brooke Breti examines how various environmental conditions within schools influence creative thinking. She argues that all students have the potential to be creative, especially when they are exposed to creative teachers who know how to promote creative thinking as key elements of healthy transformative learning spaces in K-12 classrooms. Also focusing in classrooms, Jessica Madiratta explores Gay's (2018) eight attributes of culturally responsive teaching. She explains how these attributes can contribute to healthy learning spaces, particularly for Indigenous students, and how they might transform pedagogy to be beneficial for all children. Ashlee Sandiford also attends to questions related to culture in her thoughtful literature review of anti-racist scholarship. Calling for anti-racist actions, especially for those people who are not racialized, Ashlee provides examples of ways that teachers and administrators can work towards transforming their learning spaces to improve the well-being of their students. Notably, she offers a framework she calls "the RAISE Theory" that she describes as a tool to help educators reflect on their anti-racist practices. In the fifth article of this special issue, Avery Matthews writes about developmental disabilities, specifically addressing the merits and challenges of direct/explicit and social constructivist approaches of teaching in inclusive classrooms. Finally, Hui Xu describes her study that explores the challenges graduate Chinese students encounter when making small talk. Her study offers insights into how universities can transform, not only their services for international students, but also toward providing healthy welcoming spaces for students for whom English is an additional language. Another graduate student, Chioma A. I. Olumide-Ajibola, wrote a compelling book review of *Nuances of Blackness in the Canadian Academy: Teaching, Learning and Researching While Black,* edited by Awad Ibrahim, Tamari Kitossa, Malinda S. Smith, and Handel K. Wright. Her thoughtful analysis of this

four- part book invites all readers, regardless of race and ethnicity, to enter the Blackness in the academy conversation with a view to disrupt the inequities that have persisted in teaching, learning and research.

As I connect together my final thoughts, I would like to begin by thanking the team that made this graduate student special issue possible. The publishing process was inspired by Dr. Andrea Sterzuk's (2016) *in education* graduate student issue that focused on power, identity and resisting audit culture by offering an alternative way for new academics to enter the publishing domain. The unique process, used in that 2016 graduate student issue and in this issue, was designed to be less competitive and more supportive, yet rigorous and productive. It involved inviting graduate students, who were open to being mentored through the publishing procedures, to submit their work for consideration. First, graduate students attended an "introduction to publishing workshop" and a follow-up meeting, the outcome of which was an initial draft manuscript that was vetted by the guest editor and a reviewer. Then, graduate students were paired with a reviewer-mentor who offered an open review process to support changes and revisions over time. Finally, manuscripts were submitted for a final review in an open review process with both the reviewer-mentor and the guest editor. The co-editors-in-chief and the managing editor of the journal played important roles in the final stages, resulting in the high-quality articles you are reading in this publication. In Dr. Sterzuk's (2016) editorial, she stated "[o]ther ways are possible" (p. 2) and now, with this second graduate issue published, maybe we will see a trend emerging…and I will argue, it is a healthy and transformative space for new scholars to publish.

I wish to extend a sincere "Thank You" to the reviewer-mentors: Emily Ashton, Melanie Brice, Michael Cappello, Kathleen Nolan, Scott Thompson, and Brittany Tomin.

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Realizing and Imagining Schools as Sites of Community Care: Lessons from Children Playing During a Pandemic

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Abstract

This paper is the result of an action research project that aimed to understand how to support family play experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through grounded theory interviews and analysis, underpinned by an ethics of care, schools were revealed as important providers of community care for children through their offerings as spaces where children create friendships, move, learn, engage in the arts, feel a sense of belonging, contribute, and play. This paper takes a strength-based approach to learn from children and families playing during the pandemic to explore the many ways schools provide care to children. It also offers imaginings of schools in partnership in care-offering alongside community-based organizations.

Keywords: COVID-19, play, community care, aesthetics of play, schools, children and public space

Realizing and Imagining Schools as Sites of Community Care: Lessons from Children Playing During a Pandemic

In the summer of 2020, I undertook an action research project that explored how the COVID-19 pandemic affected play and how community organizations and professionals working with and for children might support play for families at home. At the time, I was a graduate student working from home as a primary school teacher and community-based organization executive director while parenting two young children (ages 1 and 3) who were home from childcare. My position and relationships in the university, public school system, and early childhood community led the executive director of another organization to approach me to undertake this project.

In this paper, I specifically outline the implications of findings and action components of this research for schools. Since before the COVID-19 pandemic, scholars have been exploring what is often considered a decline of play (e.g. Brown, 2014; Karsten, 2005; Lewis, 2017; Valentine & McKendrick, 1997). The study being reported on was conducted with the following questions in mind:

- How do families perceive that the COVID-19 pandemic has shaped play?

- How can community-based organizations, including schools, support play at home during a pandemic and otherwise?

In an effort to move past identifying barriers and towards identifying and implementing actionable items that restore and protect play's presence in the lives of Canadian children (Oberle et al., 2021), the focus of this paper is on what families playing during the pandemic can teach schools about their role in community care. Ethics of care, as described by Noddings (1986), has been utilized as a conceptual framework for understanding how to care for the welfare of families and children living during a pandemic, and play is positioned as a component of community care.

Links have been made between play and care in academic literature. For example, Graber et al. (2020) write: "There is good reason to take changes to children's play seriously … For children living within these severe safety restrictions [of the COVID-19 pandemic], play may be one of the most essential ways to attend to their health, development, and learning" (p. 144). Casey and McKendrick (2023) noticed that play, often framed as *in crisis*, was a *remedy to* crisis during the COVID-19 pandemic, offering means of comfort and compassion to many. Aitken (2019) and Kallio and Hakli (2015) explored how play and art opportunities can allow human beings to suspend painful realities of the world. This paper directly positions play as an often-undervalued form of care, demonstrated in part through children's motivation towards it (Yoon & Templeton, 2019); expressions that play makes them happy (Brockman et al., 2011); and its significance for human relations and experiences across the lifespan (Lewis, 2019).

The study occupies a delicate time: the early onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, when adapting and doing education differently agitated questions surrounding how education is done ordinarily. Bazzul (2023), for example, reimagines a quality and ethical education as one that confronts malfunctioning societies, life on a dying planet, and what it means to co-exist and find pleasure in ongoing crises. The study described in this paper was conducted with the understanding that quality and ethical schools, as central components of the care and education of children, are responsible for fostering and facilitating children's play as a critical act of social justice. The study's examination of play during the pandemic, including practical action components and applications, contributes to understandings of a school's role in community care for children.

Literature Review

Defining play has consumed much of scholars' time and remains highly disputed (Lebed, 2019; Russell, 2016; Sutton-Smith, 2001). For the purposes of this paper, play is defined as a voluntary and intrinsically motivated action where the act of engaging in such activity presides over outcomes associated with it (Play Scotland, 2023). Although children's play has many reported developmental benefits and is a United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) declared children's right, in this paper, I advocate for play as a worthwhile activity in and of itself. Children repeatedly tell researchers that play makes them happy (Brockman et al., 2011), and the effects, content, meaning, significance, and emotions of play are far-reaching (Saltmarsh & Lee, 2021). It remains a fragile and important way that children process the world and their placement within it.

For decades, scholars have been warning that children's play opportunities are shrinking (Aitken, 1994; Brown, 2014; Karsten, 2005; Lewis, 2017). Community accountability for neighbourhood children appears to be declining (Karsten, 2005); play is moving from outdoors to indoors (Valentine & McKendrick, 1997); and adult supervision and control of play is increasing (Barron, 2014; Furedi, 2006; Lewis, 2017; Stephenson, 2003). In addition, a push-down of academic learning on increasingly younger children, regularly referred to as *schoolification*, is considered a pronounced threat to play opportunities (Nicolopoulou, 2010). Graber et al. (2020) notice that significant gaps remain in understanding the effects that restrictive circumstances to play, including lockdown conditions, may have on children's health and education. Understanding the history of play as a means of healing and joy during adversity (Bambrick et al., 2018; Boucher et al., 2014; Casey & McKendrick, 2023), coupled with the currently precarious state of play, necessitates attempts at understanding what one may learn about community care for play from its occurrences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite many play-advocates' work and community interventions made in an attempt to support children's active play, Canadian national survey results demonstrate that as a consequence of the immediate effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, children were overall playing less outside than they did before the outbreak of the pandemic (Moore et al., 2020), which could potentially have both short- and long-term effects on children and their well being (Lannoy et al., 2020; Puccinelli et al., 2021; Tremblay et al., 2015). Furthermore, while documenting community efforts to support play during times of crisis and its benefits to children during the pandemic, Casey and McKendrick (2023) uncover that play continues to lack adequate public and community support.

Locating play as a critical component of being well, understanding, processing, and emoting during a crisis, action research with community-based organizations to support play during and post-pandemic is a principal part of the action study this paper reports on. I shared the findings widely within the community-based sector, made easier by my position within it, and many organizations have altered their offerings, whether temporarily or permanently, around the study's results. This paper discusses how adults' attention to children during the COVID-19 pandemic opens possibilities for how school administrators, educators, and community organizations might involve play in caring for children.

Method &Study Design

The study reported on in this article was an action research project (Stringer & Aragón, 2021) conducted using constructivist grounded theory as described by Charmaz (2014). After receiving a notification about a research funding opportunity from the host university's Community

Engagement and Research Centre, the executive director of a community-based organization approached me to see if I might undertake a study. The organization leader was interested in being responsive to changing community needs during the pandemic, in particular around play. In the resulting qualitative study, I conducted interviews via Zoom and telephone, online surveys, and social media to collect data. Findings were constructed through participants' experiences and expressions, and shared with community-based organizations. I attended to the non-profit organization community desires of the project through conversations with non-profit organization leaders and staff. The action components of this study are inspired by Noddings' (1986) *ethics of care*, which fuses morality axiology, ethics, and care together with an assertion that action components which are caring in manner become an ethical responsibility. Similarly, Held's (2006) work on ethics of care helps reject action components that might hold a singular and objective moral stance on what a better human or society might consist of. Therefore, the action components of this study focused on caring relations rather than the virtues of individuals or societies. The action components are also seen as imperfect and incomplete; thus, the paper explores further, speculative imaginings of additional offerings of care, motivated by the work of Puig de la Bellacasa (2017). Such a framework centres the study on care, seeking evidence (or lack thereof) of care, and perceiving action research itself as a means of offering care.

Recruitment and Participants

After receiving institutional ethics approval, I recruited interested adult parents as participants using purposeful sampling (Bungay et al., 2016). All the parents had children up to six years of age. An important note, therefore, is that this study worked alongside caregivers of children but not children themselves, which is a limitation. As will be explored in the discussion section of this paper, this limitation also provided a rich method for examining how adults, myself included, witnessed, relayed, and experienced children's expressions of how they felt about play, schools, learning, and relationships during the pandemic, and what might be learned from such witnessing.

Upon completion of an initial online survey, which asked questions about changes people might be experiencing around play and how they might want community organizations to respond, participants were asked if they were interested in participating in a virtual interview for 45-90 minutes via telephone or Zoom. The first ten respondents who indicated they had at least one child below six years of age were selected. In addition, there were approximately 200 unique survey respondents to online surveys via Instagram for this study. Non-profit organization staff who wanted to receive emerging data and attend conversations and webinars were recruited via email through a network of local organizations serving families and young children.

The 10 study participants included seven participants who self-nominated for the study via social media and three who were referred by one of the participating community-based organizations that work with families based on factors such as newcomer status, poverty, and special needs. All 10 participants indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic affected their family finances. Three of the participants received a Canada Economic Recovery Benefit (CERB), a monetary benefit of $1000 CAD every two weeks for people financially impacted by the public response to the COVID-19 virus (Government of Canada, 2021). All participants discussed sensitive information involving their personal finances, mental health, and their children's special needs. Understanding that data would be shared with community-based organizations that many families were connected to, and anticipating future possible publications in journals, all participants chose pseudonyms to be identified by.

Data Collection

Although the study was an action research project, I used grounded theory techniques for interviewing and for coding methods in the data. Action research and grounded theory have been used conjointly in previous studies, and thought to work well together (Wastell, 2001). In the case of this study, grounded theory offered rigour in systematically conducting interviews, transcribing them, and coding them, which assisted me in locating patterns and constructing categories of the data. This, in turn, helped me to create pathways for action.

I conducted the first interview about play during the COVID-19 pandemic according to an initial interview guide in which I asked questions about immediate changes and concerns around play, and how parents would like to see community-based organizations support play during the pandemic. When participants appeared to deviate from the guide, their path was followed rather than directed, as is recommended by Birks and Mills (2011) in order to take the "optimal route" (p. 75) in grounded theory data collection. Although interview guides with set questions were prepared, during the interviews I would invite participants to address matters they felt were important to explore regardless if it was on the interview guide or not. I would ask follow-up questions and invite participants to wander away from the pre-made set of questions when they felt it was necessary. I transcribed and open-coded (Charmaz, 2014) the first interview so that I could slightly alter the guide for the next interview. Each interview, transcribed and coded before the next, was further informed by community findings as I began to see patterns emerge. As patterns such as 'public play invites playfulness' became more apparent, I solicited online responses from the aforementioned social media account surrounding play in the local area. Sharing early findings with the community enabled me to check whether or not the findings were resonating with the larger community and allowed me to invite further insight into apparent patterns. The social media account also aided the action component of this research: as participants shared what appeared to increase access to play during the pandemic, I often shared their responses to the social media community. Doing so not only initiated a community discussion around fostering play during the COVID-19 pandemic that helped me refine findings, but it created an ongoing, open discourse about supporting play during that challenging time.

Data Analysis

I analyzed the data using constructivist grounded theory methods (Charmaz, 2014). When I transcribed the interviews, I assigned every line or every sentence in each transcript with an initial code that helped define each fragment of data. Slowly, I moved from initial coding to more focused coding as codes started making sense together and as some codes began to subsume others. Focused coding involved diving back into the data to revisit initial codes and fragments, to test how the focused codes aligned with initial data and coding. Finally, I moved into theoretical coding which involved playing with the focused codes and revisiting data to see how the codes might fit into one another and/or develop into a theory. The grounded theory data analysis and the action research methods intersected in several ways. Rather than analyzing data entirely on my own, I would often check-in with participants, the social media page, and the non-profit leaders involved in the project to share codes and phases of analysis. Considering the urgency with which the non-profit leaders wanted to adjust their findings, this approach helped inform their community offerings while inviting their own perspectives on the analysis and study's trajectory.

Findings

Although this study focused on how, in general, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted play in and around the home, this paper specifically underscores findings around community care offerings involving play. What follows is a presentation of what parental observations of children playing during the COVID-19 pandemic may teach about schools' role in supporting play, and how to position and care for children in public life. Findings, relative action components, and theoretical analysis emerged in the following two categories: *Children, Play, and School*, and *Children, Play, and Public Life*. I focus on these two categories in this paper to explore specific applications for schools. Each of these two categories of findings are further divided into sub-categories according to how codes appeared to theoretically interact.

Children, Play, and School

The first category of findings involved children, play, and school. Schools emerged in the study as a multi-faceted factor to support play throughout the pandemic. Patterns emerging from the data swirled around schools being spaces where children can enjoy play and around the unstructured and often taken-for-granted aspects of schools being important to children. The unplanning of play that seemed to be happening at home during the pandemic opened a means of listening to and understanding children's expressions of how they found unplanned and informal ordinary moments at school, meaningful. Within this section, I present findings around unplanning play, discourses of learning loss, and taken-for-granted aspects of schools.

Unplanning Play

Many caregivers who completed the initial survey inquired about play ideas for use at home with children. All 10 research participants indicated a desire to support children's play, often relaying that the more children played at home, the more they could focus on work or enjoy quiet time. Parents also often expressed feeling good about their children playing, with play appearing to help children to be calm and happy. Caregivers described how the play children were most frequently engaging in at home during the pandemic was unplanned, and interview discussions illuminated planned, prescribed activities and crafts as barriers more than catalysts for play. One participant, Lola, shared frustration that her children were reluctant to join her for structured crafts and activities, but then she noticed:

> you know what they had been doing when I interrupted them? They were playing. I was interrupting their nice play with my own ideas of play. So now I just completely let them be unless they're bored asking me for something to do. Which is honestly so rare.

To support an apparent desire for children to spend more time in such unplanned and unstructured play processes, one community-based organization received a grant to purchase play baskets to give to self-nominating families who expressed that purchasing children's play items was financially challenging. Families indicated the ages and interests of the children, and each received a custom basket. The organization also invited families with the financial means to purchase play baskets in any amount, with the option to donate money towards the purchase of baskets for self-nominating families. The organization staff leveraged wholesale purchasing and free books afforded to the organization to offer children and families a diversity of items for different types of play. They donated labour to purchase, assemble, and deliver baskets of play items specifically for families, which were filled with open-play items with no prescribed methods for play, including loose parts, blocks, open-ended puzzles, books, a ball, and high-grade art

materials. Another organization with many staff members and strong financial resources used findings to distribute baskets of simple household items, children's books, art supplies, and infographics about play, for free, to more than 700 families in the city. The play baskets were enthusiastically received and increased unplanned, unstructured play at home, as indicated by surveys sent to recipients and unsolicited written responses of appreciation.

Discourses of Learning Loss

One parent, Jessica, described a discrepancy between two of her children's school workloads while learning from home. She worried that one of her children's teachers was not sending home an appropriate amount of schoolwork and that, as a result, this child might "fall behind other children in his grade." Two other participants shared similar thoughts and experiences, and clarified that it was not a lack of learning that was causing stress, but rather, the thought of their falling behind their peers. Participants Michele, Jennifer, and Haven shared the sentiment that they wished schools would entirely standardize their teaching during the pandemic, with Haven suggesting that schools broadcast each grade on a different free, publicly accessible website or channel that children could watch throughout the day so that each child would receive the same education.

In the data, participants described difficulties getting children to complete schoolwork at home. There was a pattern that many children were agreeable to completing art-related homework, especially visual art and physical education activities if assigned, but were more resistant to other school tasks. One participant stated that when her school-aged child's teacher became aware that children in her class were struggling to complete all homework and prioritizing what they often referred to as the 'fun stuff', she suggested that parents instruct children to complete literacy and math homework and disregard the rest. For a time, only math and literacy content were posted to their online classroom.

The findings around pressures that parents felt to keep up with academic standards, and schools indicating a preference for math and literacy subjects, created, at times, a false binary between what was considered more *important* or *serious* learning over less important and less serious learning and activities. Many educators, myself included, care a great deal about children's literacy and numeracy abilities and can understand the prioritizing of such subjects. During a pandemic, however, throughout the loss of people, places, things, and ways of life, such priorities became more nuanced. The action research study's conceptual framework involving ethics of care disturbed some of the ordinary and accepted ways of doing education, and called for possibilities of doing things otherwise. This was a point in the study where adults relayed that teacher and adult desires conflicted with those of children. Uneven power dynamics between children and adults meant that adult desires often prevailed over those of children. This was demonstrated by the teacher who, upon hearing that children were prioritizing 'fun' homework, only posted work in two subject areas. Such a scenario emaciated children's education to involve maintaining opportunities to complete constrained work, while depriving opportunities for play, building relationships, and engaging in an abundance of learning opportunities, all of which schools typically provide children. Thinking with care and asking questions about whose desires should count, led to thinking with abundance. Math, literacy, *and* play and the arts, all became caring and important and necessary; it was difficult to consider any subjects at the expense of others or to categorize them differently as being universally serious or fun. Math, literacy, and the arts are all, at different times, easy, playful, serious, and challenging. An ethics of care, where one is meant to acknowledge the desires of the cared-for (Noddings, 1986), in this case children and families, provided ample room for playful learning, the arts, and movement in formal learning offerings.

Throughout the study and development of action components, an urgency grew around endorsing play amidst the uncontrollable lack of access to education-as-it-was being frequently framed as *learning loss,* coupled with parents experiencing pressure to ensure children's upkeep with sometimes narrowed curricular content despite grief over losing play opportunities with friends. Thus, one action component included several organizations collaborating to offer a multi-professional-endorsed statement to the community that play is an important and worthwhile pastime for children, especially amidst the pandemic. Organization members and I launched a *Summer of Play* campaign that included a letter, an advertising campaign, and the creation and dissemination of a website and resources. Fifty-seven local academics, early childhood professionals, teachers, school administrators and directors, politicians, and organization leaders working in education or in another form of service to children, signed the letter. The advertising campaign included professionally-designed billboards and large bus signs announcing a *Summer of Play* with a web address to access the letter and resources. The website and resources shared the importance of play and offered ideas to spark play (Project Play YQR, n.d.). Aside from being broadly advertised, the campaign and associated resources were widely shared amongst organizations and the families they work alongside.

Taken-for-Granted Aspects of Schools

This final subcategory within the category *Children, Play, and School,* explores what appear to be taken-for-granted aspects of schools. Two community-based organizations with whom I was sharing emergent findings with throughout the study, moved their community programs online amidst the physical closures of their sites. Participants expressed that when they asked children what programs they preferred, children rarely mentioned the content of such programming. Instead, they mentioned enjoying hearing facilitators and educators say their names aloud and being offered unstructured time to interact with other children. As organizations continued to adapt their programming, they retained personal aspects and unstructured time for children to play and converse, even if such time felt awkward for facilitators in an online setting. Parents of school-aged children also indicated that their children's primary motivation for attending virtual classes and class meetings was to see and interact with their teachers and peers; children yearned for the unplanned, informal, relational bits of school.

It was found in the study that children's expressions of their preferences and motivations towards school are paralleled in the data in their expressions of preferences and motivations towards community activities. Participant interviews, surveys, and social media data all indicated that school-aged children were lonesome for their friends, educators, and the relationships that schools fostered. Four parent participants expressed how their children missed eating at school with their friends, and one parent, Lola, explained that her children receive two snacks, plus lunch at school. One child, who attended a teacher parade hosted by her elementary school, watched from her front yard as her teachers drove by in personal vehicles they had decorated, honking and waving. While her mother described her as delighted while watching the parade, she reportedly then spent the rest of the afternoon crying for her teachers and school staff that she missed. Such stories highlight the taken-for-granted aspects of what schools provide: nourishment, joy, play, belonging, and relationships.

Findings from the study indicate that participants hold desires for an education system that do not fit neatly together. Some parents expressed the desire for a standardized education system delivered via television, while others expressed being moved by children's expressions of desires to hear their names spoken aloud, to have unstructured time to visit their friends and share their

thoughts, to move, to play, to create art, and to spend time with their teachers, who they care for and feel cared by. Adult desires shifted and changed throughout the study, pointing to how much there is still to learn about care and desire within education, and how much adults can learn through listening to children. Questions which arose include: What does it mean to care for children during a pandemic? What does it mean to offer education during a pandemic? What is the purpose of education? What is care? What do children desire? Whose desires count? Whose notions of care count? These are all questions that parents, the community-based organization staff, and myself, as a parent, teacher, and researcher, asked ourselves consistently throughout the study.

Though there may be no singular perfect answer to such questions, it remains important that such questions are continually asked, and that they are asked with and alongside children. Educators, school administrators, parents, and the general public would be wise to take note of and appreciate what children have voiced through this study as being essential aspects of schools: spaces to develop friendships, to play, to enjoy the arts, to satisfy and kindle curiosity, to move, to create and express, to hear their names spoken out loud, to feel a sense of belonging, and to see and be seen by people they care about.

Children, Play, and Public Life

While the study examined parent experiences with play at home, children's homework, and how children talked about and missed school in its absence, it also examined how the novelty of the pandemic conditions allowed children and families to experience their communities differently. Participants relayed how as children were more visible and present in their local neighbourhoods, such neighbourhoods seemed to offer them a sense of belonging. Aesthetics of play, or evidence of play and playfulness, seemed to grow and strengthen in response to children; in turn, children's presence seemed to grow and strengthen in response to aesthetics of play. This section reports on findings around the means by which schools and community organizations asserted children's play opportunities in public life as community care. Analysis of the data yielded two key findings relating to this category: increasing belonging in communities and aesthetics of play.

Increasing Belonging in Communities

During the physical closures of schools, the participants who partook in interviews described going out for neighbourhood walks more frequently. One participant, Jessica, explained, "We never did this before. Never. And it's kind of nice? We've learned neighbours' names who we hadn't known before. We know who has pets. We know who is working from home. We go to the park by our house, and we just didn't really ever do that before." Later, she continued, "Each day is sort of different, even though it's the same. Like, 'oh look, someone drew a picture here with chalk!' 'Are these flowers new?' It's like a neighbourhood scavenger hunt every day." In fact, all interview participants described noticing new things in their neighbourhood.

According to the interview data, it appeared to make a difference to participants whether or not they found their neighbourhood aesthetically pleasing, and several interview participants directly stated that they found the aesthetic of their community attractive, providing motivation to get outside. Most interview participants mentioned noticing new things on their neighbourhood walks including flowers, nature, gardens, and interesting houses. If, however, participants found their neighbourhoods unattractive, it hindered their desire to get outside for walks and play. One participant, Amanda, described, "We do go for walks but… It's not nice. Where I live is not nice. It's a lot to get out already since it's an apartment and then it's just…dusty, and there's nowhere to go."

It appears that playful or play-related aesthetics encouraged children and families to get outdoors. On participant, Danielle, shared:

> I live in [a] neighbourhood and there's this home that's all colourful and there's a tree with a little door on it and some fairies and it says 'shhhhh fairies are sleeping' or something on the tree and it's just so cute and thoughtful and cheers us all up so sometimes we just walk to go see that tree and go home. They sometimes write cute things on the sidewalk there, too, and it changes so we like to go and see what might be written.

Another participant, Lola, describes creating a pathway that she and her family would travel by foot based on the hearts in windows, especially noticing hearts in windows where there had previously been none. Participants seemed not only increasingly motivated to get outside if they perceived their neighbourhood to be aesthetically attractive, but also to direct and inform the location of their play depending on their neighbourhood's material aspects.

Aesthetics of one's neighbourhood emerged as a catalyst for outdoor play if children and families perceived the neighbourhood to be pleasing, but as a barrier to play if they did not. Neighbourhoods that appear welcoming, neat, and visually interesting not only motivated children and families to get outside but even to direct families where to go to play, consistent with a finding from Tappe et al. (2013) that neighbourhood aesthetics improve active outdoor activity for both adults and children.

What also seems apparent from the findings is that while neighbourhood aesthetics compelled children and families to direct their play and movement to specific spaces, those spaces tended to adapt to the increase of children in the community. The children enjoyed chalk messages, hearts popping up in windows, and fairy trees, which enchanted them and influenced their movement. On the other hand, the chalk messages, hearts popping up in windows, and fairy trees also increased as children spent more time outdoors in their neighbourhoods. This implies that children and the environment affect one another. Children's physical presence in public life changes public life. Thus, schools bringing children into civic life not only allows children to learn with the world in which they live, but contributes to how the world changes and adapts as humans and non-humans emerge in relation with children.

Aesthetics of Play

The study's findings indicate that the place of play affects one's experience of the world, similar to how Gadamer (1993) conceives of aesthetics in that novels, operas, poems, paintings, and songs can change how one thinks, acts, and behaves (Gadamer, 1993; Grondin, 1998). Aitken (2018) describes, from a geography perspective, how play "shows up as a radical flash of inspiration and creativity" (p. 14) and that,

> the aesthetic created by ... play spaces and the practices passes through children and young people to suggest not only dislocation and surprise, but also a suspension of adult strictures and sensibilities ... there is a radical aesthetics in play that can change the world. (p. 14)

Play invites play. This research study demonstrated that the aesthetics of play has an affective and inviting component. Many online survey responses supported the pattern of seeing more of the same families around the neighbourhood and at community parks. In one online response, the respondent stated,

> I have never seen this many kids outside in our neighbourhood! It's amazing. I would send my kids, too, but they're still little (four and seven) and I worry that they wouldn't be able

> to stay far enough apart and could catch the virus. I hope kids continue to go out once the virus is gone so ours can join in. I didn't even know there were this many kids in the neighbourhood!

It is worth noting the use of the word "never" throughout this section, which indicates a novelty of behaviour and experiences brought on by the novel conditions that the COVID-19 pandemic created, including going for regular neighbourhood walks, conversing with neighbours, and an unprecedented number of children playing in neighbourhood streets and parks.

Both in-person and online data pointed to a pattern that many parents were relaxing the supervision of their children, and some parents even communicated a correlation between the expansion of their limits on play and play in their community. For example, participant Amanda stated,

> Some of us parents [in our neighbourhood] all basically had a conversation, and we were like okay…we are okay with the kids being on their bikes in the street and going to the park together without an adult. None of us had been okay with it before but it was a very conscious decision that we all made together.

Another participant, when describing how she was allowing her son to play in the yard by himself and feeling nervous about neighbour perceptions, said, "We notice that one of our neighbours has a small boy and he's outside lots by himself, so that helps us to feel more…I don't know. Not bad," suggesting that parental play-supporting behaviour is located in relation to the conduct of other parents in close proximity. Near the end of data collection, one participant submitted an online description of how the lack of school and structured activities that normally occupied children, gave them an opportunity to develop a whole play area where they could spend most of their time together:

> (…) my big kids have built so many strong relationships with the kids in our bay. They have their own little bubble and have played countless hours of free uninterrupted play. The things they have done over this year blows my mind. They have made a bike track on the open lot on our bay they literally all play there all day every day. No one has sports or anywhere to go so they play together all the time. It has been nice to really kind of just go back to the roots of free play without feeling like we have somewhere to be or a sport to get to. No schedule.

Many interview participants described how seeing other families outside encouraged them to spend more time outdoors. Families also appeared to learn from one another as they discussed and determined what became new neighbourhood play norms. They co-determined how much the children would be supervised, timelines for heading out in the mornings or returning in the evenings, how far children would be permitted to wander, and how the children would manage playing with and caring for younger siblings.

The enjoyment and importance of getting outdoors for families was such a robust finding in the study that it inspired one organization to apply for funding for families facing financial strain, to purchase Prairie-appropriate outerwear to ease spending time outdoors during harsh Prairie winters. Although they applied twice, their funding applications were denied. Findings also sparked two major organizations to offer more outdoor activities for families and young people. For example, the executive director who initiated this research project started an activity where staff ran the organization's regular programming outdoors in parks rather than in their centre. Such

action components appeared to not only support the desire and joy families experience outdoors, but to make children and families visible in public spaces. The adaptations received enough positive feedback that three organizations have permanently altered their offerings to be more outdoor-based.

Discussion

The pandemic revealed a fluidity of norms, evidenced by the parental discussions around neighbourhood play and the temporary welcome replacement of structured indoor activities with outdoor, informal, multi-age active play across neighbourhoods. It also revealed, however, an essential opportunity for adults to listen to children and attend to the aspects of school that they most appreciate, made evident by its material absence. What follows is a discussion on the importance of recasting schools as partners in community care and vehicles for children's positioning in public life. The main argument of the paper, supported by findings and an ethics of care, is that the opportunities schools provide for children to play, make friends, engage in arts, move, and feel a sense of belonging are deserving of further attention. Furthermore, in this paper schools are reimagined as partners alongside community-based organizations and municipalities to expand the education and care for children beyond schools' material walls, inviting community participation into schools and child participation in public life. The COVID-19 pandemic and subsequently this study, offered a unique learning opportunity. Although data and findings may have differed had children been the participants in the study, the study's approach to speaking with adults who were listening to children describe how they experience school, play, and the pandemic facilitated adult learning; adults not only learned about their children's experiences, but about their reactions to such learning.

Manyozo (2016) pulls three components of listening from Paulo Freire (1996a, 1996b): listening to evidence, listening to oneself, and listening as a form of speaking. Listening to evidence, in this case, involves listening to children's expressions about school and play, which paint schools as both play-offering and play-stifling institutions. Listening to oneself requires attending to how parents, school staff, community partners, me as the researcher, and you, likely as adult readers, feel and react to children's expressions about school, including what one might learn from such attending. Listening involves, at times, willingness to set aside respective degrees and experiences that render one an expert on education and childhood and being open to intellectual scrutiny by children themselves. Finally, listening involves listening as a form of speaking; one can critique the positions they take just as they critique the positions others take. Adults can refuse to presume that their own writing, speaking, and action components are flawless as they strive to remain fluid, open, and listening, in conversation with others and with themselves. A Freirean (1970) pedagogy of listening turns attention to not only what one hears, but how they react to hearing it and whether the desires of those they listen to are reflected in their actions.

There is power in children's expressions of finding meaning, joy, and belonging in some of the most unrecognized (the arts, recess) and even accidental (hallway conversations) parts of their school experience. When children expose gaps in care, it can bruise the egos of theorists, researchers, teachers, administrators, and parents who have invested time, passion, energy, and expertise in the creation of a caring public school system. Adult feelings of tension and discomfort, mine included, add layers of learning and evidence to this action research study.

Findings from the study suggest that a more caring public education system would provide further support for play, including in-class and out-of-class opportunities for children's play and

exploration. Scholars continue to raise concerns about the disappearance of recess in schools (Global Recess Alliance, 2022; McNamara & Sahlberg, 2020), sometimes replaced with indoor breaks from curricular content that nevertheless lack the informal and unstructured conditions that outdoor recess offers, and that adults in this study learned are important to children.

The study's findings and discussions in this paper do not cast schools and teachers as enemies; in fact, quite the opposite. One need only recall the description of the food that schools provide or the story of the child crying after seeing her teachers and school staff drive by to gain a sense of the care that teachers, schools, and school staff provide children. Pressures to create a false binary between curricular learning and play are a long-standing issue, often deriving from outside of school and teacher imaginations (Pyle & Danniels, 2017), while many teachers themselves habitually champion play and care for children. Children longing for the play opportunities schools provide and the friendships they foster are echoed in this paper and in the extant literature (Souza et al., 2020; Szpunar et al., 2021) and demonstrate the aptitude that schools have for fostering the undervalued and precious thing that is friendship (Held, 2006).

The issue, therefore, is not that schools do not provide care; it is rather that they do so amidst ongoing per-student defunding (Statistics Canada, 2019, 2024) and growing student numbers (Hunter, 2023; Statistics Canada, 2023), as well as chronic teacher burnout which affects teacher social-emotional competence and children's school experiences (Oberle et al., 2020). The issue is not that schools are not engaging and joyful spaces where children want to spend their time, but that the school qualities which engage and spark joy for children seem to be cast as an afterthought in the public imagination.

By limiting access to schools and structured children's activities, the pandemic created conditions that, as shown through this study, had potential to increase neighbourhood cohesion and trust while ultimately increasing play. Neighbour relations strengthening the playfulness of a community is aligned with Schoeppe et al.'s (2015) finding that children living in neighbourhoods with high social cohesion are granted more freedom and space to play than those living in neighbourhoods with lower social cohesion (where cohesion is characterized by friendliness, helpfulness, trust, shared norms, and values). Cortinez-O'Ryan et al. (2017) and Faulkner et al. (2015) demonstrate how the visibility of play tempts further play. This idea is congruent with the current study, which showed that as children play more often in their neighbourhoods, their play itself seems to invite more play. Public positioning of play promotes public playfulness.

Possibilities and Imaginings

The study described in this paper involved action research, which aims to facilitate participation in creating a more just society rendered through the study itself (Fine & Torre, 2021). A pedagogy of listening (Freire, 1970; Manyozo, 2016) and ethics of care (Held, 2006; Noddings, 1986) required careful and reflexive listening coupled with caring action components. However, there are limitations as an individual researcher, and even as a collective of invested organizations, in creating just and caring systems and societies.

I now move into an exercise of imagination, in which I invite the reader to indulge in speculative futures where children's desires, as expressed in this study, are thoroughly attended to. This section invites larger-scale dreaming and planning of action steps for schools, in partnership with community-based organizations, municipalities, ministries, and other organizations invested in the care of children, to implement and thereby increase play and social justice for children and their role in civic life. This is part of emergent listening (Davies, 2014), where instead of listening

to what has been said, what has been heard, what has been repeated, what is already known, and what protects the status quo, the listener listens for possibilities of being and knowing that may be unknown and unfamiliar. It is a speculative, caring exercise, involving thinking of care as not only an individual human matter (Puig de la Bellacasa, 2017), but in also using care to imagine how children's daily lives might be better, in different and more caring worlds.

Imagine if, to address spatial inequities such as neighbourhood attractiveness being a factor to accessing play, municipalities and funders were to support schools in creating well-resourced outdoor school grounds that facilitate play, learning, and community gathering. The study's results help imagine how communities might be more equitable and joyful if all public-school grounds were cultivated as vibrant, exciting, aesthetically pleasing places for families and children to spend time. To fully realize their role in community care, municipalities and funders could contribute to more equitable communities by collaborating with and supporting schools in creating attractive outdoor spaces for children, plants, animals, and families. Such care, when considered alongside the results of the current study, may assist in asserting children's position in public life, creating conditions of possibility for various forms of care for children and children's reciprocal care in the community. School grounds might then be positioned as community hubs for play and connection. However, engaging in these imaginings means overcoming poor funding support for education and recalibrating the prioritization that indoor classroom environments and materials often take over schools' outdoor spaces (McNamara, 2013).

School grounds could become welcoming places with community murals, gardens, biodiversity, and changing outdoor galleries where, after school hours, children and families want to spend time, relax, play, and learn. Children might sometimes engage in uncomfortable power relations with the more-than-human world, and be confronted with evidence and thinking about the climate crisis (Nxumalo, 2019). Such interactions and entanglements could invite new ways of co-caring and being alongside one another.

I now invite readers to imagine the vibrancy of communities if children's sense of belonging was to overflow the margins of their school grounds and if educators invited children to co-create communities filled with aesthetics of play. Municipalities would plan multi-use pathways and introduce traffic-calming measures around schools, helping to fortify children's safety and ability to play outdoors in their communities. Part of children's education would involve planning their route to school and coordinating walk-to-school groups, presumably enhancing neighbour relations, social cohesion, independent mobility, the right to privacy (UNCRC, 1989), and play opportunities within neighbourhoods.

I invite the reader to imagine how schools could become community partners alongside libraries, galleries, parks, and municipalities by involving children in painting hopscotch squares along sidewalks and bike paths, installing basketball hoops and small-scale play areas, maintaining gardens, composting, displaying connectable components of walkable stories around communities, painting park benches, creating community murals, and co-curating revolving local art galleries to engage and delight the public while welcoming and establishing children as important participants in public life. Just as this study has highlighted teachings from the community to improve schools as community spaces of care for children, it has also highlighted teachings from schools that can improve the community. The findings of the study suggest not only a new appreciation for the caring and joyful attributes of schools inside their walls but also turning aspects of the school inside out, so this care flows freely into the community, void of a container.

Finally, I invite the reader to imagine how communities shift and change because children are a visible and tangible part of them. From this study, I learned that as children are directed and influenced by their neighbourhood aesthetics, the neighbourhood aesthetics are also directed and influenced by children. Questions emerged, such as: What new aesthetics of play appear? How do streets, alleyways, bees, houses, buildings, ants, fences, benches, shops, libraries, art galleries, community spaces, and bus shelters respond to the consistent presence of children? How might civic life shift and change with children's increased presence and participation? What other ways might community-based organizations, parents, and school administrators participate in the collective care for children?

Limitations and Further Research

The greatest limitation of this study is that children were not directly engaged as research participants. Therefore, all children's expressions and experiences have been relayed by adult family members. This study was strengthened, however, by the added layer of witnessing how adults listened to, cared for, learned from, and relayed children's experiences, thoughts, and desires. However, there is a need for further research that works directly alongside children themselves to explore the role of schools in providing community care to children and creating playful, just, and child-friendly communities. A second limitation is that the study is, to some degree, context-limited to the specific mid-sized Canadian Prairie city where the study took place.

Conclusion

The pandemic offered an opportunity to understand the care that quality schools provide to communities: places where children not only learn but are cared for, sheltered, and sometimes provided with food; where they are given opportunities to socialize with friends, move, develop and foster hobbies, and have access to books and materials to take home. When children could no longer physically attend school, the pandemic revealed public schools as the meaningful spaces of community care that they are. However, the COVID-19 crisis also revealed the fragility and flaws of schooling in its current form, including that some of its most caring qualities that children find most meaningful, including its opportunities and spaces for play, garner little attention and resources.

Through its focus on play as community care during the pandemic, the study discussed in this paper has revealed the importance of play and a sense of belonging for children in schools that could be expanded outside of schools' material walls; in doing so, children would not only be invited into public life, positioning them as important participants in society, but society would also change and bend as it cares, publicly, for children. The paper has offered teachings for schools and school staff, but also for parks, municipalities, galleries, libraries, and other community-based organizations as partners in caring for children and asserting their role in community. Examining children's play amidst the COVID-19 pandemic revealed findings that compel further research and action projects that explore the role of schools in transforming communities into playful, child-friendly centres.

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The Role of Environmental Factors in Fostering Creativity in the Classroom

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Abstract

Creativity is a set of skills, a form of thinking, and a way of meeting and excelling in the demands of the 21st century. This article explores creative gaps and inadequacies that hinder the development of teacher and student creativity in classrooms. Drawing from various disciplines, this article explores the challenges schools face in nurturing creativity through an in-depth analysis of existing literature, research studies, and expert views on the subject of creativity in education. The author discusses how teachers play a pivotal role in nurturing students' creativity and the importance of empowering teachers, with a focus on equipping teachers with the necessary tools and knowledge. The author contends that empowering teachers to create transformative educational experiences creates students who are critical thinkers, problem solvers, and contributors to a dynamic and innovative society.

Keywords: Creativity, student, teacher, practical suggestions, classroom environment

The Role of Environmental Factors in Fostering Creativity in the Classroom

Given the fast-paced, competitive and contemporary climate, creative thinking skills are essential to meeting the demands of our current era. Gerardo (2017) claims that in order for students to compete, innovation through creativity is necessary; accordingly, educators must foster creativity to help students adapt to complex environments as a means of survival. Combining new and useful ideas and creating value are, therefore, essential parts of living in the present and future (Gerardo, 2017). As discussed in this article, creativity needs to be an explicit pedagogical focus for educators. Leckey (2011) argues that creative activities also "help build students' resilience in the face of contemporary challenges, as creativity and creative thinking boost self-esteem, improve quality of life, and promote growth while enhancing well-being and lifelong learning" (p. 505). Particularly given the rate of change in contemporary times, resilience through creativity is critical for students to lead a fulfilling life.

This article presents a review of research literature examining the impact of the environment on enhancing students' creativity, supported by studies on neuroplasticity and the development of creative thinking skills. A significant portion of this research centers on how teachers cultivate creativity in the classroom by creating environments conducive to creative expression and exploration. It acknowledges the necessity of creativity as a set of skills, a form of thinking, and a means of excelling. The suggestions provided in this article are further reinforced by research on creativity and educational environments, as well as my own nine years of teaching experience. Additionally, the suggestions delve into how creativity is lacking in the education system and why schools encounter challenges in fostering creative classrooms and nurturing creative children.

Creativity and the Brain

As indicated by Mastnak (2018), neuroplasticity, or the process through which the brain undergoes transformative changes, occurs when creativity is harnessed within classrooms. Neuroplasticity is recognized for its ability to induce structural changes in the brain in response to one's thoughts, actions, and emotions, thereby organizing the brain and even augmenting brain tissue based on individual experiences (Patt Lind-Kyle, 2009). Consequently, as Patt Lind-Kyle (2009) discusses, the brain adapts to accommodate new skills and information, with novel experiences—such as those aimed at enhancing creative capacity—shaping and generating soft tissue for the formation of new networks of synapses. This means that when we direct our focus toward novel endeavors, we trigger the activation of fresh neural connections (Patt Lind-Kyle, 2009).

Creativity also helps students acquire knowledge and overcome real-life problems (Sukardi et al., 2021). In contrast to the long-held belief in fixed brain anatomy, advancements in mainstream medicine and science have provided evidence that the brain is adaptable and capable of change (Mastnak, 2018). This adaptability is not simply due to an independent regulatory mechanism, but rather, it involves intricate and sensitive processes, particularly when individuals engage with music or the arts (Mastnak, 2018). Notably, this discovery aligns with the observation of structural plasticity in various neuro-modulating cortical areas, such as the hippocampus. The integration of creativity and artistic pursuits into educational settings may hold the key to unlocking the full potential of neuroplasticity and fostering cognitive growth (Mastnak, 2018). Therefore, schools must foster creativity in healthy and transformative spaces, as education is the underlying factor in developing talent and identity (Pelfrey, 2010). Further, research in neuroplasticity suggests that creativity is an integral part of helping foster identity and, further,

finding success in future contexts. The privileging of creativity in education is also critical given that heightened creativity is linked to improved performance, as higher productivity is achieved when students are able to deeply engage authentic interests (Gerardo, 2017).

For many years, discussions have occurred around the topic of creativity. Research has found that creative learning environments enhance students' creativity (Fan & Cai, 2020). Teachers can play a key role in fostering creativity for all students, as they can change the educational environment and narrative, leading to strategies that directly impact students' creative thinking capabilities and experiences of creativity (Sukardi et al., 2021). Teachers can foster a culture of creativity and critical thinking among students by encouraging risk-taking, establishing open communication, nurturing creative ideas, and granting greater freedom and choice during assignment completion (Fan & Cai, 2020). If teachers can specifically target the building of new neural pathways through focused experiences, it will further reinforce the idea that everyone has the capacity for creativity. With new creative strategies being implemented, teachers can unlock the benefits of intrinsic motivation (Hennessey, 2010). Staging opportunities for students to pursue intrinsic motivation play a crucial role in fostering creativity amongst learners and also influences students' overall motivation levels (Hennessey, 2010). When children experience intrinsic motivation, they willingly engage in learning complex material on their own accord (Hennessey, 2010). This intrinsic drive towards new knowledge encourages students to delve deeper into tasks and to sustain their efforts for extended periods. Therefore, it is advised that teachers consider a range of factors in pursuit of increased creativity and associated exploration, giving time for exploring students' authentic interests in order to unlock the potential of creative engagement. However, in order for teachers to plan towards creativity with intention, it is critical first that creativity be defined.

What is Creativity?

When defining creativity, definitions vary from one source to another; each version defines creativity differently in relation to its audience and subject of focus (Robinson, 2008). For example, the concept of a creative person is often inherently linked to the type of work they pursue. As a simple example, a painter's creations will naturally differ from those of an architect (Glück et al., 2002). It is important to acknowledge that individual differences in creativity may lead to differing results on scientific and artistic creativity. Given the complexity of defining creativity, a comprehensive structural framework of creativity encompassing both scientific and artistic creativity have not been fully achieved (Glück et al., 2002). The definition of creativity must therefore be flexible, elusive, and interpreted in more than one way (Robinson, 2008), in part because what it means to be creative differs across contexts. Further, the variation in defining creativity can also be attributed to how creativity is viewed from person to person; what one may view as an expression of creativity, another may not. As such, researchers, teachers, and students interpret creativity in their own ways, whereas singular definitions of creativity often take broad approaches to satisfy a wide spectrum of disciplines, ability levels, and behaviours (Robinson, 2008).

Recognizing the variation in what creativity means is equally critical in the classroom because teachers need to align approaches with current topics when integrating creativity into the curriculum (Gerardo, 2017). From an educator's perspective, creative thinkers keep track of their ideas, ask questions, and are open to new ideas; they also avoid a set pattern or rigid way of doing things (Gerardo, 2017). Creative individuals can also explore problems from differing points of view. The point being made here is that creativity—while often viewed as a set of discrete skills

associated with fine arts— can be thought of, broadly speaking, as more of an orientation towards problem solving, exploration, and flexibility, rather than something only a small percentage of the population possesses. Creativity can be embraced in a range of classroom contexts provided it is placed at the centre of curricular planning and in instances where exploration is seen as an essential part of learning.

Defining a Creative Teacher

The teacher is the main mediator who determines what is practiced in the classroom, and therefore, teachers have the greatest ability to foster creativity in the classroom (Morais & Azevedo, 2011). Teachers are a source of information; they play a critical role as models for their students and thus have the responsibility of promoting creativity to enhance social and individual progress. Much of this responsibility involves teachers also embracing their own capacity for creativity. Creative teachers should be supportive, energetic, and knowledgeable. The creative teacher should also be self-reflective and critical of their own practices while demonstrating their own creative abilities (Morais & Azevedo, 2011). A creative teacher actively encourages taking risks, especially in unpredictable situations, but there needs to be a close and motivating relationship with the students in order to provide a supportive environment that allows for risk taking. In addition to teachers needing to acquire an affinity to creativity, the classroom space should also be vibrant, well-designed, and welcoming (Morais & Azevedo, 2011). Attention to constructing supportive, dynamic spaces can increase student motivation and help students become excited and interested in the learning process (Lily & Bramwell-Rejskind, 2004). From teacher orientation, to student motivation, to the actual spaces in which creative activities can occur, there are many overlapping factors to consider when thinking about how creativity can hold a more prominent position in education. For the remainder of this paper, I will consider the latter, often overlooked role that physical space plays in supporting creative growth.

Classroom Environment

According to Beghetto and Kaufman (2014), the learning environment emerges as a pivotal factor in nurturing creativity, playing a decisive role in determining whether creative development is encouraged. While teachers value creativity within their classroom environments, they also prioritize maintaining order. However, teachers often grapple with the concern that a creatively inclined student might disrupt the learning atmosphere (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). One way to address this concern is by recognizing that students will express creativity in diverse ways. Therefore, to foster creativity in the classroom environment, teachers can incorporate various creative approaches into their daily teaching practices to enrich all students' learning experiences and promote engagement. This can entail involving students in activities that prompt them to generate multiple ideas and take ownership of their learning. Providing opportunities for choice, imagination, and exploration is paramount. Additionally, teachers should carefully monitor the motivational signals conveyed through their classroom practices and actively demonstrate and support creativity (Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014).

Given the malleability of children's minds and their neurological predisposition towards creativity, the classroom environment can either enhance or hinder a student's ability to learn and feel secure (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009). Moreover, classrooms designed to explicitly foster emotional well-being, create an environment conducive to both learning and emotional growth (Bucholz & Sheffler, 2009). For example, Mather et al. (2001) examined schools that partnered with psychologists, teachers, and parents to develop a framework that explains why children

experience behavioural issues. The developed framework is titled the "Building Blocks of Learning and Behavioral Problems in the Classroom" (Mather et al., 2001), and emphasizes that the learning environment is at the base of a pyramid and acts as a foundation for all learning.

In spite of research indicating its significance, the impact of the physical environment on creative learning is often overlooked (Rentzou, 2014). The physical structure of the classroom impacts student morale and their motivation to learn (Phillips, 2014). Room design also influences social context, student relations, and the overall effectiveness of the classroom (Warner & Myers, 2009). In order to encourage creativity, the classroom should be inviting and the environment should create a positive atmosphere for students; students should feel that the classroom is a space where they can safely take risks and explore (Phillips, 2014). Students are likely to feel empowered when they engage in environments that encourage risk-taking, learning, and personal growth. Such spaces should be inviting, promote individuality, and feature flexible designs that reflect the uniqueness of each student. Moreover, enhancing creativity in the classroom requires more than just adding a few posters. Teachers must be willing to take creative risks and envision expansive possibilities for their learning spaces (Cremin & Barnes, 2018). Yet, educators often face pressures in the educational system that constrain their ability to envision creative classroom environments. The focus on assessments and adherence to standardized guidelines can impede creativity, leading teachers to stick to conventional teaching approaches (Cremin & Barnes, 2018). Acknowledging this tension between external pressure and the aspiration to foster creativity is, therefore, an essential step. Consequently, it becomes crucial to convince teachers of the significance of nurturing creativity (Cremin & Barnes, 2018). Given the various pressures educators face such as assessment and monitoring classroom time, developing a physical classroom space to support creativity can be an important initial step and a catalyst for an ongoing process of centering creative learning experiences that can be adaptable to the myriad demands teachers face.

Practical Suggestions

In establishing the classroom environment as a factor in fostering creativity teachers might, therefore, consider the following aspects when designing classrooms specifically to support the development of creative competencies.

Lighting

Studies have found that the lighting in a room has a direct impact on brain activity. Lighting can create psychological impacts such as hormone production, alertness, arousal, cognitive and creative abilities such as working memory, attention, and problem-solving (Lan et al., 2021). With these factors in mind, research has found that natural lighting is the best option. In contrast, fluorescent lighting can create hyperactivity and agitation, which diminishes one's capacity to be creative (Warner & Myers, 2009). Research by Warner and Myers (2009) also reports that classrooms with minimal windows result in depression in some students.

Furniture

Schools use functional furniture that, although durable, is often uncomfortable. The institutional appearance of furniture in classrooms can also de-stimulate creative minds (Warner & Myers, 2009). Thus, furniture should have a positive psychological appeal (Warner & Myers, 2009), with a range of seating options and different textures. Warner and Myers (2009) suggest that tables in classrooms can help promote a creative environment, as tables are excellent for group work and

allow students to communicate with each other while exploring creative ideas. For example, using a table that is big enough to sit multiple students comfortably, allow for sharing and is easily assembled, stimulates greater creativity by facilitating collective exploration (Komendat, 2010).

Classroom Décor

Placing students' artwork around the classroom and in the hallway can have a positive impact on students by creating an environment where students work hard to have their artwork displayed (Komendat, 2010). Furthermore, allowing students to provide input into creating the classroom space, including its design and décor, fosters creativity and a healthy emotional environment as students see themselves reflected in the spaces around them (Komendat, 2010). In addition, the use of colour in environmental design significantly impacts students' attitudes toward school. While generally positive, an excessive array of colours can be unsettling, potentially leading to errors in test responses and increased distractibility (Grangaard, 1993). Many classrooms feature materials with bright, primary colours, which research suggests can be distracting. Instead, it is proposed that a student's learning space should prioritize materials directly relevant to the task at hand.

That environmental stimuli can influence behaviours (Grangaard, 1993) underscores the importance for teachers to strike a balance between an aesthetically flexible learning environment and one that is thoughtfully curated. Similarly, selecting a theme for the classroom was also found to be important, as themes create consistency and predictability (Komendat, 2010), while still giving educators space to create visually dynamic spaces. According to Komendat (2010), display boards were found to reinforce key learnings but, at the same time, too many displays were found to be overwhelming, so teachers should carefully consider how they aesthetically curate their classroom spaces.

Material Resources

Resources serve as the infrastructure of creativity in the classroom, meaning that resources must be readily available and usable (Warner & Myers, 2009). Without the availability of creative resources, other variable such as classroom lighting, the environment, and colours were found to not make a difference (Warner & Myers, 2009).

Space Configurations

The environment has a direct impact on comfort and motivation of learning in the classroom (Yildirim et al., 2011). Classroom clutter and uncleanliness were found to hinder students' productivity (Komendat, 2010). In addition to being clean and organized, classrooms should also have a space that allows for creativity during activities. Well-designed pathways for high-flow areas in the classroom are also necessary as this improves transition time from one subject to the next and supports a cooperative learning environment (Komendat, 2010). By creating large whole group spaces, students learn to share creative ideas. In contrast, when spaces are too small or when transitions are not easily executed due to limited space, behavioural issues arise. As such, teachers must try to create the illusion that their classroom is much larger than perceived. To do this, teachers can place material in cupboards, be thoughtful in their selection of wall décor or posters, and be strategic in how they place furniture (Komendat, 2010). These environmental factors can, in turn, have a positive impact on students' concentration and motivation (Yildirim et al., 2011).

Classroom Size and Interaction

Research indicates that an optimal class size is twenty-five students or fewer. Ideally, this number could be even lower as smaller class size results in improvements in a variety of learning factors, behaviours, and creative abilities (Komendat, 2010). While educators often have limited control over their class size, they can still facilitate individual attention that fosters creative growth by employing small group instruction. Utilizing small groups in the classroom promotes effective learning, leading to improved academic achievement and positive attitudes toward learning amongst students (Samson, 2015). In small groups, students can actively participate in problem-solving, which enhances their engagement and understanding (Samson, 2015). After nine years of teaching experience, I have learned that implementing small group instruction has significantly enhanced my ability to cover a broader curriculum. This approach not only empowers students to work independently but also encourages collaboration within groups, fostering a conducive environment for creativity to thrive. Additionally, it allows the teacher to work one-on-one with students instead of addressing a group of students simultaneously.

Environmental Changes in Response to Increased Pressures

Environmental changes in classrooms are one method through which teachers, burdened with increasing demands on classroom time, can immerse their students in creative and authentic learning opportunities. Teachers, in turn, face the ongoing challenge of not only instructing but also nurturing and evaluating creativity. However, the recent focus on a performative learning culture, meeting subject matter requirements, and heightened curricular demands has marginalized creativity (Tan et al., 2016). Standardized tests, cutting funding, the focus on assessment, and the narrowing of the curriculum have been shown to further drain creativity in children as pedagogical approaches often focus on singular learning goals without the openness creativity often requires (Frances, 2010).

A recent shift in the learning environment is evident, compared to the 1970s and 1980s, when teachers and students were immersed in projects that held genuine interest and meaning for them (Hennessey, 2010). In contrast, today's classrooms often encounter significant pressure stemming from the emphasis on standardized tests and frequent assessments aimed at fulfilling strict curricular standards (Hennessey, 2010). Therefore, teachers are witnessing a resurgence of rigid pedagogical modes and heightened demands, precisely when authentic learning experiences are most needed. This is particularly evident when recognizing the significance of fostering creativity in students to meet evolving educational requirements.

Personal Connections

As an educator, I have cultivated a culture of creativity within my classroom. Prior to the onset of COVID-19, I endeavoured to nurture an environment rich in imagination and innovation. This involved furnishing the space with tables adorned with decorative bins brimming with classroom supplies, complemented by bulletin boards with a rustic modern farm theme, and showcasing students' artwork to celebrate their artistic talents. Engagement flourished through collaborative activities and group projects, encouraging students to collaborate, exchange ideas, and learn from one another. To support their endeavours, my classroom was well-stocked with a diverse range of materials, tools, and resources aimed at igniting creativity and exploration. These resources encompassed art supplies, technology tools, books, multimedia resources, and hands-on learning materials.

Reflecting on the research, I am convinced that open classroom environments represent the future of education, offering innovative and student-centered learning experiences. While my

classroom continues to cherish all these elements, it is challenging not to acknowledge the profound impact of COVID-19. Many students find themselves lagging behind due to the lost time in education. Consequently, teachers are ensnared in the effort to impart fundamental knowledge. The prevailing focus in schools is to bring students up to grade level, leaving scant room for nurturing creativity. This is a constant struggle, and can leave teachers with a persistent feeling of inadequacy, fearing that our students may never catch up to the expected grade level standards.

Closing

As research focused on environmental factors and students' development of creative competencies suggests, creative thinking can be encouraged through positive environmental conditions that make space for curiosity, risk-taking, and imagination. Environmental factors such as social and physical conditions can often be overlooked, having a profound impact on students' learning experiences (Frances, 2010). Creativity is also an indispensable element of contemporary life. For instance, currently, many forward-thinking careers and emerging industries rely on their workers' abilities to think unconventionally, critically, and independently, as well as to envision new scenarios while producing high-quality work (Pelfrey, 2011). Therefore, students require an environment that fosters the acceptance of mistakes while problem-solving, as they may face similar demands in their future careers (Pelfrey, 2011). Creating new and improved services through innovation is necessary to meet the challenges before us, and nurturing creative thinking is part of the solution. Contrary to the notion that creativity is secondary to the primary objectives of education, I contend that creativity can and should be elevated to a central aspect of student learning. Creativity is, indeed, essential for ensuring that student learning remains pertinent in our evolving world (Cropley & Oppert, 2018).

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Theoretical Foundations of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Connections to Saskatchewan Curriculum and Indigenous Education

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Abstract

This paper examines the attributes of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as well as its theoretical foundations. Gay's (2018) work describes the eight attributes of CRT as validating, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical. After unpacking each attribute, I present and discuss four dimensions of Gay's (2018) theoretical foundations of CRT which include culturally diverse curriculum, teacher caring, home and school connection, and academic achievement. Further, I write about how CRT and the epistemologies of Indigenous education can lead to healthy and transformative spaces for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan public schools. For the purposes of this paper, I define healthy and transformative spaces as spaces where students have their needs met in the four dimensions of spirit, mental, physical, and emotional health.

Keywords: Indigenous education, culturally responsive teaching, students, education, healthy and transformative spaces

Theoretical Foundations of Culturally Responsive Teaching and Connections to Saskatchewan Curriculum and Indigenous Education

This paper examines the attributes of culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as well as its theoretical foundations. According to Gay (2018), "culturally responsive teaching is about teaching, and the teaching of concern is that which centers classroom instruction for multiethnic cultures frames of reference" (p. xxvii). I will be taking the eight attributes of the theoretical foundation of CRT and unpack each of them. Gay's (2018) work describes the eight attributes of CRT as validating, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical. I will define what Gay means by each attribute and then I will relate them to the scholarship on Indigenous education. After unpacking each attribute, I will present and discuss four dimensions of Gay's (2018) theoretical foundations of CRT. I will explore how both CRT and the epistemologies of Indigenous education can lead to healthy and transformative spaces for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan.

Four Dimensions of Health

In this paper, healthy and transformative spaces are spaces where students have their needs met in the four dimensions of spirit, mental, physical, and emotional health. It is important for students to have healthy spaces in their educational careers so they can thrive at school. There are four dimensions of health that can be found within Indigenous perspectives on health including spiritual, mental, physical, and emotional health (Warren, 2013). Indigenous spirituality is holistic and closely related to culture (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). Mental wellness for Indigenous peoples is having a purpose in daily life, hope for the future, a sense of belonging, and a sense of meaning in life (Indigenous Services Canada, 2015). Physical wellness for Indigenous peoples is living a healthy, active lifestyle to maintain physical strength, fitness, and health (National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2013). Emotional wellness for Indigenous peoples can refer to affective or mood elements (Tanner et al., 2022).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

CRT is described by Gay (2002) as, "using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (p. 106). CRT works from the assumption that mainstream education is based on the norms of whiteness (Gay 2018; Pete, 2017; Taylor & Sobel, 2011). According to Chandler and Wiborg (2021), "Whiteness norms are recurring patterns of behaviors that systematically benefit White people" (p. 714). An education system that is based on the norms of whiteness does not work for many diverse students, including many Indigenous students, because it privileges Western ways of knowing and being. Unfortunately, an education system based on norms of Whiteness has created achievement gaps between non-White students and White students (Castellano et al., 2000; Lee & Buxton, 2011; Rico, 2013; Rychly & Graves, 2012; Styres, 2017).

One area of scholarship that explores how to create healthy and transformative spaces for diverse students in education is CRT. The theoretical foundations of CRT can be partially attributed to the work of Geneva Gay (2002, 2010, 2018). Gay is amongst many other scholars who have helped to construct theories of CRT (Au 1993; Delpit, 1995; Irvine 2003; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moll & Gonzalez, 2004; Nieto, 2013). According to Gay (2018), there are eight qualitative attributes or distinguishing traits of CRT: it is validating, comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical. This paper is structured around unpacking these eight attributes.

The theories of CRT connect with the epistemologies of Indigenous education, and this will be explored throughout the paper. There are Indigenous scholars who use CRT in their research on Indigenous education (Au, 2009; Klug, 2012; Nicol et al., 2020; Pete, 2017). Indigenous education scholarship describes the ways that CRT has benefitted and continues to benefit Indigenous children and youth and there are also many elements from the epistemologies of Indigenous education that align with CRT.

It is critical to look at Indigenous history to understand why CRT resonates with the epistemologies of Indigenous education. Across Canada and the United States, governments have been involved in the assimilation of Indigenous people into Western culture (Klug, 2012; Sinclair 2007; Goulet & Goulet, 2014). In Saskatchewan, the residential school system had an incredibly negative impact on Indigenous people in the province, and to this day there are many intergenerational impacts on Indigenous students and their families in Saskatchewan public schools. The residential school system aimed to assimilate Indigenous families into a White society and to strip students from their own cultures (Rico, 2013). In opposition to assimilation into Whiteness, CRT provides the opportunity for teachers to include the cultures of their students in the classroom.

Attributes of Culturally Responsive Teaching

According to Gay (2018), there are eight attributes of CRT, each of which I will discuss here by unpacking them one by one.

First, CRT is validating of non-White students by acknowledging the use of cultural heritages of students as content in formal curriculum (Aguilera et al., 2007; Gay, 2018; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Rychly & Graves, 2012). For Saskatchewan teachers, this means an acknowledgement of Indigenous cultures as content within the provincial curriculum, not as the odd outcome or indicator found in the Saskatchewan curriculum, but as a core understanding within all of the Saskatchewan curricular outcomes.

The use of cultural heritages means authentic integrations of Indigenous ways of knowing and being in daily practices. CRT makes meaningful connections to local community cultures (Vavrus, 2008), for example, within Saskatchewan public schools a meaningful connection to local cultures includes Indigenous nations that can be found within the province. The cultural heritages of Indigenous students in Saskatchewan play a valuable role in the classroom. Indigenous education scholarship champions cultural learning opportunities in classrooms and curriculum (Castellano, 2000; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; King, 2017; Saysewahum, 2009; Smith, 2001). Toulouse (2018) wrote about many traditional values that can be utilized as learning opportunities in the classroom, for example, stewardship of the land, mutual respect, and peaceful conflict resolution. These traditional Indigenous values can be integrated into the Saskatchewan curriculum through land-based learning experiences, learning about respect from Elders and Knowledge Keepers, and by learning about traditional forms of justice.

Moving on to Gay's (2018) second theoretical attribute, CRT is comprehensive and inclusive. She wrote that CRT is about teaching the whole child. To teach the whole child is to provide learning opportunities that develop intellectual, social, political, and emotional aspects of the child to teach skills, values, attitudes, and knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 1992). Holistic teaching provides opportunities for learning outside of the provincial curriculum. The idea of holistic learning resonates with the epistemologies of Indigenous education because holistic learning promotes the development of the whole child (Ermine, 1995; Goulet & Goulet, 2014;

Peltier, 2021; Stowe, 2017; Toulouse, 2016a). For example, Cajete (2019) argued that western science takes a fragmented approach to learning about science whereas an Indigenous approach to science is about relationships and reciprocity with the physical world. A culturally responsive approach, like Indigenous education, is to teach curriculum using a holistic framework.

Gay's (2018) third attribute of CRT is that it is multidimensional and includes curriculum content, student-teacher relationships, instructional approaches, student management, and classroom climate (Gay, 2018; Lewthwaite et al., 2014). For teachers to create healthy and transformative spaces for their Indigenous students, they need to take into consideration all parts of their classroom practices. Students require to have their needs met in all four quadrants of health: spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional and these needs are met in different parts of their day by, for example, building relationships with a student might help meet their emotional needs, and a classroom climate that feels safe will help with meeting the physical needs of Indigenous students. There will be many considerations to make throughout the day to ensure the four quadrants are being balanced.

This multidimensional attribute can relate to the epistemologies of Indigenous education. In Toulouse's (2016b) teaching guides on achieving Indigenous student success, she not only includes curriculum content, but also classroom management ideas, extensions, historical facts, and traditional uses. Using a multidimensional approach - is valuable to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators. The epistemologies of Indigenous education have a holistic focus. McIntosh et al. (2014) described, "an Indigenous approach to education involves connecting with Elders, engaging with the community, inclusion of students' culture and experiences, and actively teaching social responsibility" (p. 240). This approach demonstrates how Indigenous education is much more than academic subjects.

The fourth attribute of CRT, according to Gay (2018), is how it can be empowering through academic achievement, courage, and confidence (Aguilera et al., 2007; Bensman, 2000; De Jesus, 2003; Gay, 2018). Gay (2018) wrote that once students believe they can succeed, they will pursue a task until mastery is met. The Indigenous concept of persistence can be related to Gay's empowerment by examining the Circle of Courage model. This model grounds the work of positive youth development on the Native American values of mastery, generosity, independence, and belonging (Brendtro et al., 2002). The Circle of Courage models encourage academic achievement through courage and balancing the four sections of the medicine wheel.

The fifth attribute outlined by Gay (2018) is how CRT is transformative and does not rely on traditional formal educational practices. To create healthy and transformative spaces that nurture the four quadrants of health, teachers will have to learn about and reflect on the colonial education system they participate in each day in Saskatchewan. Teachers must be willing to move away from traditional educational practices that continue to negatively impact Indigenous learners in their classrooms. Since CRT moves away from traditional education practice, Gay (2013) states teachers should expect resistance to this way of teaching. Teachers might find resistance from administrators or families for engaging in culturally responsive practices; when, for example, exploring social justice issues. The epistemologies of Indigenous education offers alternatives to traditional educational practices (Bell, 2013; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Toulouse, 2016b). Indigenous scholar Toulouse (2016a) described how she came to her work as an Aboriginal student success workshop facilitator based on her own experiences in the educational system and her personal life. Many of her teaching guides provide lesson ideas that veer away from traditional

education practices, such as using humour, and they have potential to transform students, classrooms, and schools.

Gay's (2018) sixth attribute, emancipatory CRT, described how the ideas of connectedness, community, and cooperation are keys to an emancipatory approach. These concepts are at odds with some of the neoliberal approaches to education that can be found within Saskatchewan public schools, such as the use of standardized testing (LeBlanc, 2011; Orlowski, 2015). Sleeter (2011) wrote that neoliberalism in schools focuses on individualism and competition. To foster concepts of community and cooperation, some major shifts might need to be taken by teachers in the name of a healthier and transformative space for their Indigenous students. These concepts are not to be mistaken with lowering expectations of students and not challenging students (Howard & Terry Sr, 2011). Students can still succeed academically at the same time as connecting and cooperating with their peers in their classroom. Despite neoliberal beliefs of individualism, working as a collective can help students to be successful in their studies.

The concepts of connectedness, community, and cooperation are familiar within the literature on Indigenous education (Au, 2009; Brendtro et al., 2002; Cajete, 2019; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Little Bear, 2012). For example, Goulet and Goulet (2014) suggested the practice of weechiseechigemitowin (alliances for collaborative action) which is a Cree practice of interactive learning with another. Another example, is the invitation of Indigenous community such as Elders, Metis senators and other Indigenous resource people into the classroom (Toulouse, 2016b). Indigenous Elders are an integral part of Indigenous community, and this brings actual community into the classroom. An Elder, Knowledge Keeper, or other Indigenous resource person can bring in concepts of connectedness and cooperation within their teachings.

The seventh attribute of CRT is that it is humanistic (Gay, 2018). This attribute can be a challenge for teachers since it involves considering how they might facilitate independent learning experiences for the students in their classroom. Independent learning experiences can be transformative spaces for students in the mental dimension as it allows for students to engage in personal learning projects that are meaningful to them.

Finally, CRT is both normative and ethical (Gay, 2018), in that most schools provide an education that is primarily responsive to a Eurocentric culture and not responsive to students of colour (Gay, 2018; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011). Western ways of knowing are so entrenched in educational practices that it can be difficult to see how Eurocentric ways are dominating teaching practices. Gay (2018) argued that an ethical approach is to have ethnically diverse culturally responsive teaching so that minority groups of colour are given the same rights and opportunities currently provided to majority group students. An ethnically diverse culturally responsive approach to teaching has the potential to address the need for healthy and transformative spaces for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan public schools, in the emotional realm. Indigenous students deserve to feel a sense of belonging in their classrooms and schools.

To summarize, the attributes of CRT include acknowledging the use of cultural heritage of students in formal curriculum, ensuring that both informal and formal curriculum is comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and lastly is normative and ethical (Gay, 2018).

In the next section, I present and discuss the four dimensions of Gay's (2018) theoretical foundations of CRT: ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum, teacher caring, home and school connection, and academic achievement.

Ethnic and Culturally Diverse Curriculum

One fundamental goal of CRT is empowering students through ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum content (Gay, 2018; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011). In Saskatchewan, authentic cultural teaching resources are available for teachers to use through such places as the Gabriel Dumont Institute, Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre, Emma Stewart Resource Centre, and in many school libraries and school divisions. Resources created through local Indigenous organizations have been created by individuals that belong to the Indigenous community (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Toulouse, 2016b). The resources created by local Indigenous community members will likely be reflective of the Indigenous learners in Saskatchewan public schools. It can be empowering for students to see themselves reflected in the resources they are using in their classrooms. To create a healthy and transformative space in terms of mental and emotional health for Indigenous students, they need to learn from relevant curriculum that authentically reflects their background as Indigenous students.

Good quality textbooks are key to the achievement of diverse students because they are a common source for curriculum content (Gay, 2018; Stowe, 2017). It is important for teachers in Saskatchewan to review textbooks they commonly use in their teaching and check them for quality. Checking textbooks for quality is an important task, however many educators are utilizing resources for teaching that are not textbooks. There are many culturally damaging resources being sold or utilized from such websites as Teachers Pay Teachers and Pinterest. Websites like these ones are appealing to educators because they are easily accessible. However, many resources with Indigenous content promote stereotypes about Indigenous peoples, such as Indigenous peoples belong in the past (Toulouse, 2016b).

Teacher Caring

The second dimension of Gay's (2018) theoretical foundations of CRT that I explore here is teacher caring. One component of CRT that many scholars have contributed to is the idea of teacher caring (Bensman, 2000; De Jesus, 2003, Gay, 2018)). The term *caring* in the theory of teacher caring is not a synonym of *kind* or *nice* but instead a description for teachers unwilling to tolerate underachievement of diverse students (Rhychly & Graves, 2012). These teacher caring ideas provide several practical options for teachers to implement in their own classroom spaces. For example, one component of teacher caring is creating spaces for diverse students to be recognized, valued, and heard (Bensman, 2000; De Jesus, 2003). Having spaces for Indigenous students to feel recognized, valued, and heard provides an opportunity for students to go to a healthy space in their schools where their mental and emotional needs are met.

Scholarship focusing on Indigenous education also reflects on the importance of such spaces for Indigenous students to be recognized (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; McIntosh, 2014). Teachers can re-imagine healthy and transformative spaces for Indigenous students in our classrooms and schools by, for example, having a space for students to smudge with traditional medicines so they can have their spiritual needs met. Spaces for traditional practices are healthy for Indigenous students and can transform colonial classroom spaces into safe spaces. One such space is an *Indigenous space*, suggested by Johnston (2019) which is a space that "refers to the recognition, theory, and practice of worldviews that draw from knowledge bases that encompass the ways in which Indigenous Peoples think about their world and articulate their relationships within their world" (p. 485). Indigenous students can have their physical health needs met in spaces that honour and recognize their unique worldviews.

There are several ways for a teacher to practice teaching caring. Another component of teaching caring is finding ways to discover knowledge and learning about students beyond the school day and the school as an organization (Bensman, 2000; De Jesus, 2003). There are many community events throughout Saskatchewan that Indigenous students participate in, from sports to cultural events like pow-wows and round dances. These are spaces for educators to learn more about Indigenous students, families, and community in a respectful way. Imagine the impact of educators coming to non-colonial spaces to learn and be with their student community. Teachers can get to know about the lives of their students if they are willing to do this learning outside of institutions. Indigenous education scholars also write about the importance of creating and nurturing relationships outside of the school organization (Brendtro et al., 2002; Goulet & Goulet, 2014). Indigenous scholar Toulouse (2016b) suggests building relationships with the local Indigenous community or organizations. This bridges Indigenous community with the school and classroom.

A third idea related to teacher caring is aiding racialized students in developing a critical consciousness (Gay, 2018; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011), which necessarily calls for teachers to build their own critical consciousness. Once teachers start to build their own critical consciousness, they will be able to bridge these learnings with their own students. It is important for students to develop a critical consciousness so they can engage in civic and social justice issues in their communities (Bassey, 2016). There are many civic and social issues that impact Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan, and it can be powerful for Indigenous students to engage in these issues for the betterment of their community.

Culturally responsive teachers demonstrate caring-in-action by having affirming views of students from diverse backgrounds (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Culturally responsive teachers are challenged to provide educational experiences that validate students' cultures (Lewthwaite et al., 2014). These types of educational experiences will create healthy and transformative spaces in education for Indigenous students. The affirmation of views for students with diverse backgrounds is not just celebrating their culture (Sleeter, 2011). Instead, teachers will be challenged to reflect on the ways they may be viewing their diverse students through a deficit lens and to interrogate why they think that way. A deficit lens is one where a teacher has less expectations of students because of behaviours, family dynamics, or negative assumptions.

Teachers who subscribe to culturally responsive caring-in-action help students deal with racism and discuss the unequal distribution of power and privilege amongst different groups (Gay, 2018). Discussing racism in the classroom can be a sensitive and difficult discussion for some educators and for students. The reality for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan schools is that they face racism regularly. Educators are doing a disservice to Indigenous students when they avoid such topics as racism in classroom discussions and activities. In her writing on strengthening CRT, Sleeter (2011) argued that you cannot substitute culture for political analysis as that approach ignores racism and oppression. While CRT can offer a powerful experience for students to have their culture integrated into activities, it cannot replace learning about uncomfortable topics such as racism in Saskatchewan.

Indigenous education scholarship also explores the importance of teaching students about racism. As Goulet and Goulet (2014) argued, "When improvements in Indigenous education focus primarily on cultural programming, taught within the framework of current schooling practices, the initiatives do not expose or challenge power relationships within our society" (p. 22). One of the misconceptions about CRT is that it is only focused on cultural teaching. Instead, what can be

powerful about culturally responsive teaching is the ability to bring culture into the classroom and still challenge and disrupt real-world issues such as racism that impact students.

Home and School Connection

CRT recognizes that students bring strengths from their home cultures to school (Au, 2001; Gay 2018; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011; Pete, 2017). Students have lived experiences outside of school that can be included in classroom learning experiences (Gay, 2018; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). These connections will need to be deeper than food, dress, and special holidays or celebrations. For teachers to learn about the home cultures of their students, they will need to engage directly with their students, their students' families, and the wider community. Stowe (2017), a teacher and scholar, writes about her experiences with culturally responsive teaching in an Oglala Lakota classroom and how this required immersing herself in the Lakota community. There is no better way to get to know more about a community than immersing oneself into it.

One of the misconceptions of CRT is the role of the teacher to teach culture to their students (Pete, 2017; Sleeter, 2015). Most Indigenous students come to school with their own understandings of their culture that comes from their family and community. It is the role of the teacher to bridge these understandings with provincial curriculum by allowing students to write about their culture in English language arts for example. In situations where a teacher would like to bring in traditional knowledge, they can invite an Elder, knowledge keeper, or Indigenous resource person into their classroom to learn from. In fact, in many instances, there is Indigenous knowledge that is not to be shared by anybody but the Elders and Knowledge keepers in First Nations communities (Saysewahum, 2009). Ideally, teachers will need to learn about the cultural backgrounds of their student and think of respectful ways to integrate this information into classroom learning.

Indigenous education promotes a connection between home and school life (Bell, 2013; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Kowaluk, 2016, Toulouse, 2016b). Although some progresses have been made, Western education systems continue to separate the home and school lives of students. According to McIntosh et al. (2014), "Traditional Indigenous education focuses on the community as a whole and is based on the assumption that individual learning is inextricably linked to communal well-being" (p. 239). An Indigenous approach to education does not separate or compartmentalize parts of learning. Instead, learning that happens both in school and out of school are important.

Academic Achievement

CRT is an approach that can be used to improve the academic achievement of students of colour (Au, 2009; Gay 2018; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011). Similarly, CRT can be used to improve the academic achievement of Indigenous students in Saskatchewan public schools. One example of creating academic achievement is through caring interpersonal relationships between teachers and students (Ayers 2004; Gay 2018; Thompson 2004). One way to create a healthy and transformative space in education for Indigenous students is through improved relationships using teacher caring. There are a variety of approaches that can be taken to build stronger teacher-student relationships in the classroom.

Relationships are foundational to Indigenous education, and Indigenous scholars have written extensively in this area (Goulet & Goulet, 2014, Toulouse, 2016b). Some ideas shared by Indigenous scholar, Kowaluk (2016), focus on for relationship-building including learning about

the composition of a student's family, favourite activities, as well as student strengths and concerns. These are very practical ideas that can be utilized by teachers to create a healthy and transformative space for their Indigenous students. Au (2009) wrote that establishing positive relationships with students is a general principle of good teaching; however, relationship-building might differ between cultural backgrounds of students. Most teachers have engaged in relationship building with their students, but they might need to consider other ways that are more reflective of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

One way that CRT can improve academic achievement of students of color is through challenging deficit-based thinking (Howard & Terry Sr., 2011; McIntosh et al., 2014; Sleeter, 2015). For Indigenous students to succeed academically in Saskatchewan public schools they need to have educators that believe in them. Teachers should reflect on why they may be looking at their Indigenous students through a deficit-lens and commit to challenging those beliefs. Adopting a CRT means committing to the belief that *all* students will achieve academic excellent regardless of their culture, race, backgrounds, and language (Taylor & Sobel, 2011). One way to disrupt deficit-thinking is believing that all the students in a classroom can and will be successful. A classroom space where educators believe the best in their Indigenous students is a healthy one because Indigenous students will have their mental needs met in that space.

To improve the academic achievement of students of colour it is necessary to use academic rigor and have high expectations of students (Gay, 2015; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011; Taylor & Sobel, 2011). Ostensibly, to create healthy and transformative spaces for Indigenous students, educators need to use instructional practices that engage and promote academic rigor. There are real consequences for Indigenous students when teachers have lower expectations of them. McIntosh et al. (2014) state that many Indigenous students are placed in life skills or vocations programs because of teacher low expectations of them. Considering the consequences of lowered expectations with teachers can help them to understand the importance of academic rigor for Indigenous students. It is also important to reflect on academic success and failure as institutionalized discrimination instead of individual "achievement" (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Having high expectations of Indigenous students is a form of resistance against institutionalized discrimination.

Academic achievement is often described as mastering academic subjects and getting high test scores (Lopez et al., 2013). However, as Gay (2015) argued, "School achievement is more than academics, and as such it involves more than mastering subject matter content knowledge" (p. 132). Culturally responsive educators are encouraged to develop student outcomes that are not necessarily linked to academic achievement (Sleeter, 2015). Scholars De Jesus (2000) and Bensman (2003) ask culturally responsive educators to explore areas of students' interest and curiosity. For an Indigenous student this might look like an interest in dancing pow-wow or learning how to do beadwork. When children have a chance to see themselves in their learning content it sustains engagement in learning (Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Lopez et al., 2013; Stowe, 2017). An idea for teachers is to learn about their students' interests and determine how they can fit this information into their lesson and unit planning. The engagement in student interests will create a healthy and transformative space where students will have a learning space that meets their mental needs in a better way.

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper explored the theoretical foundations of CRT, including the eight attributes and the four dimensions of CRT based on the work of Gay (2018). The eight attributes of CRT include: validating, being comprehensive and inclusive, multidimensional, being empowering, transformative, emancipatory, humanistic, and normative and ethical. The four dimensions of Gay's (2018) theoretical foundations include ethnic and culturally diverse curriculum, teacher caring, home and school connection, and academic achievement. I summarize here how the eight attributes of culturally responsive teaching can create healthy and transformative spaces for Indigenous students.

The attribute of validating provides opportunities to non-White students to have their cultural heritage as content in formal curriculum (Aguilera et al., 2007; Gay, 2018; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Rychly & Graves, 2012). Being comprehensive and inclusive would have culturally responsive teachers teach the whole child (Gay, 2018). The attribute of being multidimensional requires adaptations to curriculum content, student-teacher relationships, instructional approaches, student management, and classroom climate (Gay, 2018; Lewthwaite et al., 2014). The attribute of being empowering is through academic achievement, courage, and confidence (Aguilera et al., 2007; Bensman, 2000; De Jesus, 2003; Gay, 2018). Being transformative would have culturally responsive teachers not relying on formal traditional educational practices while the attribute of being emancipatory is connected to ideas of connectedness, community, and cooperation (Gay, 2018). The seventh attribute of being humanistic would have culturally responsive teachers considering how to facilitate independent learning experiences for students (Gay, 2018). Last, being normative and ethical would have culturally responsive teachers afford the same rights and opportunities to students of colour as are provided to majority group students (Gay, 2018; Howard & Terry Sr., 2011). Healthy and transformative spaces for students are significant to Indigenous students because they deserve to feel a sense of belonging and pride in their classrooms and schools. I hope readers of this paper can imagine how they might use these eight attributes to improve educational experiences and spaces for Indigenous students in Saskatchewan classrooms and beyond.

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What's With All This Race Talk Anyway? A Literature Review on Antiracist Education

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Abstract

This article reviews the developing literature on antiracist education and the emerging frameworks for recognizing racism in educational spaces. Much of the literature draws on critical race theory as the underlying framework to conceptualize race and racism. Many scholars emphasize the need for antiracist practices in K-12 education. There was, however, significant research evidence that suggested a gap between antiracist pedagogy and knowledge and the actual implementation into everyday teaching practices. The review also found evidence of suggested strategies teacher education and school division professional development programs should engage with to help aid the implementation of antiracist education in schools and classrooms— evidently, the review points to the importance of faculty (educators, support staff, administrators, superintendents and school division employees involved in policy development) to reflect on their experiences with race. I conclude with an invitation to recognize and understand how to show up as an antiracist educator, today, tomorrow and for the future.

Keywords: race, racism, antiracist education, critical race theory, racialized students

What's With All This Race Talk Anyway? A Literature Review on Antiracist Education

Racialized students and educators are victims of a system that exacerbates institutional racism (Boykin, et al., 2020). Whiteness is engendered and reinforced in many facets of education, such as, but not limited to, interpersonal relationships, curriculum, pedagogical approaches and policies (Arneback & Jamte, 2022; Boykin, et al., 2020; Hambacher & Ginn, 2021; Sleeter, 2017). The socially constructed ideas of race and racism are both psychologically and physiologically harmful and stressful for racialized students and teachers (Boykin, et al., 2020). In this literature review, race refers to the classification of individuals based on physical characteristics such as skin colour and hair texture which have helped shape systems of privilege and oppression. Race was created as a result of white supremacist ideologies, birthing the term Whiteness which I refer to in this paper as the invisible normative standard where individuals perceived as white benefit from unearned privileges and power dynamics between racialized groups (Hambacher & Ginn, 2021). I also theorize Whiteness similarly to Bonilla-Silva's (2023) definition, "Whiteness emerged as the imperative of categorizing the 'us' to conquer or control the colonial 'them'…" (p. 194). From this lens, racism is defined as a systemic injustice that disadvantages racialized groups and individuals based on their race or perceived racial identity. Another perspective of racism comes from Moreton-Robinson's (2015) concept that racism is the child of colonialism and therefore is connected to the theft and appropriation of Indigenous lands in Canada (Bonilla-Silva, 2023). This definition is imperative to understanding the depths of racism towards Indigenous students in Canadian schools and the effects of anti-Indigenous hate. Furthermore, the term racialized refers to individuals or groups who do not benefit from Whiteness, rather, this term is coined out of the comparison of whiteness. Bonilla-Silva (2023) theorizes racialization as "race-making" where we "racialize as we enforce racial order, and we enforce racial order as we racialize. The nuances of race, racism, Whiteness and racialization contribute to the analysis of what it means to be antiracist.

Discussions involving race and racism have increased over the past few years, bringing awareness of antiracist education to the forefront of learning institutions. For example, Berchini (2017) calls on antiracist faculty to "enact pedagogies that connect knowledge of personal privilege with understandings of [W]hiteness in relation to institutional power" (Hambacher & Ginn, 2021, p. 332). I conceptualize antiracism with the help of Berchini (2017), while also considering antiracism as the intentional opposition to racism through the promotion of racial equity that works to disrupt and dismantle systems of oppression derived from race and racism. Situated in a Canadian context, in this literature review, antiracism includes racial equity for Black, Indigenous, people of colour, newcomer students and all other racialized groups.

The University of British Columbia in conjunction with the Angus Reid Institute conducted a study involving 872 Canadian youth aged 12 -17. According to the study, over half (54%) of students declared that "kids name call or use insults based on racial or ethnic background at their school, while smaller proportions say kids are made to feel unwelcome (38%) or are bullied (42%) based on their racial or ethnic background" (Angus Reid Institute, 2021). The study also revealed the depth of teaching about racism across Canada and what students say they did, or did not learn, about Canada's history with racism. This research (see Figure 1) demonstrates some of the ways that racism is prevalent in Canadian schools. Therefore, a review of the literature is necessary to understand how to combat unsafe and unhealthy learning environments faced by racialized students.

Figure 1

Percentage of Canadian children saying they 'learned a lot' about each topic in school (retrieved from Angus Reid Institute, 2021).

Percentage of Canadian children saying they 'learned a lot' about each topic in school:						
(Unweighted numbers)	Total (n=872)	Region				
		BC (n=137)	Prairies (n=185)	ON (n=317)	QC (n=172)	ATL (n=61*)
Indigenous treaties, residential schools	43%	52%	59%	42%	24%	28%
Canadian multiculturalism	38%	36%	55%	38%	28%	23%
The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms	27%	22%	42%	26%	23%	18%
Racism in Canada throughout history	26%	26%	31%	29%	15%	26%
Slavery in Canada	17%	18%	17%	21%	9%	20%
Internment of Japanese Canadians during WW2	11%	22%	14%	9%	6%	7%
A head tax on Chinese immigrants to Canada	9%	19%	10%	9%	4%	2%
The Komagata Maru ship	3%	10%	2%	3%	1%	-

I conducted this literature review as a result of being witness to racism in Saskatchewan schools. As a practicing teacher who embeds antiracist approaches into the classroom, I observe first-hand, the benefits, questions and critical analyses from students about the world around them. However, I could not help but notice the overall hesitation from educators when it comes to *'knowing what to do when racism occurs'* and *'how to disrupt Whiteness and structures of power (places of oppression) within schools*. Even after a few mandatory antiracist professional development sessions, I continued to question the confidence of educators to feel equipped to teach and respond to students in antiracist ways. With a large focus on mental health and post-COVID-19 recovery, I find it paramount to investigate the ways racism shows up in education.

Implementing and fostering anti-oppressive practices within schools positively affects the mental health and well-being of racialized students and teacher educators. Stanley (2022) suggests, "to unmake racisms in the first place, we not only need to undo inherited racist practices, we also need to find and build connections that cross over racist exclusions and dismantle the systems of power that divide us" (p. 141). To do so, I argue that two questions must be asked:

- Where does racism show up in education and how do teacher educators identify various forms of racism?

- What strategies and best practices are recommended for implementing antiracist education in educational systems, classrooms and curriculum development?

Teachers dedicated to providing social justice practices recognize the need for combative solutions to racism in education (Hambacher & Ginn, 2021). Incorporating antiracist education allows teachers to make a positive difference in the lives of racialized students and their colleagues (Kumashiro, 2000). That being said, disrupting oppressive learning spaces becomes challenging due to the reliance on teachers' beliefs, practices and values upheld by educational systems such as school divisions and faculties of education. Within the overall field of education, there needs to be significant changes to professional development, curriculum and pedagogy to adopt anti-oppressive policies and practices.

Positioning Myself in This Work

To situate myself within the realm of antiracist education, I (Ashlee) am biracial (Black and white) and am confronted with the nuances of navigating and deconstructing racism in both my personal and professional life. Given firsthand encounters with racial discrimination, I find myself aware of racial disparities happening in the classroom and question the capacity with which faculty feel equipped to respond. My reluctancy stems from research by Kishimoto (2018) who argues, "…in order to effectively incorporate anti-racist pedagogy into courses, awareness and, more importantly, self-reflection regarding the faculty's positionality has to begin before going into the classroom and that these issues need to be continuously revisited alongside the teaching" (p. 543). Based on this positionality, at what point are faculty expected and willing to critically self-reflect?

Further, I wonder about the possibilities of working in an education system that no longer contributes to experiences of racism but works to dismantle and disrupt Whiteness—the ways that white people benefit from unearned privileges (Hambacher & Ginn, 2021). Within these educational spaces, ranging from bathrooms and lockers to desks and playgrounds, to conversations with white students and colleagues, both hidden and nuanced as well as overt and unambiguous acts of racism manifest themselves. My lived experiences represent a unique dichotomy that includes the realities of both racism and privilege. Being biracial has provided meaningful insights to understand and relate to the perspectives of many. However, my reality should not be misconstrued with the challenges being biracial presents. I navigate my experiences with an invitation to explore, question and challenge race and racism. This is the exact reason for the writing of this literature review—to invite practitioners to question, challenge and sit with the uncomfortability of race and racism as it pertains to educational settings.

Methodology

To conceptualize the positionality of racism and how it transpires in educational spaces, I conducted a literature review which extended to theorizing and compiling strategies and best practices to implement antiracist pedagogy in schools and classrooms. The University of Regina's library database was the primary search engine used. Additionally, Google Scholar and Theses Canada searches were performed. Keyword searches included 'antiracism,' 'antiracist,' 'antiracist education,' and 'antiracist pedagogy.' I also utilized the 'snowball effect' method to gather additional literature cited in previously searched and found literature. I mainly focused on literature situated in Canadian and US contexts, however, literature from New Zealand is also referenced. No specific parameters on the timeframe of the literature were followed but attention was given to more recent literature.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework underlying this literature review is firmly grounded in the principles of critical race theory (CRT). CRT serves as the guiding lens through which the dynamics of racism are comprehended and analyzed (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Huber, 2020). This conceptual framework enables educators to gain a profound understanding of the multifaceted nature of racism and its various forms within educational contexts. By employing CRT, educators can effectively understand the contexts in which racism is rooted, thereby enhancing their ability to identify, address, and dismantle systemic racial inequalities within educational spaces. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) affirm CRT as an "…intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction, and construction: deconstruction of oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power" (p. 9).

Within the framework of CRT, multiple tenets exist (Bell, 1987; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solorzano & Huber, 2015, 2020; Solorzano, 1998). For this literature review, I address four specific tenets (see Figure 2): (1) the permanence of racism; (2) the value of experiential knowledge and counter-storytelling; (3) the concept of interest convergence; (4) and critiques of liberalism (Sleeter, 2017). These foundational tenets, interwoven within the fabric of this review, serve to strengthen educators' comprehension of the acts of racism within educational settings. Moreover, these tenets offer insights into proactive strategies that educators can employ to dismantle racial inequities and foster an environment conducive to antiracist practices within schools.

Figure 2

Tenets of Critical Race Theory (retrieved from Bedford & Shaffer, 2023, p. 7).

Tenet of CRT	Description
Permanence of racism	Racism is a permanent component of American life that shapes governing domains, including politics, economics, and societal norms
Experiential knowledge and counter-storytelling	The majority of stories include the voices of the masses and White worldviews, silencing the voices of people of color; the need for counter-stories comes from experiential knowledge of BIPOC.
Interest convergence	The relationship between race and the interests of Whites; any advancements had by people of color occurs only when it benefits White people.
Critique of liberalism	The idea that "neutrality" and "colorblindness" are nothing more than façades concealing and maintaining the privilege, power, and advantages of Whites (Sleeter, 2017, p. 160); incremental and sustainable change do not come quickly, and equality and equity are not the same.

Note: Adapted from Bell (1980, 1991), DeCuir and Dixson (2004), Delgado and Stefancic (2017), Sleeter (2017), and Solorzano and Yosso (2001, 2002). First published in (Shaffer et al., in press).

Critical Race Theory to Understand Racism in Schools

The Permanence of Racism

Central to critical race theory (CRT) is the fundamental principle that racism possesses an enduring presence. CRT posits that race and racism are socially constructed concepts influenced by political forces (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021) and reinforced by institutional structures. Gillborn (2015) expands on this notion, asserting that critical race theorists argue the majority of racism remains hidden beneath a veneer of normalcy, with only the most overt and blatant forms being acknowledged as problematic by the general public. However, Bonilla-Silva (1997, 2023)

contends that the permanence of racism is perpetuated through a circular pattern rooted in the belief that racist behaviour establishes racism, which in turn validates the existence of racism. This circularity arises from a failure to ground racism in social relations among different racialized groups. Neglecting to acknowledge racism as a socially constructed phenomenon only serves to exacerbate its continuing nature. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) propose that if racism were truly isolated and manifested solely through random acts of violence, society would witness educational excellence and equity within public school environments. However, they argue that African American students often experience success outside of the public school system, indicating the continued vitality of racism within educational spaces. In other words, structural and systemic racism in which the education system is grounded in prevails. Therefore, the entirety of the education system must be challenged and reworked from an anti-racist viewpoint. Other relevant research points out that anti-Indigenous racism such as Residential Schools, Indian Hospitals, the "60s Scoop" and the overwhelming population of Indigenous children in child and family services play a significant role in education, specifically the effects of racism towards Indigenous student's school experiences (Efimoff and Sarzyk, 2023). In essence, Partridge (2014) suggests that society incorrectly assumes that white individuals incidentally or coincidentally hold the majority of power and privilege within society. However, CRT compels us to explore alternative perspectives that challenge white supremacist ideologies, which devalue and dehumanize racialized communities, thus, creating a comprehensive understanding of the prevailing social order that rejects such arguments and promotes an inclusive and equitable society.

Experiential Knowledge and Counter-Storytelling

A second principle central to critical race theory proclaims the significance of listening to the experiences and stories of racialized groups. Because of their omnipresence and normalization in schools, racist experiences tend to go unacknowledged (Hambacher & Ginn, 2021). Therefore, stories of racialized groups become seemingly important. Counternarratives give racialized people an opportunity to name their own reality which consequently illuminates sociopolitical complexities in education (Vesley et al., 2023). Solorzano and Yosso (2002) assert that experiential knowledge intentionally calls majoritarian stories into question. Majoritarian stories purposefully discount racism to "maintain dominant group status over People of Colour" (Solorzano & Huber, 2020, p. 22). Solorzano and Huber (2020) go on to suggest, that "majoritarian stories (re)construct and justify systems of subordination that lead to inequitable social arrangements and, consequently, disparate outcomes of Community of Colour in nearly every sphere of social life, including education, health, wealth, and politics" (p. 9). The power of story creates connections between individuals which become a necessity for comprehending, identifying and disrupting racism within educational spaces. A portion of this literature review is aimed at amplifying the voices of racialized individuals and their experiences within school settings.

Interest Convergence

As articulated by Bell (1987), interest convergence refers to the prevailing notion that white individuals advocate for the interests of people of colour only when such interests align with and promote their own interests. White individuals experience fragility regarding the possibility of their status and power eroding, despite the fact that the actual pursuit is that of racial equity (Sleeter, 2017). Therefore, to ameliorate the effects of racism, educators must actively dismantle and interrogate white supremacist ideologies. Moreover, it becomes crucial to delve deeper into the examination of privilege, encouraging teachers and community members to reflect upon how their perceptions of school may be influenced by underlying interest convergence dynamics.

Undeniably, interest convergence plays a pervasive role in perpetuating white supremacist ideologies within educational environments, necessitating the implementation of a CRT perspective to identify acts of racism. Interest convergence shows up throughout this literature review by addressing the necessary reflections faculty must commit toward antiracist education.

Critiques of Liberalism

The final tenet to be considered here is the critique of liberalism and the inadvertent dynamics of neutrality, colour blindness, and meritocracy that continue to shape and maintain the dominant group. Neutrality and colour-blindness discount any and all experiences of racism while at the same time mask white privilege and power (Sleeter, 2017). CRT scholars explain meritocracy to be the belief that success in society is solely dependent on the hard work and determination of individuals—neglecting to consider the influences and results of power dynamics (Solorzano & Huber, 2020). Microaggressions are presented through this review as a way to draw attention to nuanced identify racism in addition to showcasing how liberalism upholds the ideas of neutrality and colour blindness. CRT's critique of liberalism challenges deficit thinking models as they often justify poor academic success through group membership, "…typically, the combination of racial minority status and economic disadvantagement" (Valencia, 2010, p. 18). In other words, Valencia (2010) conceptualizes deficit thinking as a framework that blames "students' poor schooling performance [on] their alleged cognitive and motivational deficits" (p. 18), rather than questioning institutional and personal biases and the ways these injustices have historically influenced student learning. Such a lens, liberalism overlooks the consequences of deficit thinking by situating racism and Whiteness as "not our problem" and continues to preserve the status quo. Valencia and Solorzano (1997) speak against liberalism as it ignores structural barriers and, rather than eradicating racism, liberalism focuses on assimilating people, families, and communities into a society grounded in Whiteness. In other words, "the formula for action becomes extraordinarily simple: change the victim" (Ryan, 1971, p. 8). Therefore, a neutral discourse can become an oppressive technique to withhold optimal learning opportunities for school success for such students.

Bedford and Shaffer (2023) draw attention to the necessity of CRT in educational spaces, "employing key tenets established by critical race theorists can confront systems of injustice and provide tools for teachers, preservice teachers, and you to engage in change" (p. 5). By conceptualizing racism through the following four central tenets, the permanence of racism, experiential knowledge and counter-storytelling, interest convergence and critique of liberalism educators can talk about and understand race and racism in tangible ways. CRT should extend beyond this literature review as a grounding foundation for educators to generate thoughtful conversations and critical learning opportunities.

Considering Intersectionality in Relation to CRT

A considerable amount of literature pointed to the idea that antiracist frameworks present intersectional systems of oppression such as class, gender, and sexual orientation (Annamma & Winn, 2019; Kishimoto, 2022; Luft, 2010; Mutitu, 2010; Partridge, 2014), suggesting that these systems of oppressions are 'mutually sustaining' (Partridge, 2014) and that dismantling one enables/requires the dismantling of all. Scholars Russel Bishop et. al., (2003) conducted several studies to investigate how educators could provide a better learning space for Maori students. Bishop (n.d, 0:10).), conceptualizes intersectionality and the benefit of antiracist education for all students:

…[W]hat's good for Māori is good for everybody,' … [and] 'What's good for everybody is not necessarily good for Māori.' … [R]eally what our data is showing really, really, really, really clearly which is just great news for us is that as Māori students improve their achievement in our schools so do non-Māori as well. But what we're really delighted about in the latest evidence that we're gathering as well, is that after five- or six-years teachers get more and more effective. And as they get more and more effective Māori student's achievement is improving. What's really quite wonderful on the latest data we've got is in fact that Māori are now achieving at the same levels as non-Māori students in our schools.

In offering a critique of intersectionality, Kishimoto (2022) argues that intersectionality can sometimes be used to avoid discussions of race by intentionally focusing on other forms of oppression. Luft (2010) emphasizes the importance of intersectionality, while at the same time arguing that "…intersectionality is not the most strategic methodological principle for the early stages of microinterventions [classrooms, workplaces and workshops] when the objective includes antiracist consciousness change". (p. 103). In other words, intersectionality is complex and "a crucial premise when seeking broad interventions", but when initiating early stages of microinterventions, one must begin with racism (Luft, 2010, p. 102). Focusing on race must be "centrally" and "singularly" discussed to reintroduce it to the conscious discourse (Luft, 2010, p. 103). Because I am taking my direction from Luft, the scope of this literature review focuses on the singularity of race and the ways racism manifests in school learning environments.

Conceptualizing Antiracism in Education

Microaggressions in the Classroom

Racism in school learning spaces significantly impacts racialized students and teachers. However, overt and obvious forms of racism do not exceed all variants of racism. In other words, racist acts can be directed at immigration status, language, and culture which are affiliated to race (Kohli, 2009). CRT scholars refer to these subtle racially charged actions as microaggressions (Hantke, 2022; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). Scholar Derald Wing Sue (2010) identifies microaggressions in three forms: race, gender and sexual orientation. Sue (2010) defines the act of microaggressions as "the brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioural, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group" (p. 5). Although all of the encompassing forms of microaggressions are important to note, I highlight 'racial microaggressions', a term coined by Chester Pierce in the 1970s. Pierce defines racial microaggressions as, "…the everyday subtle and often automatic 'put-downs' and insults directed toward Black [People of Colour and Indigenous] Americans (Pierce et al., 1977; Sue, 2010).

Microaggressions within education can be the cause of inequalities which directly impacts the success of marginalized groups (Murray, 2020). The harm caused by microaggressions towards racialized groups cannot be underestimated. Pierce (1974) builds on the impact of microaggressions and states:

These [racial] assaults to black dignity and black hope are incessant and cumulative. Any single one may be gross. In fact, the major vehicle for racism in this country is offenses done to Blacks by Whites in this sort of gratuitous never-ending way. These offenses are microaggressions. Almost all black–white racial interactions are characterized by white put-downs, done in automatic, preconscious, or unconscious fashion. These mini disasters

accumulate. It is the sum total of multiple microaggressions by whites to blacks that has pervasive effect to the stability and peace of this world. (p. 515)

This explanation of microaggressions conceptualizes the dangers not exclusive to Black students and teachers, but for all racialized groups. Therefore, overlooking microaggressions can lead to students feeling invalidated, devalued and under-respected, particularly as a result of belonging to a certain group (Murray, 2020; Sue, 2010). The damage caused by microaggressions on racial groups in learning spaces consequently hinders students from "underperform[ing] despite having the ability to succeed" (Murray, 2020, p. 184). Even further, racialized students subject to experiencing trauma in their lives are significantly impacted by microaggressions (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2021). A clinical study by Woods-Jaeger et al. (2021) examined the correlation between childhood trauma and resilience and whether microaggressions furthered a person's ability to demonstrate resilience. They found that racial microaggressions negatively impacted the resilience of African-American adolescents who previously experienced trauma (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2021).

In order to identify and respond to racial microaggressions, Kohli and Solorzano (2012) amplify the importance of understanding different types of microaggressions, the context in which they occur, and the effects microaggressions present (see Figure 3). By engaging in this process, educators will find themselves better equipped to respond to racial microaggressions as they arise.

Figure 3

A model for understanding microaggressions (from Kohli & Solorzano, 2012, p. 447).
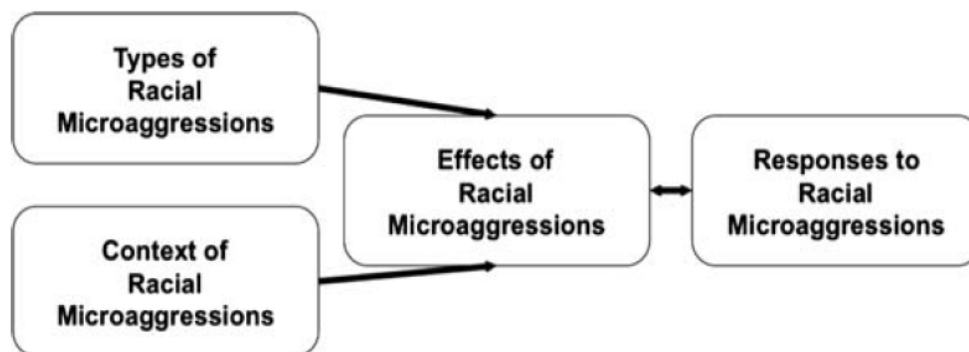
There are layers to understanding racial microaggressions and where they manifest in education. It becomes paramount then to have a rich and comprehensive grasp of where, how, and when, microaggressions occur. As defined earlier, microaggressions are discrete, unconscious acts of violence toward racialized groups (Hantke, 2022; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Pierce, 1974; Sue, 2010). Perez and Solorzano (2014) remind educators:

They are: (1) verbal and non-verbal assaults directed toward People of Color, often carried out in subtle, automatic or unconscious forms; (2) layered assaults, based on race and its intersections with gender, class, sexuality, language, immigration status, phenotype, accent, or surname; and (3) cumulative assaults that take a psychological, physiological, and academic toll on People of Color. (p. 302)

With the context of microaggressions in mind, several types and examples of microaggressions are laid out by Murray (2020) from Lynch (2019) and Sue (2010). Identifying

microaggressions can be challenging, therefore the following quotes offer examples from Murray (2020):

1) **Prejudging academic ability:**

   - Setting low expectations for students from certain groups or backgrounds.
   - Believing that a student's dialect or language skills are problematic.
   - Stating how a nonwhite student is articulate or well-spoken.

2) **Devaluing culture, heritage, and religious traditions:**

   - Scheduling assignments, projects, and examinations on cultural or religious holidays
   - Disregarding religious traditions
   - Expressing Eurocentric and ethnocentric views

3) **Criminalizing behaviour:**

   - Referring to undocumented students as illegals
   - Making assumptions about students and their backgrounds
   - Banning certain ethnic clothing, head coverings, such as hats or hoodies, or hairstyles

4) **Disregarding income inequality:**

   - Assigning class projects that disregard socioeconomic status and penalize students with fewer financial resources
   - Assuming all students have access to and are proficient with the use of computers, technology, and applications for communications related to academic assignments
   - Excluding students from accessing certain activities due to the expense of the activity

5) **Making politically charged statements:**

   - Expressing racially charged political opinions in class
   - Using inappropriate political and partisan humour in class that degrades members from other groups
   - Hosting debates in class that place students holding opposing views in bad predicaments

6) **Dismissing difference:**

   - Conveying only heteronormative examples in class
   - Calling on, engaging, and validating one gender, class, or race of students while ignoring other students during class
   - Requiring students with nonvisible disabilities to identify themselves in class. (pp. 184 – 185)

Being able to name various racial microaggressions is helpful in critically recognizing them in schools. Additionally, these examples of microaggressions within a school context are seemingly complex, Kohli and Solórzano (2012) studied the importance of knowing and properly pronouncing someone else's name. Within the study, Nitin, a South Asian man, shared an example from middle school.

Rather than learning a name outside his cultural comfort zone, a teacher decided to change this young student's name to his own. He explained: When I was in the seventh grade, I

missed my first day of class. One of my teachers was calling roll and couldn't pronounce my name – Nitin. As a joke, he crossed my name out of the gradebook and told the class he was renaming me '[Frank]'…. after himself. Everyone thought it was pretty funny and the next day at school, everyone kept calling me '[Frank].' I soon grew used to the name and within a few months, I was introducing myself as '[Frank].' I went to that school for six years - seventh through twelfth grade. By the time I graduated, I firmly thought of myself as '[Frank],' so much so that at college, I introduced myself as '[Frank]' to everyone, including other South Asians. (Kohli & Solórzano, 2012, p. 451)

Name-changing derives from a long history of slavery and colonization (Fryer & Levitt, 2004). However, the teacher in Nitin's situation, unknowing of this history, caused harm and stripped a piece of Nitin's cultural identity away (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). Kay (2018) articulates this experience as *passing* – a term he defines as "members of a minority cultural group/race might 'pass' when, for whatever reason, they can present themselves as majority" (p. 184). This includes but is not limited to name-changing on resumes, self-identifying as the majority race, and disowning aspects of one's marginalized identity to *pass* in society (Fryer & Levitt, 2004; Kay, 2018; Kohli & Solorzano, 2012).

Based on personal school experiences as a student and now educator, I can attest to the negative impacts microaggressions have on identity and the capability to feel confident in one's skin. Therefore, I find it significant to suggest additional microaggressions often experienced in schools:

- Getting asked "where are you from" and then being called into question because the response does not line up with the answer the questioner was hoping for. This question is often followed up by "but, where are you really from?";
- Othering (Kumashiro, 2000) racialized people by assuming their culture, country, and nationality based on race;
- Using literature as a means to justify slur-terminology;
- Using the same consequence or reaction for non-racialized incidents in racist situations;
- Tokenism as a form of microaggression. For example, asking racialized students or teachers to speak or provide their opinion on behalf of their racialized group. This behaviour assumes all racialized groups have the same experiences and results in individual invisibility; also known as assimilation (Hasberry, 2013) or role entrapment (Hasberry, 2013).

Evidently, microaggressions are often the result of good intentions with negative impacts. They can be challenging specifically for white educators to identify as they often are subtle and inadvertent (Sue, 2010). It is important that educators can confidently identify microaggressions to disrupt racism in schools. Showing consideration for racialized groups means the recognition of microaggressions should not be the responsibility of racialized groups. Faculty (educators, administrators, and school districts) must become aware of the choice of words and behaviours used while promoting a climate of empathy and cultural humility (Murray, 2020). Failure to challenge microaggressions can lead to negative school experiences for racialized students (Woods-Jaeger et al., 2021). Therefore, the need for antiracist education and practices is imperative for a more equitable education.

Analyzing Everyday Racism in Schools

Antiracist education utilizes critical thinking skills to deconstruct power relations (Mark, 2003) by acknowledging an unequal distribution of knowledge and resources based on the social construct of race (Dei & Vickers, 1997). Noteworthy comments from Boykin et al. (2020) include:

- Black people are experiencing exhaustion and other physiological effects resulting from racism;
- Racism extends far beyond police brutality and into most societal structures;
- Despite being the targets of racism, Black people are often blamed for their oppression and retaliated against for their response to it;
- Everyone must improve their awareness and knowledge (through both formal education and individual motivation) to fight racism;
- Anti-racist policies and accountability are key to enact structural reformation. (p. 776)

These quotes point to the significance and necessity for antiracism practices. Additionally, Arneback and Jamte (2022) point out that racist acts manifest in schools in, "prejudice, microaggressions, discrimination, exclusionary practices, ethnocentric education, hate speech and racial violence" (p. 192). Therefore, implementing antiracist actions provides environments where everyone can learn, see themselves as learners and feel confident to be themselves. Efimoff and Sarzyk (2023) investigated the impacts of historical education and systemic racism specifically involving anti-Indigenous racism and found promising impressions on how students thought, felt and behaved towards Indigenous students. In this case, antiracist education helped to build empathy within a community to understand the lasting effects of racism. Antiracist education benefits everyone.

A consistent theme showed up throughout the research that emphasizes the need for antiracist education as it relates to the psychological well-being of racialized students and educators (Boykin et al., 2020; Vesley et al., 2023; Sleeter, 2017). The lack of equity in learning spaces results in negative experiences for racialized students that lead to disengagement from learning. For racialized students and educators to feel confident in learning environments, attention to antiracist practices is crucial. Walker and Wellington (2022) critique that changing how we teach and research is not sufficient but rather "recognizing and overturning racist complicity in classrooms and academic departments […] means reckoning the colour-evasiveness that pervades the constructions of education" (p. 31). To say you are an antiracist but lack any sort of initiative to deconstruct racist acts only perpetuates the problem further. Those who benefit from white supremacy are required to make sacrifices in order to bring about sufficient change (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). Unfortunately, colour blindness and meritocracy challenge the existence of racism and prevent sacrifices to dismantle white supremacy.

What's With All This Race Talk Anyway?

"Why can't we just leave race out of it?" "I don't see colour, I see a person". "Racism doesn't exist anymore; leave it in the past!" Consistent with CRT, colour blindness, meritocracy, and the emphasis on the permanence of race, demonstrate why we cannot just leave race out of it. Solomon et al. (2005) suggest, "[w]hite people, who overwhelmingly take up positions of power, remain committed to the myth of a meritocratic system (p. 68, as cited in Partridge, 2014). The phrases stated above are a few examples that maintain the deficit discourse that belittles racialized people and justifies white supremacy in schools. Confronting white supremacy in schools requires the dismantling and reconstruction of the colonial *status quo* which often is challenged or overlooked

by white people, as the knowledge, histories and theories benefit them (Partridge, 2014). As such, the embodiment of white supremacy lives through the refusal to acknowledge the way Whiteness shows up in schools—pointing to neutrality and colour-evasiveness. In a comparable manner, Leonardo (2004) states,

> It is not only the case that whites are taught to normalize their dominant position in society; they are susceptible to the forms of teachings because they benefit from them. It is not a process that is somehow done to them, as if they were duped, are victims of manipulation, or lacked certain learning opportunities. Rather, the colour-blind discourse is one that they fully endorse (p. 144).

Although ignoring the way racism manifests in schools seems like an endearing "out", ignorance of racism is inexcusable and must be recognized to disrupt systemic racism to move towards antiracist education (Vesley et al., 2023). Perspective shifting is challenging because often as humans, we only view the world through our own experiences which explains why "to whites…many of whom think of race as something that comes up only occasionally in specific situations… is a very hard reality to appreciate" (Brookfield, 2017, p. 208). Vesley et al. (2023) help us understand that those who benefit from systems of power find it challenging to recognize white supremacist privilege and often respond defensively towards racialized groups only further perpetuating deficit discourse and structural inequity. Schumacher-Martinez and Proctor (2020) attribute these feelings to Critical Whiteness Studies that suggest, "nice white people are complicit in maintaining systemic oppression through the superficial need to be seen as good and not part of the problem, instead of an openness to engage in critical self-audit awareness" (p. 251). Undergirding the necessity of this work, Hambacher and Ginn's (2021) exploration of race-visible education revealed the benefits of disruptive self-reflection to help repair injustices experienced by racialized groups. Such that, Williams et al. (2020) promote the necessity for educators to be well-equipped in responsive teaching so that "…practitioners [can] foster inclusive classrooms, facilitate difficult dialogues, and support all voices in the classroom" (p. 370). Undoubtedly, the literature calls on faculty and teacher-education programs to embrace and enact antiracist frameworks and pedagogy.

Challenges and Resistance Towards Antiracist Education

Hambacher and Ginn's (2021) comprehensive review of the past decades' race-visible education proved the tenets of CRT, mentioned earlier, permeate resistance from educators. Ill-equipped teacher education programs prevent the production of antiracist education in schools (Andrews et al., 2021, Browne et al., 2023; Sleeter, 2017,). Excluding antiracist pedagogy inhibits the ability to create just environments of learning for everyone which provides opportunities for "the reproduction of whiteness in structures [continues] to oppress raced, gendered, and classed individuals and communities who deviate from the norms established by the ideology of whiteness" (Calderon, 2006, p. 73). Therefore, the absence of antiracist education presents dangerous consequences for racialized students. Boykin et al. (2020) explain how individuals who are faced with racism experience heightened levels of psychological and physiological stress which require constant emotional regulation strategies. Donaldson (1997) echoes such experiences and proclaims, "Students become angry, withdrawn, less confident, depressed, guilty, and many times hostile toward their educational experiences" (p. 31) when incidents of racial violence frequently occur at school. It is clear a focus on teacher education programs and professional development for experienced teachers becomes essential to dismantling and addressing racism in

schools. First, attention to personal values and beliefs must be addressed as Hambacher and Ginn (2021) have observed skeptical, discouraging and at times aggressive resistance from educators.

Personal Values and Implicit Bias

The dilemma of enacting antiracist education can be that educators may find antiracist pedagogy contradicts their own personal values and beliefs (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). This is referred to as implicit bias—unconscious and automatic associations and interpretations—which has a tremendous impact on learning environments (Staats, 2016). Decision-making, disciplinary actions and treatment of racialized students are tremendously affected by implicit bias (Staats, 2016). A study on discipline disparities proved that K-12 students of colour were sent to the principal's office more regularly, and experienced disciplinary measures that were more subjective in nature, such as disrespect, behaviour issues or excessive noise, versus their white counterparts who were disciplined for objective infractions such as smoking and vandalism (Skiba et al., 2002). Disproportionate discipline can lead to adverse effects as Annamma and Winn (2019) emphasize, "pervasive deficit mindsets reinforce and (re)produce societal inequities" (p. 318). Mutitu (2010), explains how teachers will often predetermine and nurture students they perceive should be successful which results in a deficit mindset for the rest of the students. In addition, Scheff (2000), recognizes these nurtured students are usually "talented, middle class or closest in action and appearance to middle class" (p. 91). Therefore, faculty need opportunities to unpack their own implicit bias before implementing an antiracist framework (Hambacher & Ginn, 2021). It is important to note, self-reflections on race and racism do not solely pertain to white faculty, but also to racialized faculty and their experiences with racism. Mutitu (2010) highlights the necessity for educators of colour to reflect on their personal experiences with race, "students will not learn to address issues of racial inequity if the teacher hasn't come to terms with [their] own experiences of race, because the teacher isn't a neutral participant in this process" (p. 44). Additionally, Partridge (2014), explores the significance for white educators to address the role they play in sustaining white supremacy within schools. She asserts, "When white bodies come to understand themselves as agents of white supremacy, unwilling agents perhaps but agents nonetheless, we are better able to address how our bodies continue to function in this manner and see the ways we can contribute to anti-racism and anti-colonial agendas" (Partridge, 2014, p. 74).

Although research points to a commitment to self-reflection, emotionality is a major factor that must be considered when attempting to create change and disrupt social norms. Zembylas (2010) identifies, "[w]hen teachers resist reform efforts, it is often because it threatens their self-image, their sense of identity, and their emotional bonds with students and colleagues by overloading the curriculum and intensifying teachers' work and control from the outside" (p. 222). This type of hesitation can be conceptualized as white fragility, a term coined by Robin Diangelo (2011) in her article *White Fragility*. In the context of education, Jayakumar and Adamian (2017) point to white fragility manifesting in university programs:

> White college students are often protected from confronting their own racial biases and assumptions … primarily due to the centering of [W]hiteness in curricula and instruction, the predominance of whites on higher education campuses, and the absence of challenges to white students' dispositions in regard to race and racism. (p. 916)

Participating in self-reflection is a critical tool for implementing an antiracist framework. Faison and McArthur (2020) identify the necessity for "critical reflection and deliberate action" (as cited in Vesley et al., 2023, p. 5) in order for transformative practices to surface in schools. Vesley et al.

(2023) describe these actions to be "…de-centering the most privileged voices, surfacing racist structures, and teacher[s] looking inward and outward to actively promote antiracism" (p. 6). To guide educators to critically reflect and engage in transformational work, Vesley et al. (2023) created an *Antiracist Pedagogy Course Audit* tool, see Figure 4. Adapted from Summergrad (n.d) and Howard (2016), Vesley et al.'s (2023) audit tool draws on CRT tenets similar to the ones that informed this literature review. Additionally, their audit tool is grounded in Friere's (2013) conceptualization of critical consciousness, specifically paying attention to the influence and outcomes of power and the results of societal inequities. Lastly, the audit tool reminds us (learners) that "antiracist action is not possible without ongoing interrogation of self and one's positionality" (Vesley et al., 2023, p. 6).

Figure 4

Antiracist Pedagogy Audit Tool (from Vesley et al., 2023, p. 7-8).

| Area of Examination	Looking in the Mirror (Summergrad, n.d..)	MAEC (Howard, 2016)	Developed by Vesely & Colleagues
18. I assign structured group activities inside/outside the classroom to integrate students by race, gender, disability, and/or ethnic group.		X	
19. I use and model nonbiased verbal and nonverbal communication in the classroom.		X	
20. I address directly in class or with students racist statements or behavior.			X
21. I analyze my interactions with students, and ask others to observe my interactions with students, to determine any differential patterns. I take actions to correct these patterns.		X	
Assignments & Assessments			
22. In assessment, I take into consideration that the learning environment may not be equitable based on racialized and racist experiences in K-12 schooling.	X		
23. I analyze assessments of students to determine any differential patterns in my grading and feedback. I take actions to correct these patterns.			X
24. Students of Color are meeting and exceeding course requirements.	X		
25. (For research-focused coursework) I work with students to do research that does not perpetuate racist/colonial patterns, including interrogating the methods we use and how/where we disseminate research.			X

In addition to Vesley et al.'s (2023) audit tool, Kishimoto (2022) created a framework (see Figure 5) that helps faculty address their social position within education. By becoming aware of one's social positionality and power within society and the classroom, the learning environment can be positively impacted (Kishimoto, 2018, 2022). Kishimoto (2022) summarizes the three components of antiracist pedagogy as:

1) Incorporating topics of race and inequality into course content
2) Teaching from an antiracist approach, for example, through decentering authority and creating community in the classroom
3) Antiracist organizing within the campus are linking efforts to the surrounding community (p. 116)

The proposed frameworks are starting points for self-reflection, the reduction of racial biases and the transition for teaching towards an antiracism approach.

Figure 5

Antiracist pedagogy as an organizing project (from Kishimoto, 2022, p. 117).
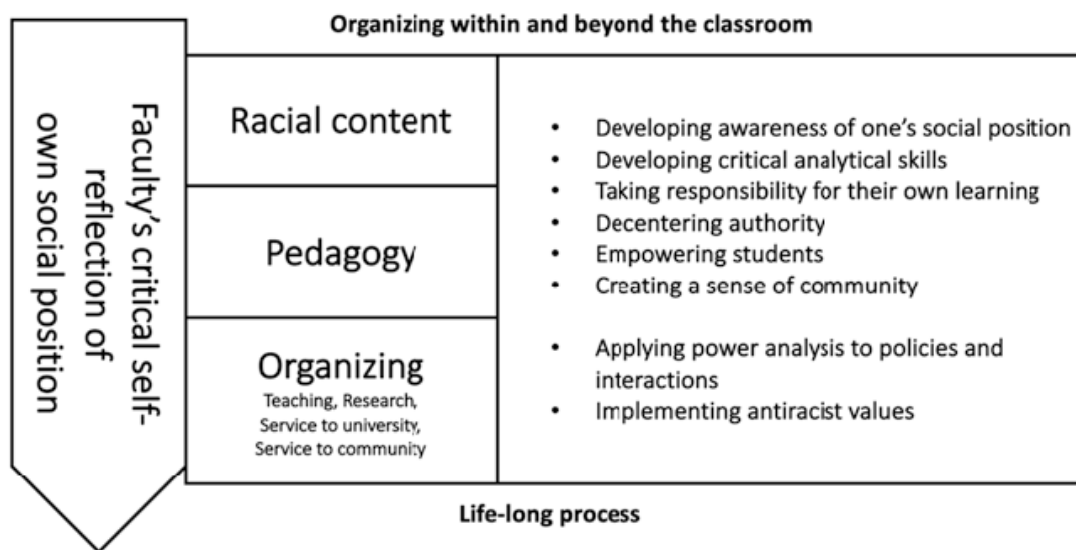
Teacher Education Programs

Although the curriculum offers a foundation for *what* to teach, antiracist education offers a framework for *how* to teach. Kishimoto (2022) asserts that "antiracist pedagogy not only raises students' awareness of their social positions in society but also requires faculty to become aware of their social position and think about their roles and responsibilities in a racialized society" (p. 115). Because of the interpretation freedom educators have with the curriculum, the choice of teaching through an antiracist lens then becomes optional. Also referred to as the social and political influences (interest convergence) that continue to uphold systems of power and influence (Kishimoto, 2022). In more recent cases, teacher-education programs are implementing antiracist pedagogy and theories in university courses (McGregor, 2020, as cited in Kishimoto, 2022). Ladson-Billings (1995) argues that "teacher education programs throughout the nation have coupled their efforts at reform with revised programs committed to social justice and equity (p. 466). More recent events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the killing of George Floyd and an influx of race-visible literature hitting the shelves "pushed race, antiracism, and systemic racism into mainstream discussions" (Kishimoto, 2022, p. 105). In turn, this shifts the focus in education for prospective teachers to "…support equitable and just educational experiences for all students" (Ladson–Billing, 1995, p. 466).

A report carried out in Saskatchewan (Barreno, 2016) focused on analyzing a 1988 study that examined the Saskatchewan curriculum for implementation of Global Education—a term related to antiracist education. In this 2016 report, Barreno concluded the need for pre-service teacher programs to include Global Education theories (p. 7). Education Social Studies (ESST)

317: *Teaching Engaged Citizenship: Social Studies and Social Environmental Activism* is a course now offered by the University of Regina's Faculty of Education program, evidently, a by-product of the current academic push towards teaching for social justice (Barreno, 2016). Marilyn Cochran-Smith (1991, as cited in Browne et al., 2023) vocalizes the need for pre-service teachers to see themselves engaged in systems of power and privilege and to understand how to make decisions critically based on these findings. To conceptualize the need for teacher education programs, Nieto (2000), outlines the pervasiveness of antiracist education. She asserts,

> A concern for social justice means looking critically at why and how our schools are unjust for some students. It means analyzing school policies and practices—the curriculum, textbooks and materials, instructional strategies, tracking, recruitment and hiring of staff, and parent involvement strategies—that devalue the identities of some students while overvaluing others. (p. 183)

Additionally, Sleeter (2017) recognizes that post-secondary institutions are structuring the orientation of programs toward social justice and culturally responsive teaching, however, she also identifies "the great majority continue to turn out roughly 80% [w]hite cohorts of teachers even though [w]hite students are less than half of the K-12 population" (p. 155). Although these statistics represent the context in the US, many Canadian scholars point to similar findings (Hampton, 2016; Partridge, 2014; Robinson, 2005). Therefore, the initiation of providing antiracist education in teacher education programs will increase awareness and at the very least help towards the development of antiracist action within schools.

Professional Development for Educators: Accountability

In her article, Kishimoto (2022) addresses the uncertainty of the longevity of antiracism education as these mainstream discussions can be a temporary trend. Therefore, professional development for practicing teachers and administrators becomes essential (Sleeter, 2017; Hambacher & Ginn, 2021). Mutitu (2010) further asserts the need for professional development, "More often than not, teachers will hold negative and lowered expectations for lower class and minority students than middle to upper-class white students" (p. 45). Consequently, this type of expectation disparity focuses more on the emotional toll on white students rather than on students [and teachers] of colour (Sleeter, 2017), also recognized in CRT as interest convergence.

Providing teachers with additional professional development and mandating antiracist education through pedagogical practices, curriculum and antiracist policy changes are approaches to combat the avoidance of antiracist education. Love (2019) argues, "At the end of the day, white teachers need to want to address how they contribute to structural racism. They need to join the fight for education justice, racial justice, housing justice, immigration justice, food justice, queer and trans justice, labour justice, and, above all, the fight for humanity" (para. 12). However, conversations and professional development centred around antiracist education cannot solely rely on staff meetings or book clubs; professional development must be continuous (Boulden & Borden, 2022). Implementing professional development that involves the sharing of personal stories and narratives typically sways others to act (King, 2023). From a CRT perspective, counterstories give space for racialized individuals to share their experiences and provide a voice to help reform education (Sleeter, 2017). In psychology, this strategy is known as the identifiable victim approach which is used to increase empathy toward a personal situation (King, 2023). This is also known as "pedagogies of strategic empathy—"personal experiences evoke[ing] an emotional response which, in turn, can increase a desire to enact change" (King, 2023, p. 32). In

addition to personal narratives and strategic empathy, Boulden and Borden (2022) suggest, [i]ncorporating teachers, for example, as co-presenters can help ensure that the professional development clearly speaks to teachers' interests and is digestible to individuals who may not be as far along in their journey toward being anti-racist educators" (p. 319). While the literature pointed to themes of increased awareness through self-reflection, teacher education programs and professional development for antiracist education, the sections that follow offer an invitational approach to continue beyond this review for engaging in antiracism work.

## Looking Forward: An Invitation to Engage

Overall, this literature review highlights the need for antiracist education. Although a call for antiracist education has been sought after in research, scholars point out the absence of practical frameworks and suggestions for what antiracist actions look like in educational environments (Arneback & Jamte, 2022). For action to come to fruition, antiracist practices must be embedded in ongoing practice. To dissect all the ways antiracist education can show up in schools is out of the scope of this literature review. However, moving towards an antiracist approach, I invite you, educator, to continue on the journey of self-reflection and enlightenment to the ways racism shows up in education. The following frameworks found within the review are presented as an invitation to how you can show up as an antiracist educator, today, tomorrow and for the future.

Name, Own, Frame and Sustain (NOFS) Framework

Drawn from the lived experiences and stories of Black and white school leaders, Lopez and Jean-Marie (2021) developed a framework (Figure 6) to address specifically anti-Black racism in schools. However, the concept of intersectionality can be used to adapt the following framework for marginalized experiences such as anti-Indigenous racism, anti-immigrant racism, and gender and sexually diverse groups.

Figure 6

Framework for Action – Name, Own, Frame, and Sustain (NOFS) (from Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021, p. 58).
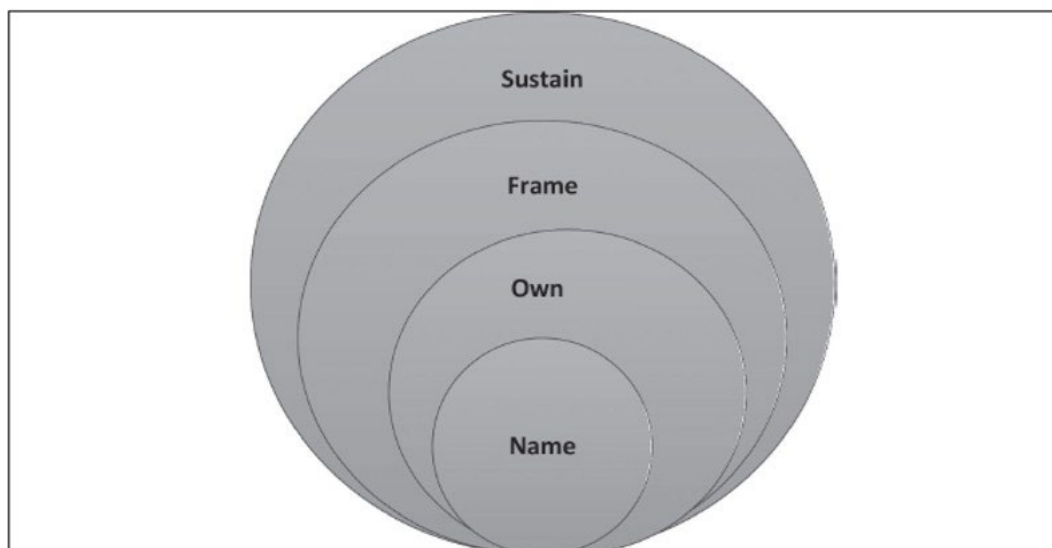
Naming is the understanding and categorizing of racist occurrences in everyday school practices. Through this process, educators must question their positionality, self-reflect, and

examine what they need to learn and unlearn. Antiracist action cannot come solely from racialized educators as this responsibility heightens the pain, trauma, and suffering of racialized educators (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021). The ability to identify microaggressions would be an example of *naming*.

Second, *owning* that there is a racism problem is fundamental to antiracist action. When faculty take ownership of racial issues, it allows them to: 1) see how they and others are complicit; and 2) reflect on possible and necessary actions. By *owning*, educators recognize racism within schools and take responsibility to act. Critical Race Theory would suggest *owning* is conceptualized as the permanence of racism.

Thirdly, *framing* is the ability to intentionally dismantle practices and policies that continue to uphold racism within schools. Educators need to *reframe* how they understand curriculum, assessment and evaluation practices, school discipline structures, and spaces where racialized students can talk openly and safely about their experiences of trauma in school settings. By reframing school structures, attention to deficit notions must be challenged—racialized students deserve to see themselves as worthy and excellent. In addition, *framing* focuses on moving beyond performative actions and instead uplifts, supports, and provides racialized students with a welcoming school environment.

The final step in the NOFS framework is *sustaining* the three aforementioned structures. By sustaining antiracist policies and practices, schools become a safer learning environment for everyone. Additionally, Lopez and Jean-Marie (2021) emphasize the importance of "collaborative mentorship", in order to sustain antiracist actions. Dismantling racist structures is a journey that takes time and effort. Educators must be willing to be vulnerable in questioning the role they themselves play in schools while embracing the tensions involved in antiracist work. The NOFS framework meets educators where they are in their antiracist journey and provides a cushion for faculty to seek change. Saying you are an antiracist *and* implementing an antiracist framework will require sacrifices. Soltani (2017) insists that performative and tokenistic gestures will not bring about change.

Typology Framework

There is no one-size-fits-all solution that can be applied to combat racism in school environments. Arneback and Jamte (2022) conducted an empirical investigation, drawing on the work of 27 teachers in the UK who all work to counteract racism in educational settings. Analyzing their qualitative research results, Arneback and Jamte (2022) produced a typology "that makes the complexity of both racism and antiracism visible and serves as a tool to help educators make active decisions regarding what type of antiracist action would best be used about the specific form of racism manifested" (p. 193). Figure 7 outlines six approaches to antiracist action and highlights the complexities of these approaches that educators might choose to engage in when dealing with the challenges of racism in schools.

This typology not only represents individual action but also provides a framework for dismantling structures within education. The breakdown between antiracist action and the manifestation of racism gives critical insight into counteracting and dismantling racial issues.

Figure 7

*A typology of anti-racist actions (from Arneback & Jamte, 2022, p. 207).*

	Anti- racist action	Manifestation of racism	Main target of change
Emancipatory action	• Critically examine lived experiences and develop students' ability to counter racism and rid them selves of internalized oppression.	Structural: A focus on power structures and systemic inequality, as well as internalized racism.	• Societal inequality • School, as (re)producer of unequal opportunity. • Students, as possible victims of internalized racism.
Norm-critical action	• Make visible, critically examine and challenge social norms through (self-)reflexion.	Structural: A focus on dominant norms that create exclusion, discrimination, harassment and unequal opportunities.	• Society, as producer of social norms that lead to oppression • Schools, teachers and students as (re)producers of norms and privileges.
Intercultural action	• Create space for cultural diversity and intercultural processes in education.	Structural: A focus on monocultural education, segregation and lack of representation.	• Society, as characterized by segregation • Schools, teachers and students as possible reproducers of ethnocentrism.
Democratic action	• Involve students (often from different backgrounds and with different opinions and values) in democratic dialogue.	Individual: A focus on views and beliefs that grow in isolated social milieus.	• Students as possible reproducers of anti-democratic perspectives and practices.
Relational action	• Enable positive self-worth in students through recognition, care, respect and solidarity.	Individual: A focus on racism as a consequence of problematic socialization.	• Students as possible carriers of negative self-worth.
Knowledge-focused action	• Provide opportunities for knowledge development and critical evaluation of sources of knowledge to prevent racism.	Individual: A focus on how racism stems from a lack of knowledge.	• Students as possibly uninformed.

The RAISE Theory

Based on my findings from the literature review, I have conceptualized a framework that I feel holds faculty accountable for antiracist education. Inspired by the work of others (Arneback & Jamte, 2022; Kishimoto, 2022; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021), I synthesized and created the *RAISE* theory as a helpful tool for emerging and practicing educators to begin or continue on their antiracist teaching journey. I anticipate the *RAISE* theory (Figure 8) will be utilized as a safe tool to call individuals in, rather than call out. Most importantly, the *RAISE* theory invites teachers to rise up and put in the difficult work that antiracist education requires.

Figure 8

The RAISE Theory

The RAISE Theory
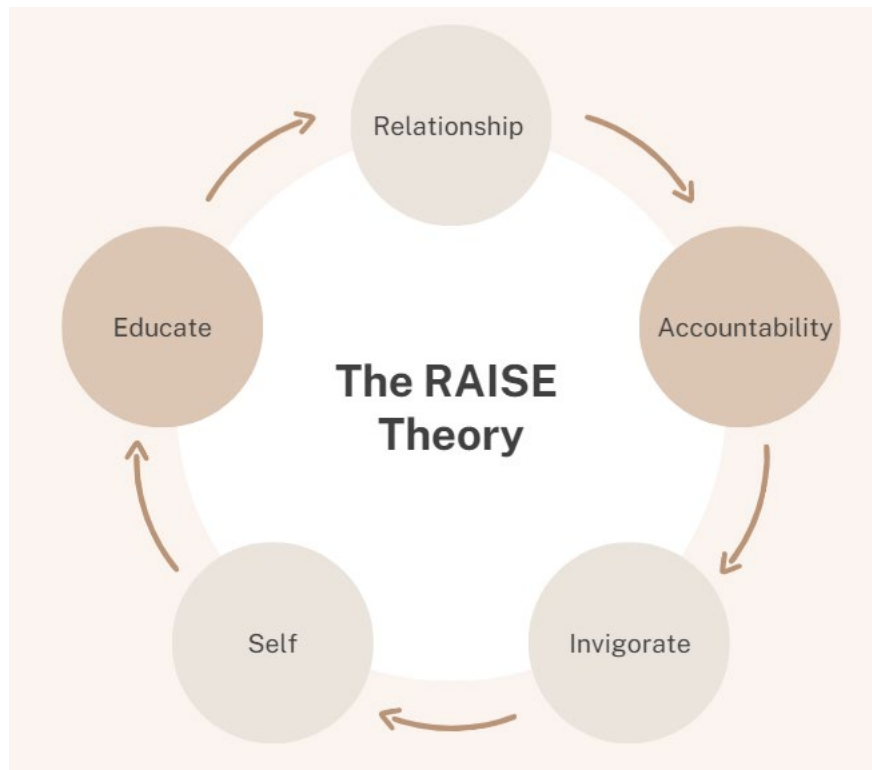
Relationships

Relationships are integral to student learning—"if you can't reach 'em', you can't teach 'em". Teacher–student relationships are foundational for providing an antiracist education. In fact, "[p]ositive interpersonal relationships have been proposed as a buffer against stress and risk, instrumental help for tasks, emotional support in daily life, companionship in shared activities, and a basis for social and emotional development" (Marten, 2014, p. 10). Experiencing racism—overtly or explicitly—is traumatic and can have damaging results (Sue, 2010). Racialized students need to know they are loved, appreciated and seen for who they are. They need a judgement-free, compassionate, and safe place in school that allows them to talk about their experiences with racism. Although I have focused on the interpersonal relationship between teacher and student, racialized staff should be considered here as well.

Accountability

To provide antiracist pedagogy in schools, educators must hold a high standard for themselves, school districts and boards of education. As mentioned above, dismantling race and racism is undoubtedly challenging—but not impossible. Performative measures are only tokenistic gestures that act as blanket statements. Raising flags, timely posts, or publicly announcing inclusive ideas are empty promises when followed up by the exclusion of antiracist actions. Boykin et al. (2020), assert that "combating systemic racism requires a transformation of the national education curriculum. Our call for education is very specific. Rather than additional implicit bias workshops that gesture broadly at discrimination, we call for a formal education on racism – an education that starts from elementary school and continues through high school" (p.779). Holding stakeholders accountable to produce policies embedded in antiracist theories is the way forward for a more equitable and just education system.

Invigorate

Solidarity amongst faculty in antiracist work acts as an invigorating measure for people – especially racialized groups. Racialized educators are not responsible for upholding antiracist accountability in schools (Boykin et al., 2020). Because those who face racism experience negative psychological and physiological effects (Boykin et al., 2020), non-racialized colleagues must help invigorate their racialized colleagues in the form of solidarity and allyship. In order to obtain solidarity, non-racialized educators must reflect on themselves and their position of power within school spaces.

Self

In order for teachers to engage in antiracist work, they must first engage in self-reflexivity (Cole-Malott & Samuels, 2022). Schools continue to be hosts for maintaining power and privilege structures and therefore, one must first recognize, question, learn and unlearn their positionality. The process of self-reflexivity is foundational to *The RAISE* Theory. Cole-Malott and Samuels (2022) describe reflexivity as,

> A process of questioning your unexamined assumptions about a wide range of ideas. It demands the interrogation of implicit bias and actively countering those biases when and where they are identified. Reflexivity asks you to step away from your thinking and to determine how your actions, beliefs, and practices shape outcomes as an educator. Reflexivity is actionable; it demands that you take action with what you know (p. 56).

Additionally, the audit tool aforementioned in the previous section can be utilized for self-reflexivity.

Educate

To effectively foster an antiracist environment, educators must first educate themselves to embrace antiracist pedagogy. Antiracist educators do not wait for resources to find them, they do not expect racialized groups to be experts in antiracist work, and finally, they are not selective in antiracist conversations. Antiracist education is a lens, a framework, and a critical worldview that allows others to seek and understand multiple perspectives. *The RAISE* Theory is an interconnected process that takes time, agency and commitment. In the words of Nelson Mandela, "education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world" (Cordeur, 2017, p. 45).

Concluding Thoughts

The scope of this literature review investigated the way racism shows up in education and the significance of antiracist education as it explores the possibility for other systems of oppression to be challenged. Using similar language from Bishop (n.d), antiracist education is good for racialized students and teachers and, therefore, good for all students and teachers.

There is an abundance of research, studies and findings defining antiracist education (Donaldson, 1997; Hasberry, 2013; James, 1995; Kishimoto, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Mutitu, 2010; Shah et al., 2022; Upadhyay et al., 2021), the need for antiracist education in learning spaces (Arneback & Jamte, 2022; Boulden & Borden, 2022; Boykin et al., 2020; Dei & Vickers, 1997; Goulet & Goulet, 2014; Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021; Mark, 2003), and why antiracist education is so challenging, and in some cases, impossible (Gebhard et al., 2022; Kumashiro, 2000; Murray, 2020; Sleeter, 2017; Valencia, 2010; Vesley et al., 2023). Despite the challenges, we must acknowledge that education is the catalyst for change. Because "classrooms are the microcosms

of the broader community and society" (Goulet & Goulet, 2014, p. 27), disrupting racism and questioning institutional power at the school level can have reflexive effects on society.

Finally, antiracist education is a framework for educators ready to disrupt institutional racism. Discreet or overt, racism continues to walk the halls, roam the playgrounds, and sustain power relations within classrooms. Racialized students and staff must feel heard, understood, and celebrated to continue to experience learning in positive ways. Patience, self-reflexivity and courage are fundamental attributes that make antiracist education attainable. In this way, Mark (2003) points out that antiracism practices are not "add-ons" to curricula, but rather a method of critically thinking and analyzing the world around us. By utilizing frameworks such as *NOFS* (Lopez & Jean-Marie, 2021) and The *Raise* Theory, faculty can uphold a standard to dismantle racial power dynamics in schools. We must commit to antiracist education to — up, with, and for, racialized groups who have yet to have their voice heard. Antiracist work is not racialized peoples' work; antiracist work is all peoples' work. To end, I leave you with a powerful quote from Ibram X Kendi (2019), "[w]e know how to be racist. We know how to pretend to be not racist. Now let's know how to be antiracist" (p. 21). Let the work begin.

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Direct/Explicit Instruction and Social Constructivist Practices in Inclusive Classrooms

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Abstract

Effective educational practices play an instrumental role in student success. In the context of an inclusive classroom, it is crucial that educators use evidence-based practices to ensure all students meet educational outcomes. This literature review paper focuses on two evidence-based pedagogies, namely direct/explicit instruction (DI/EI) and social constructivist approaches, and their effects on an inclusive classroom. Special consideration is given to cooperative learning and concrete implementation guidelines. Lastly, the complimentary effects of combining DI/EI and social constructivist practices are investigated to advance an argument for using a variety of evidence-based practices within inclusive classrooms.

Keywords: Inclusive education, direct instruction, explicit instruction, social constructivism.

Direct/Explicit Instruction and Social Constructivist Practices in Inclusive Classrooms

Many researchers, such as Kurth and Mastergeorge (2010), suggest that students with developmental disabilities benefit from being in an inclusive classroom rather than a self-contained special education classroom. In this paper, an inclusive classroom is defined as a heterogeneous learning environment whereby students with developmental disabilities learn alongside their neurotypical peers (Rasmitadila & Boeriswati, 2017). Kurth and Mastergeorge (2010) found that students with developmental disabilities attained significantly higher scores on measures of math, reading, and writing when in an inclusive classroom compared to a non-inclusive classroom. Szumski et al. (2017) conducted a meta-analysis to explore how academic achievement is affected when students with developmental disabilities are taught alongside their peers without developmental disabilities. These authors concluded that inclusive classrooms do not have any significant negative effects on the academic achievement of students without disabilities. Two pedagogies that may foster success in the classroom are direct/explicit instruction (DI/EI), which aligns with behavioural analytic psychology (Kretlow & Bartholomew, 2010), and social constructivist practices, which align with cognitive psychology (Knapp, 2019) and social psychology (Raskin, 2002). In this paper, the effects of these pedagogies are examined, with respect to the academic and non-academic benefits yielded when each approach is integrated into an inclusive classroom. A discussion regarding the complementary effects of using both DI/EI and cooperative learning in an inclusive classroom is included, along with practical examples of effectively implementing cooperative learning strategies.

The benefits of an inclusive classroom are not just restricted to academic achievement. Inclusive classrooms can also benefit students socially, as they foster peer acceptance. Peer acceptance is a protective factor against adverse outcomes such as behavioural problems and school avoidance (Garrote et al., 2020). Therefore, peer acceptance can positively contribute to the socio-emotional development of students. According to a qualitative study by Shogren et al. (2015), students with developmental disabilities had positive perceptions of their inclusive classroom, stating they had a greater opportunity to make friends and enjoyed the challenge of learning the same content as their neurotypical peers. Similarly, a qualitative investigation by Bunch and Valeo (2004) found that students without disabilities in an inclusive classroom reported having more friends with developmental disabilities compared to students without disabilities in a non-inclusive classroom.

Fisher and Meyer (2002) reported that students with developmental disabilities in an inclusive classroom made significantly greater gains on measures of social competence relative to their peers in a segregated learning environment. Since students with developmental disabilities are more likely to experience social isolation and bullying victimization than their neurotypical counterparts (Farmer et al., 2019), the increase in social competence and peer acceptance that stems from participation in an inclusive classroom may act as a preventive factor against adverse outcomes. Educators need to utilize evidence-based practices within their pedagogies for these social and academic benefits yielded by an inclusive classroom to be actualized.

Brock et al. (2020) claimed there is a research-practice gap in the field of inclusive education whereby teachers seldom use evidence-based practices in an inclusive classroom. This gap, according to Brock et al., may indicate that students with developmental disabilities who are not in the most optimal learning environment, such as where there is limited use of evidence-based practices, may not lead to superior academic or socio-emotional developmental outcomes. These authors also state that the research-practice gap could be lessened if evidence-based practices

focused on improving academic achievement rather than focusing on social development or mental health since, in their study, academic achievement was the highest priority for teachers. While academic achievement is a central goal of an education system, it is also worth acknowledging that other educational goals may hold equal importance. The development of educational goals such as social competence and pro-social behaviour (Ten Dam & Volman, 2007), critical thinking (Larsson, 2017), work ethic and physical well-being (Rothstein & Jacobsen, 2006), emotional intelligence (Low et al., 2004), and overall active citizenship (Jansen et al., 2006) should be given equal importance as academic goals. Attainment of these educational goals could improve one's quality of life and an individual who has sufficiently developed competencies across these numerous goals can contribute positively to the environment in which they are embedded.

An inclusive classroom aims to serve the needs of students with a range of different disabilities, suggesting that teachers may need to implement a diverse set of instructional approaches in order for their students to be successful. This article seeks to examine the effects of DI/EI in an inclusive classroom and to explore social constructivist practices, with a specific focus on cooperative learning in an inclusive classroom. Lastly, the complementary effects of the combination of DI/EI and cooperative learning are examined, and concrete methods of incorporating cooperative learning strategies are provided.

Direct/Explicit Instruction

Researchers have conceptualized DI/EI in numerous ways. Generally, DI/EI can be thought of as a teacher-led learning approach in which the content or problem-solving strategy being taught is explicitly explained (Gersten et al., 1986). Researchers have also characterized the steps of DI/EI differently, though similar themes appear. Common components in the steps of DI/EI include planning learning objectives (Lombardi, 2017), modelling and explicit direction, guided and independent practice (Gersten et al., 1986; Humphrey & Feez, 2016; Moore, 2007; Tobias & Duffy, 2009), and assessment (Lombardi, 2017). DI/EI is utilized in the classroom to construct a foundational knowledge base within students to enhance recall and promote generativity (Phillips et al., 2016; Slocum & Rolf, 2021). Teaching for generativity implies that learners will be able to apply knowledge to untrained activities (Slocum & Rolf, 2021). For example, if writing instruction allows students to spell untaught words, then the instruction is generative. Due to the structured nature of DI/EI, one key component of DI/EI programs involves the promotion of mastery learning (Engelmann, 2007). This strategy assumes that students must demonstrate adequate knowledge of the current subject material before engaging with new material (Kulik et al., 1990).

The Reading Mastery program (Engelmann et al., 1995) is a noteworthy program that is based upon DI/EI principles (Schieffer et al., 2002). This program focuses on developing requisite knowledge of receptive and expressive oral language, acquisition of phonetic awareness, letter-sound correspondence, and lastly, students are taught the skill of blending, which enables students to blend the sounds of words together. According to Schieffer et al. (2002), salient features of the Reading Mastery program include the provision of additional instruction to students who are struggling, modelling and guided practice, and immediate feedback and error correction. After the requisite knowledge of receptive and expressive knowledge is developed, the Reading Mastery program focuses on reading comprehension. Reading comprehension is augmented through the explicit teaching of various reading comprehension strategies. For example, one strategy involves teaching literal comprehension, in which students are given a passage to read and then prompted to answer questions based on the passage (Schieffer et al., 2002).

When teaching literal comprehension, teachers model behaviours such as underlining and highlighting important themes in a passage. As students' progression increases, the guidance provided by the teacher decreases, and more complex passages are introduced (Schieffer et al., 2002). The results obtained from an experiment by Goss and Brown-Chidsey (2012) support the notion that Reading Mastery is an effective program for promoting academic success. Similarly, findings from Stockard and Engelmann (2010) demonstrate that students who were subjected to Reading Mastery had more growth in nonsense word fluency scores and oral reading fluency relative to students who received whole language instruction or Open Court (SRA McGraw-Hill, 1996). Open Court is a specific direct instructional program that has been adopted by over 6,000 schools in the USA (Borman et al., 2008; Rosenshine, 2008). However, these results may not be surprising considering that nonsense word correspondence measures letter-sound correspondence capabilities (Vanderwood et al., 2008), and one component of Reading Mastery specifically focuses on letter-sound correspondence. The results from Stockard and Engelmann (2010) provide one example of a specific program that is based upon the principles of DI/EI. However, DI/EI is an effective instructional practice for various types of students across a range of subject materials (Przychodzin et al., 2004; Zepeda et al., 2015).

The Effects of Direct/Explicit Instruction in a Classroom Context

DI/EI has been rigorously researched, and one of the most well-known studies regarding such pedagogical practices is Project Follow Through, which was undertaken by the United States Office of Economic Opportunity during the late 1960s and early 1970s, according to Watkins (1997). The researchers' aim for Project Follow Through was to analyze the most effective teaching strategy for underachieving students with a low socioeconomic background, with the study encompassing over 70,000 students from 170 different districts between kindergarten and grade three (McMullen & Madelaine, 2014). Although more than 20 different teaching approaches were included in Project Follow Through, all of the approaches were either grounded in child-centred construction of knowledge or direct teaching of skills and content (Carnine, 2000). Results from the longitudinal study suggest that DI/EI is more effective than child-centred approaches based on scores in math, language, and spelling from the Metropolitan Achievement Test (Carnine, 2000). Interestingly, scores on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Scale (Kim & Axelrod, 2005) were also higher for students who participated in the DI/EI condition. Since research on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Scale (Coopersmith, 1967) is contradictory (Ahmed et al., 1985; Johnson et al., 1983), caution should be taken when determining the efficacy of DI/EI on measures of affect. Results from a meta-analysis by Körük (2017) suggested that a student's self-esteem is positively correlated to their academic achievement, and this finding holds true regardless of the student's cultural background and grade level. Therefore, the academic benefits obtained through participation in DI/EI may be attributed, in part, to an increase in self-esteem.

It was also found that students who were taught using DI/EI had higher scores relative to their peers in traditional educational settings on the Wide Range Achievement Test (Jastak & Jastak, 1976), which measures reading, math, and spelling (Becker & Gersten, 1982; Meyer, 1984). These results were consistent six years post-intervention, indicating that students retain the problem-solving skills that were taught using DI/EI (Becker & Gersten, 1982; Meyer, 1984). One of the most rigorous meta-analyses exploring the effects of DI/EI was conducted by Stockard et al. (2018). These authors concluded that students exposed to DI/EI programs had significant academic gains across various domains such as reading, language, math, and spelling. Approximately one- quarter of the primary studies in the meta-analysis by Stockard et al. (2018)

stated that the sample contained students from high-poverty backgrounds. Therefore, DI/EI has been shown to be a very strong teaching method for young students who come from low socio-economic status (SES) backgrounds as a means of developing cognitive and affective domains. Since Wagner et al. (2006) claim that low SES is particularly detrimental to the academic achievement of students with disabilities, perhaps the adoption of DI/EI can mitigate the adverse effects associated with the intersectionality of low SES and prevalence of a disability.

DI/EI has also been shown to enhance more than just academic achievement in young students. For example, Fielding et al. (1983) demonstrated that secondary school students who were taught complex concepts in the field of law using direct instruction performed better on a multiple-choice test and essay test examining knowledge of the law in comparison to students who were taught using an inquiry-based approach. Kousar (2010) found similar results in their study, stating, "The Direct Instructional model was found to be more effective than traditional instruction in immediate and delayed retention, as well as development of positive attitudes" (p. 102). This statement suggests the participants in the DI/EI condition were more likely to encode stimuli relative to the traditional instruction control condition. The notion that DI/EI increases academic achievement can be explained due to the role of feedback and student motivation. As previously stated, feedback and error correction are inherent components of the DI/EI model. Corrective feedback has consistently been shown to increase student motivation and confidence, subjective vitality, and the satisfaction of the psychological need for competence and relatedness (Kilic et al., 2021; Vergara-Torres et al., 2020) and is generally preferred by students (Gamlem & Smith, 2013). While DI/EI seems to be effective for a wide range of students, as previously discussed, it is worth reviewing whether these same positive academic and non-academic effects can be materialized specifically for students with developmental disabilities in an inclusive classroom.

Direct/Explicit Instruction and Students with Developmental Disabilities

The American Psychological Association defines a developmental disorder as a cognitive or physical impairment that leads to limited functioning (American Psychological Association, n.d.). Although this definition may seem to encompass emotional-behavioural disorders (EBDs), they are in fact distinct constructs, so the effects of DI/EI on students with EBDs will not be explored in this paper.

A study by Flores and Ganz (2007) found that the DI/EI program entitled *Corrective Reading Thinking Basics: Comprehension Level A* (CRTB) was effective for increasing reading comprehension as measured by statement inferences and by an ability to use facts and analogies with elementary school students with a range of developmental disabilities. A similar study by Head et al. (2018) found comparable results, thus providing further support that teaching strategies utilizing DI/EI are effective for increasing reading comprehension in students with developmental disabilities.

In addition to reading comprehension, mathematical knowledge acquisition and overall cognitive development can be augmented using DI/EI. McKenzie et al. (2004) conducted one of the most robust studies that supports this notion. These researchers used the DI/EI program Connecting Math Concepts (Engelmann & Becker, 1995) Level K (CMC-K) to teach mathematics concepts to students aged three to five. In this cohort of students, five of sixteen had developmental disabilities. The CMC-K program consisted of 30 lessons taught over six and a half weeks. The goals of the CMC-K program were to teach basic mathematical skills such as counting, number recognition, the concept of greater than and less than, and so on. During the delivery of this

program, the instructor modelled skills, led the class through guided practice and then provided time for individual practice. The instructors also used error correction and a reinforcement system to reduce time-off-task behaviours and increase motivation. The authors used a pretest-posttest design to measure outcomes using both the cognitive domain of the Battelle Development Inventory (Newborg et al., 1984) (BDI) and a CMC-K curriculum test. According to Berls and McEwen (1999), the BDI has strong content, construct, concurrent, and predictive validity, and high interrater reliability. This alignment suggests researchers agree that the BDI is a consistent measure, it truly measures development, it correlates with other scales of development, and it can predict future behaviour (Berls & McEwen, 1999). Similarly, McKenzie et al. (2004) assessed students on the cognitive domain of the BDI which consists of four subdomains: perceptual discrimination, memory, reasoning and academic skills, and conceptual development. These authors reported that students with developmental disabilities had large gains across all subdomains of the cognitive domain of the BDI. What is particularly noteworthy is that the lowest effect size was 0.38 and the largest was 1.59, whereas McKenzie et al. (2004) state that an effect size greater than 0.25 is significant in educational research, and an effect size above 0.5 is quite rare in educational research. The obtained effect sizes provide support that DI/EI is incredibly effective at enhancing cognitive development in students with developmental disabilities. Students with developmental disabilities had significantly increased their scores on the CMC-K curriculum test post-intervention, suggesting that the CMC-K was successful at developing skills in mathematics. These researchers also found a significant increase in the skills of typically developing students in mathematics, DI/EI programs such as CMC-K could be an invaluable component of an inclusive classroom.

It is also worth mentioning that DI/EI can increase skills in mathematics in older students. For example, Hayter et al. (2007) used a DI/EI strategy with flashcards to teach mathematical skills to high school students with developmental disabilities for four weeks. From their study, these authors concluded that the implementation of the DI/EI flashcard system increased students' motivation towards learning mathematics, as well as their performance in the memorization of mathematical facts.

While the previous articles discussed highlight the effectiveness of DI/EI for improving language and mathematic skills for students with developmental disabilities, it is also noteworthy how DI/EI impacts science-based courses. One example comes from a study by Knight et al. (2012), who used a DI/EI intervention to teach science descriptors to elementary school children with developmental disabilities. The intervention followed a typical DI/EI format: Instructors began lessons with explicit teaching of science descriptors, followed by modelling correct answers and leading the students through guided practice. The final stage was a test phase in which participants showed their knowledge of science descriptors. Knight et al. (2012) demonstrated that DI/EI is an effective intervention in teaching science descriptors to students with developmental disabilities, as all students increased their content knowledge post-intervention.

While research has consistently shown that DI/EI is a successful teaching strategy for students with developmental disabilities, it is also worth exploring the benefits that constructivist approaches have when employed in an inclusive classroom.

Constructivist Approaches

Constructivist adherents posit that knowledge is constructed or created by the learner, while the classroom teacher acts as a facilitator rather than a director, imposing knowledge onto the students (Fernando & Marikar, 2017; McMullen & Madelaine, 2014). It is important to acknowledge the distinction between social constructivism and cognitive constructivism. Social constructivism denotes knowledge that is constructed through the interaction of members within a group, whereby students construct knowledge through interactions, particularly if guidance is provided. Social constructivism proponents also believe that learning in the classroom should mimic real-world scenarios (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). Conversely, personal or cognitive constructivism emphasizes that knowledge is constructed by the individual learner through their own experiences and focuses less on group interaction relative to social constructivism (Garrison, 1993; Kumar & Gupta, 2009).

Although there are various approaches to constructivist teaching practices, such as cognitive apprenticeships and learning communities, one pedagogical practice that is rooted in social constructivism is cooperative learning. Cooperative learning methods refer to students working together in groups to achieve a specific educational outcome (Erbil, 2020). Cooperative learning involves several pertinent factors, including positive interdependence, accountability, interpersonal and group skills, promotive interaction, and group processing (Laal & Laal, 2012). Firstly, positive interdependence refers to group interconnectedness, where the success of one member is reliant on the success of all members within the group (Laal, 2013). Johnson and Johnson (2008) suggest that groups with positive interdependence are successful because, when members are cognizant that their contribution affects the entire group, their relative effort is enhanced. Therefore, groups need to be structured in a way that allows each member to make a valuable contribution to their group and, in turn, to perceive their contribution as valuable (Collazos et al., 2003). The second factor, accountability, has two components: group and individual accountability. Group accountability exists when the group receives an overall score, and individual accountability is present when the group receives an overall score and a student also receives an individual score for their contribution to the group (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). Individual accountability is an important component in the development of knowledge construction because a lack of individual accountability may create social loafing; that is, the tendency to apply less effort to a task when in a group setting than when completing a task individually (Piezon & Donaldson, 2005), consequently hindering mastery of subject material (Slavin, 2014).

The third factor in Laal and Laal's (2012) depiction of cooperative learning, group social skills, includes many different facets such as effective communication and conflict resolution, which can enhance group productivity and subsequently influence group achievement (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). In the Tuckman Model of Group Stages (Tuckman, 1965), it is suggested that all groups go through a stage in which conflicts begin to surface (McKibben, 2017). This surfacing of conflicts makes it necessary that group members possess conflict resolution skills, or desired group outcomes may not be satisfied. The fourth factor, promotive interaction, occurs when students encourage and motivate each other, and provide each other with feedback and assistance (Johnson & Johnson, 2008). Promotive interaction is beneficial in groups when members employ helping behaviours, have past experiences with peer groups, are able to provide support through feedback and modelling, and when students are adequately prepared for the task and teachers can monitor student interactions (Kristiansen et al., 2019). The final factor in cooperative learning, group processing, entails a reflection upon the group's interactions with a focus on what actions

were beneficial and how the group can improve its effectiveness and efficiency (Yager et al., 1986). Results from many studies (see, for example, Bertucci et al., 2012; Strahm, 2000) have confirmed that cooperative groups with group processing had greater achievement relative to cooperative groups without group processing. In reference to Laal and Laal's (2012) and Tran's (2013) work, the factors that contribute to successful cooperative learning seem to have strong theoretical underpinnings. Therefore, it is worth investigating how cooperative learning translates into the practical setting of an inclusive classroom.

Social Constructivist Approaches and Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning can benefit students in many ways, especially in the context of academic achievement. For example, Zakaria et al. (2013) conducted a quantitative study examining the effects of cooperative learning practices in comparison to traditional learning practices on measures of academic achievement in math. The authors determined there was a statistically significant difference between students in the cooperative learning environment ($M = 55.19$, $SD = 11.62$) and students in the traditional learning environment ($M = 47.47$, $SD = 15.10$), providing some evidence that cooperative learning is a more effective teaching method for enhancing academic achievement in math. According to Zakaria et al. (2013), these results were obtained because the provision and reception of knowledge within groups led to a deeper understanding of content. Similar results were obtained by Aziz and Hossain (2010), who reported that gains in mathematics achievement were greater when students experienced cooperative learning as opposed to traditional teaching, which the authors refer to as standard lecture. It is also worth noting that in these studies, the researchers, Aziz and Hossain (2010) and Zakaria et al. (2013), used different methods of cooperative learning; the former used Learning Together (Johnson & Johnson, 1987) and the latter used Jigsaw (Aronson, 1978). The Jigsaw method will be further elaborated on when discussing cooperative learning in an inclusive classroom. The Jigsaw method is particularly noteworthy based on results from a study by Gambari and Yusuf (2017), who suggest that the Jigsaw method may yield the greatest academic benefits relative to alternative cooperative learning strategies such as team-assisted individualization (Slavin, 1985) and student teams-achievement division (Slavin, 1994). Therefore, it seems that cooperative learning is an effective practice for increasing academic achievement regardless of the specific method, such as Jigsaw, group investigation, or any other cooperative learning method.

Research into cooperative learning strategies has also shown benefits in subjects other than mathematics. For example, Rojas-Drummond et al. (2014) examined the effects of cooperative learning using the Test of Textual Integration (TTI), which is a test that measures written communication and reading comprehension. Out of the two schools examined in their study, the students in the experimental school who used cooperative learning scored higher on the TTI in comparison to students in the control school, suggesting that cooperative learning is an effective method for developing written communication and reading comprehension skills (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2014). It is evident that cooperative learning, like DI/EI, can support literacy development in students with developmental disabilities since, as previously discussed, students with developmental disabilities may benefit from the less ambiguous and sequential instruction that DI/EI provides (Shillingsburg et al., 2015). However, like many students in an inclusive classroom, those with developmental disabilities also benefit from cooperative learning for a variety of reasons. For example, Rojas-Drummond et al. (2014) surmised that the experimental group had superior scores on the TTI due to the use of exploratory talk that occurred within the groups. The desired outcomes for educators in inclusive classrooms may entail augmenting their

students' social skills while promoting literacy development. Therefore, research indicates that a combination of DI/EI and cooperative learning in an inclusive classroom could be effective, simultaneously improving academic achievement while improving peer relations and reducing bullying victimization (Van Ryzin & Roseth, 2018).

Similar to the findings obtained by Rojas-Drummond et al. (2014), students in cooperative learning groups were found to produce higher scores on reading tests that assess higher-order reading ability compared to students in teacher-led approaches (Law, 2011). The scores were noticeably different. Students in the cooperative learning group also perceived this approach as more beneficial than students in the control group. Law (2011) explained that the cooperative learning strategy was able to produce stronger scores because group discussion enhanced intrinsic motivation. While both of these studies used cooperative learning strategies, the study by Rojas-Drummond (2014) used the Learning Together strategy, and the study by Law (2011) used the Jigsaw strategy. The results from Rojas-Drummond (2014) and Law (2011) provide additional evidence for cooperative learning strategies being beneficial regardless of the specific method used, as long as the key factors of cooperative learning (positive interdependence, accountability, interpersonal and group skills, promotive interaction, and group processing) are in place.

Given that social interaction is an inherent part of cooperative learning, a key aspect of cooperative learning includes training students in the social skills of, for example, conflict management and group decision-making (Gillies & Boyle, 2010; Laal & Laal, 2012). Students generally appreciate the opportunity to interact with their peers as it can improve relationships and allow all students to contribute, which may be particularly valuable for students who tend to feel isolated in the classroom (Baker & Clark, 2010; Igel & Urquhart, 2012). By practicing social skills, under cooperative learning conditions, important educational goals such as the development of social skills and active citizenship can be promoted.

Social Constructivist Approaches and Students with Developmental Disabilities

Hart and Whalon (2011) and Ugwuegbulam et al. (2020) suggest that cooperative learning is an effective teaching method for increasing development in both academic and non-academic domains for students with developmental disabilities. Ugwuegbulam et al. (2020) found that students with developmental disabilities who participated in cooperative learning strategies have statistically significant differences ($F_{(2,78)} = 127.29$, $p < .05$) on the Woodcock-Johnson III Mathematics Fluency Achievement Tests Scale (Woodcock et al., 2001) in comparison to students in the control group, indicating that cooperative learning is an effective method for enhancing academic achievement in mathematics. It is worth noting that students in the control group also had developmental disabilities. Similar results were obtained by Dugan et al. (1995), who explored the effects of cooperative learning on various social studies curricula in an inclusive classroom using an ABAB single-subject design. Based on their results, Dugan et al. (1995) suggested that students obtained the highest scores on the social studies test while in the treatment condition. Students also had a substantially greater level of academic engagement and higher levels of peer interaction while in the treatment condition. Their study makes a valuable contribution to the field of inclusive education, as it demonstrates how inclusive classrooms utilizing cooperative learning strategies can benefit students with and without developmental disabilities. Since the baseline condition of Dugan et al.'s study included teacher-led approaches, their results also indicate that cooperative learning may be more beneficial than teacher-led approaches such as DI/EI when attempting to increase academic achievement. However, some students with developmental disabilities may have a specific learning style that results in them learning better under a structured

and repetitive pedagogy where specific and concrete instructions are provided, such as DI/EI (Kroeger et al., 2007). Perhaps a combination of cooperative learning and DI/EI is needed to adequately meet the diverse needs of an inclusive classroom.

Results similar to Dugan et al. (1995) were obtained by Grey et al. (2007), who found that students with developmental disabilities increase their social engagement under cooperative learning conditions to a greater extent than traditional teaching conditions, while task engagement was unaffected. The finding that task engagement does not increase for students with developmental disabilities under cooperative learning conditions is also supported by results from Murphy et al. (2004). Since a lack of task engagement contributes to academic dysfunction (Morsink et al., 2021), educators may wish to consider using DI/EI when attempting to increase academic achievement and cooperative learning when striving to develop social competencies.

Across a good selection of the research, there is a general consensus that teachers of inclusive classrooms have positive perceptions of cooperative learning (Jenkins et al., 2003; Saborit et al., 2016; Strogilos et al., 2016; Völlinger & Supanc, 2020). According to Cline (2020), teachers have a positive perception of implementing cooperative learning in an inclusive classroom because of the benefits it yields for students with disabilities. In Cline's (2020) study, teachers reported that cooperative learning is particularly valuable for students with disabilities since social engagement is increased and the opportunity to collaborate with high-ability students can augment the cognitive development of students with disabilities (Cline, 2020).

To this point, an examination of the literature has revealed several ideas. Firstly, cooperative learning yields academic benefits, across diverse curriculum areas, for students with disabilities and their neurotypical peers. Additionally, students with disabilities have been shown to improve their social skills when in cooperative learning conditions. The benefits of cooperative learning for students with disabilities are also noticed by teachers, who have reported that cooperative learning enhances cognitive development and social engagement. Lastly, it is worth investigating the future of cooperative learning for students with developmental disabilities, which may not include human interaction. A study by Jimenez et al. (2017) investigated the effects of robot-led collaborative learning on children who display symptoms of developmental disabilities. The researchers created three distinct groups. In the first group, a student and the robot learned content together. In group two, a student learned material on their own. In group three, two students learned together. Each participant in the study (n = 4) took turns being in each of the three groups. Results of the study suggested that when participants were in the student-robot group, the highest learning times, which the authors define as "the rate at which the robot learned the answer and solution method of a problem when taught by the gray scale child" (Jimenez et al., 2017, p. 3), were produced. High learning time suggests that students had the highest levels of on-task behaviour when learning cooperatively with the robot. Further, the student-robot group had the highest teaching rate, meaning the robot was effectively able to assist students in "learning-by-teaching" (Jimenez et al., 2017, p. 5), whereby the student learns by teaching the robot. Lastly, students preferred learning with the robot rather than learning with another student or by themselves (Jimenez et al., 2017). These results suggest that more research is warranted to adequately assess the impact of robot-led collaborative learning on students with developmental disabilities.

It is worth mentioning that future research in the fields of inclusive education and cooperative learning could explore the role of artificial intelligence (AI). While research exploring the use of AI for students with developmental disabilities is still emerging, several authors, such

as Marino et al. (2023), have claimed that AI has already begun to disrupt the field of inclusive education. For example, in a review by Chen et al. (2022), the authors advocate for more frequent use of AI in inclusive classrooms. They claim that the ability of AI to deliver instant, personalized feedback and reinforcement and reduce feelings of anxiety proves particularly beneficial for students with developmental disabilities. Asthana and Gupta (2019) found that AI was capable of enhancing social and communication skills among students with autism. Although research examining the effects of cooperative learning and AI is relatively scarce, some studies allow for an optimistic perspective to be adopted when examining AI in the context of cooperative learning. For example, Yang et al. (2021) reported that teachers would prefer AI to suggest classroom pairings when employing cooperative learning strategies. Additionally, some teachers believe that students should engage in cooperative learning with AI, as this can promote meaningful socio-emotional interaction (Kim et al., 2022). One teacher in the Kim et al. study stated: "AI should interact educationally meaningfully with students, encourage them to overcome their difficulties and achieve the task, and motivate students" (p. 6084). Since teachers seem to express positive attitudes towards the integration of AI in cooperative learning contexts, perhaps AI will be incorporated into inclusive classrooms at the same time as instructors utilize cooperative learning strategies. Before educators fully incorporate the use of AI into their pedagogy, however, more research should be conducted that explores the academic and non-academic effects of using AI and a cooperative learning strategy in an inclusive classroom.

While it does appear that cooperative learning alone has the ability to improve academic achievement (Ugwuegbulam et al., 2020) and social skills (Grey et al., 2007) for students with developmental disabilities, the combination of both DI/EI and cooperative learning strategies, such as Jigsaw, may have a positive synergistic effect on educational outcomes. Thus, further exploration into this combination of approaches in an inclusive classroom is warranted.

Combining Direct Instruction and Social Constructivist Approaches in Inclusive Classrooms

While DI/EI may be able to increase the academic achievement of students with developmental disabilities, the schooling experience and social acceptance of students with developmental disabilities are strengthened under cooperative learning conditions (Klang et al., 2020). Many researchers believe that certain elements of DI/EI need to be incorporated when educating students with developmental disabilities; however, educators may wish to consider integrating both approaches into their practices (Al-Shammari et al., 2019; King-Sears, 1997; Voltz et al., 2001). Perhaps achievement can be augmented through the combination of these practices. For example, in a study examining the effect of DI/EI and cooperative learning in comparison to a DI/EI group and a control group, scores on reading comprehension measurements were highest in the DI/EI and cooperative learning group (Stevens et al., 1991). The DI/EI and cooperative learning group likely produced greater scores because cooperative learning allows students to provide feedback, motivate each other, and facilitate interaction regarding the re-explanation of concepts (Stevens et al., 1991), which is analogous to learning from the justly knowledgeable other in the zone of proximal development, a key component of development under the Vygotskian lens (Doolittle, 1995). Some of the most pertinent components of an inclusive classroom include the assumption that all students should actively participate, meet the needs of all students, and have a sense of belonging. According to Mengduo and Xiaoling (2010), these principles can be actualized through cooperative learning, specifically the Jigsaw method. Particular significance is being attributed to the Jigsaw method because it often outperforms other cooperative learning techniques. According

to Adams (2013), the Jigsaw method consists of ten consecutive steps, including dividing students into groups, appointing a leader for each group, dividing the lesson into segments, assigning each student to a certain segment, allowing students to familiarize themselves with their segment, creating an expert group that is comprised of one member from each initial group, allowing students to return to their initial groups, allowing students from the expert group to teach their group, observing the process as a teacher, and creating a learning assessment based on the content (Adams, 2013, pp. 70-71). Gambari and Yusuf (2017) found that the Jigsaw method improved academic achievement in a physics course to a greater extent than team-assisted individualization (Slavin, 1985) and student teams-achievement division (Slavin, 1994), two alternative cooperative learning techniques. In an inclusive classroom, Quirey (2015) determined that the Jigsaw method increased student participation more than Think-Pair-Share, which is a cooperative learning strategy that has been previously shown to increase student participation (Mundelsee & Jurkowski, 2021).

The Jigsaw method can be easily adapted for an inclusive classroom. For example, if a teacher believes that a student with disabilities is experiencing difficulties learning their assigned segment, they can assign another neurotypical student to assist them by asking probing questions or filling in missing information (Aronson, 2002). Additionally, teachers can also take key steps when establishing groups to ensure social inclusion. Goor and Schwenn (1993) suggest that teachers use a sociogram method whereby students write down the names of four peers they would like to work with. Following this, the teacher can create a social score for students based on the frequency with which their name was written down, which helps determine which students are socially isolated. Goor and Schwenn (1993) suggested that students with low scores and high scores should be grouped together, as students with high scores can more easily influence group members to be compassionate towards one another. In addition, the teacher should consider which students were selected by the students with developmental disabilities since working with a desired peer can enhance group cohesiveness and confidence (Goor & Schween, 1993). One distinguishable benefit of heterogeneous cooperative learning groups is highlighted when exploring academic achievement. Authors such as Ghanbari and Abdolrezapour (2020) and Zamani (2016) claim that grouping low-ability learners with average and high-ability learners is the most impactful grouping structure for low-ability learners on measures of academic achievement. Zamani (2016) also found that high-ability students in heterogeneous groups perform equally as well as their high-ability counterparts in homogenous groups. Therefore, cooperative learning strategies that utilize heterogeneous grouping allow for greater academic gains for low-ability students while avoiding having a negative impact on high-ability students.

When students with disabilities work in cooperative learning groups with neurotypical peers, they receive higher social acceptance and popularity ratings than when they are not in a cooperative learning setting (Piercy et al., 2002). This finding might be explained by the fact that when students work in groups, positive interactions occur when each member can make a meaningful contribution to the group, members have high levels of interpersonal contact, and the teacher provides support (Piercy et al., 2002). Therefore, when using the Jigsaw method, it is imperative that essential criteria of effective groups, such as positive interdependence and promotive interaction, are met. When developing positive interdependence, the teacher can create different roles, such as leader, editor, or encourager of participation, and assign students to these roles accordingly (Roger & Johnson, 1994). If the group is assessed on the extent to which these roles were accurately executed, this process inevitably allows all members to feel as if they made a valuable contribution to the group. This description of the Jigsaw method and the adaptations for

utilizing the method in inclusive classrooms provide a concrete basis for teachers to use social constructivist approaches in their classrooms.

Conclusion

While DI/EI may provide benefits to students with developmental disabilities, in terms of gains in academic achievement, cooperative learning can be complementary to DI/EI as it can foster social inclusion and peer acceptance. The benefits yielded by DI/EI and cooperative learning align with some of the overall goals of education, such as the development of social competence and the promotion of prosocial behaviour. If teachers are striving to ensure all students achieve the larger goals of education, then a combination of DI/EI and social constructivist practices should be seriously considered. Some teachers have a negative perception of inclusive education, partly due to a lack of intrinsic motivation to teach students with disabilities (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014) as well as the belief that students with disabilities will negatively impact the ability of neurotypical students to learn (Yilmaz & Yeganeh, 2021). Teachers' negative perceptions towards students with disabilities can be associated with lower learning outcomes for these students (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2014). However, if teachers become cognizant of the benefits derived from a combination of DI/EI and social constructivist practices, then any negative perceptions towards inclusive education may be altered, subsequently creating a healthy environment for students with disabilities to attain educational goals.

Furthermore, cooperative learning groups that are heterogeneous in nature are reported to not impair the learning ability of non-disabled students. The gains in academic achievement are equivalent in both heterogeneous and homogeneous learning groups (Wyman & Watson, 2020). Therefore, teachers should not be reluctant to use social constructivist learning strategies such as cooperative learning when educating students with diverse abilities. It is also worth repeating that students who are mainstreamed in heterogeneous cooperative learning groups tend to have stronger gains in reading comprehension and language expression relative to their counterparts in traditional classrooms (Fore III et al., 2006). The notion that cooperative learning is complementary to DI/EI has been consistently reinforced as researchers conclude that cooperative learning is at least as effective as DI/EI (Hänze & Berger, 2007) but produces additional benefits such as increased peer interaction and generalization of recently acquired skills (Gillies, 2003). If educators are interested in creating a classroom in which all students can be successful in academic and social domains, they should consider using both DI/EI and social constructivist approaches. However, further research is warranted to explore the effects of cooperative learning as well as cooperative learning along with DI/EI within an inclusive classroom. Within the past decade, there has been a scarcity of research studies specifically investigating how the combination of DI/EI and cooperative learning affects academic achievement and other non-academic measures such as social outcomes for students with developmental disabilities in inclusive classrooms.

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Making Small Talk: Support for Chinese Graduate Students

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Abstract

This article examines the level of support provided to assist international graduate students with the use of small talk to facilitate their social interaction and integration, with a specific focus on the gap between the help they need and the help they get. It is based on a larger phenomenological inquiry which examined the challenges faced by Chinese graduate students in Canada when making small talk in English as an additional language. In that study, ten participants were interviewed about their small talk experiences, including the support they expected and received from peers, faculty members, and institutions. The study was theoretically informed by the concept of community of practice, which describes how newcomers learn in naturally occurring established communities. It was found that all participants expected and wanted institutional and peer support, but their level of satisfaction with what they received varied. All four universities attended by the research participants offered services designed to help international students, but uptake was a problem. It is recommended that institutions put more effort into developing, promoting, and monitoring programs designed to support international students.

Keywords: small talk, community of practice, Chinese graduate students, support

Making Small Talk: Support for Chinese Graduate Students

The number of international students in Canada, including those from China, has been increasing in the past several years. In 2020, statistics from Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) indicated there were 530,540 international students at all levels of study in Canada, an increase of 135% since 2010. Of this population, almost 117,000 students, or 22% of the total, were from China, which ranked second only to India in the number pursuing an education in Canada (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2021). In the first eight months of 2022, more than 452,000 study permit applications and more than 135,000 study permit extensions were processed (IRCC, 2022). These statistics show that there is, and will continue to be, a large and growing number of international students in Canada.

To welcome and support these international students, it is important to examine factors which impact their academic and social success in a new learning environment. Many studies have been conducted in terms of academic, linguistic, social, and cultural challenges, as well as relevant support these students need (e.g., Aydinol, 2013; Nelson, 2018; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). Research indicates that student achievement is heavily influenced by social and academic integration (Thomas, 2012; Tinto, 1975). Social integration is generally realized through informal conversations with peers and faculty (Thomas, 2012), attending extracurricular activities (Zhou & Zhang, 2014), and interactions with members of the local community. Many international students, especially those from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, find social engagement with locals to be a challenge (Xing et al., 2020; Zhang & Beck, 2014; Zhou & Zhang, 2014).

Small talk, as a form of engagement, is a social lubricant which helps build rapport (Holmes, 2000), facilitate conversation (Laver, 1975), and make connections (Bernstein, 2013). It can serve as a critical tool enabling individuals to "break the ice" (Hargie, 2011, p. 307) and play an important role in building interpersonal connections and enabling social adjustment. For some international students, the inability to take part in spontaneous small talk is a significant social barrier.

This article explores the support services designed to assist international students when they engage in small talk in English as an additional language, with a specific focus on the gap between the help they need and the help they get. It is based on data from a study examining the challenges faced by Chinese graduate students in Canada. Ten participants were interviewed about their small talk experiences, including questions related to the support they expected and received from peers, faculty members, and institutions.

Literature Review

This review includes literature related to the definition, role, and key studies on small talk, as well as research on support for social interaction of international students. The theoretical framework, the concept of community of practice (CoP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991), is also introduced.

Small Talk

Definition

The concept of *small talk* was first introduced by Malinowski (1923), who referred to it as "phatic communion" (p. 315). It was defined as "a type of speech in which ties of union are created by mere exchanges of words", which "serves to establish bonds of personal union between people brought together by the mere need of companionship and does not serve any purpose of communicating ideas" (Malinowski, 1923, pp. 315-316). In this article, based on the views of

Holmes (2000) and Manzo (2014), small talk is defined as a discourse mechanism which extends from ritualized exchanges of greeting or departing, to social conversation about general issues, and to business or work-related communication during the transition to different topics, with a primarily phatic and relational function focused on establishing and maintaining social bonds (Xu, 2022).

Role of Small Talk

Although the term "small talk" may suggest that it is trivial and unimportant, some scholars say it is essential social grease, which can reduce awkwardness, avoid silence, and facilitate the opening, transition, and culmination of conversations (Coupland & Robinson, 1992; Cruz, 2013; Laver, 1975; Schneider, 1988), and part of a ritual that helps us connect with other people in social settings (Bernstein, 2013). Small talk is important in a whole range of social, commercial, and professional settings as it weaves the social fabric, and enacts and reinforces social roles (Roberts, 2019). The power of small talk is that it facilitates the most basic social interactions which can help create rapport between participants in a number of areas.

Studies on Small Talk

As an important component of social interaction, small talk has been studied in various social contexts. Studies have often focused on the workplace or immigrants but have rarely included international students. This review will first focus on literature related to small talk and social interaction for immigrants and non-native English speakers at workplaces and then introduce one study on international students.

Research shows that the workplace is a potential problem area for small talk among non-native English speakers (Cheng et al., 2021; Cui, 2015; Holmes, 2000, 2005; Yates & Major, 2015). For example, a study by Holmes (2000) on the challenges faced by English as Second Language (ESL) learners when making small talk at work indicates that these speakers need to have a variety of sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills. Native speakers acquire these skills through immersion in their culture and interaction with others in their community. However, ESL learners need time to develop these skills. The study suggested that successful integration for non-native speakers required learning local ways of being sociable and local norms for managing small talk.

Similarly, Yates and Major (2015) conducted a study of immigrants to Australia from non-English-speaking countries to examine their perspectives on small talk and pragmatic needs for social interaction. The most common pragmatic problems identified were the level of informality, the indirectness when giving negative comments, the capacity to understand sociability, the need to be pragmatically flexible, and the prevalence of small talk, which was noted as their greatest challenge. Cheng et al. (2021) studied English language use and communication challenges among newcomers doing entry-level jobs in Canada. The primary challenges identified were related to unfamiliar topics, problems with language, a lack of communication strategies, and personal attributes.

China has a distinctive culture from that of English-speaking countries. As a result, Chinese ESL users can have considerable problems making small talk in an English-speaking context. Cui (2015) examined the underlying sociocultural reasons for challenges faced by Chinese immigrants in Australia when making small talk with their non-immigrant colleagues at work and found that these immigrants were not well equipped to make small talk in English in the workplace. The major causes of problems were discrepancies in beliefs and values about the nature of personal

identity and interpersonal relationships, as well as how relationships beyond the intimate circle should best be managed.

In addition to the studies on small talk at workplaces and about immigrants, Xu (2022) investigated the challenges faced by Chinese graduate students when making small talk at Canadian universities. Her study affirmed that all study participants encountered challenges in their first years in Canada. While some quickly overcame many of the challenges, others continued to struggle after several years. Results showed that the most challenging issues were related to comprehension, participation, initiative, confidence, social connections, and propriety. There were many direct or indirect causes for these challenges, but most were related to language proficiency, cultural differences, and personal attributes.

In summary, studies on small talk among immigrants, ESL learners, and international students in workplaces and universities indicate it is an imperative part of social communication, interaction, and integration. Making small talk is especially difficult for those who do not speak English as their first language because it is influenced by various factors, including but not limited to language proficiency levels, different cultural norms, personal attributes, familiarity with topical knowledge, and common ground.

Social Interactions of International Students

International students encounter many challenges related to social interaction and integration, especially in the first years of their studies. The major issues include language proficiency, cultural differences, availability of opportunities for interaction, and an inability to make social connections with local people (e.g., Aydinol, 2013; Nelson, 2018; Xu, 2022; Zhou & Zhang, 2014). Zhou and Zhang (2014) claimed that first-year international students had problems with social integration due to a lack of meaningful interaction and relationships with local students or instructors. Correspondingly, Aydinol (2013) found it was challenging for international students to make friends and maintain relationships in a new learning environment and culture due to their substandard English skills and confusion about cultural and social norms. Elturki et al. (2019) also noted that international students had trouble making friends and interacting with domestic students due to language and cultural barriers. As a result, closer relationships were developed with people from their own culture or with other international students because they shared more commonalities.

Chinese international students also face significant challenges with social interaction. Zhang and Zhou (2010) investigated the perspectives, expectations, and experiences of Chinese international students at a Canadian university and explored the possible causes of challenges they confronted. The findings indicated that friendship with native English speakers was positively correlated with both their satisfaction with the learning experience and their confidence in completing the program successfully. The study also determined that language, their English-speaking skill in particular, was a major cause of the challenges they faced, and developing close friendships with local and other international students was difficult because common topics of conversation were hard to find due to different cultural backgrounds. Similarly, a study in the UK conducted by Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) also indicated that social interaction with British locals was challenging for Chinese international students because of different values and a lack of common ground. As a result, they only built social networks with co-national friends who they believed could provide more emotional support and practical help.

To sum up, research on Chinese international students shows that problems with social interaction and integration are caused by issues such as language and a lack of cultural and social awareness, especially in their early years of study (Zhang & Beck, 2014; Zhang & Zhou, 2010). Although international students can make substantial efforts to integrate within their new communities, these problems make it difficult to develop and maintain close friendships with people from the host countries. It is evident from current research that support is needed for international students to have satisfying educational experiences.

Social Support for International Students

International students encounter many academic and social challenges. For some, social challenges are a greater concern than academic difficulties, or at least have a similar impact on their adaptation to the new learning environment (Bartram, 2007; Nelson, 2018; Wilcox et al., 2005; Xu, 2023). Therefore, it is important for host institutions to provide support for students, especially for new international students, in response to these challenges. Some studies on social support for international students indicated it was as important as academic support for these students (Kojima, 2020; Wilcox et al., 2005).

Social support for international students has been addressed in several studies. Jabeen et al. (2019) reviewed 87 empirical studies from 2008 to 2018 on international students in English-medium universities and developed three major themes: academic engagement, academic socialization, and social integration. With respect to social integration, social networks and social support are the main factors influencing the acculturation and academic success of these students.

Studies have identified various types of social support for international students based on different functions or purposes. Le's (2023) research identified four types of support that could help relieve stress associated with acculturation: esteem, instrumental, informational, and social companionship support from faculty members and peers. Chavajay (2013) examined the perceived social support for international students at a US university and found that international students mainly received instrumental support from local Americans and socio-emotional support from other international students. Ong and Ward (2005) also found that international students and workers mainly sought emotional, spiritual, and psychological support from family or friends in their home countries while obtaining instrumental and informational support from local residents in the host country.

Peer support for international students has been found to be especially important and has been investigated by a number of scholars. A systemic review by Lorenzetti et al. (2019) of 45 articles on peer mentoring programs for graduate students published from 1988 to 2016 identified four domains of learning related to these programs: academic, psychological, social, and career. Most studies of the social domain were positive about the effect of peer mentoring as a way for graduate students to expand professional networks, improve interpersonal skills, and develop a sense of community or shared purpose. In a typical study, Grant-Vallone and Ensher (2000) examined peer mentoring programs for graduate students and made suggestions to ensure better support for international students, including mentor-mentee matching strategies, early orientation sessions, regular activities, and training and rewards for mentors.

Studies have also been conducted to explore how institutions can provide other forms of support. For example, Nelson's (2018) action research project focused on institutional support for international students in a Canadian college in Saskatchewan. The research found that international students were more concerned with social opportunities than academics; they believed making

friends and establishing social connections could reduce homesickness and promote cultural adaptation. The study made several recommendations: increase communication with these students, promote participation in orientation, improve communication and community-building through social media, create more opportunities for international and domestic students to socialize, and provide language support.

To conclude, studies on social support have primarily focused on the help international students receive to adapt socially to their new learning environment. Support can come from peers and members of the local community, institutions, and others from their home countries. Many forms of support were instrumental or informational, such as orientations and language support programs, while others have more comprehensive functions, such as peer support and mentorship programs. No literature has been found regarding specific support to help with small talk.

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically informed by the concept of *community of practice* (CoP) proposed by Lave and Wenger (1991), which is defined as "groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 4). The concept of a CoP is an application of Vygotsky's theories related to learning and action; the focus is on how a group shapes the practices of an individual through various formal and informal situations (Swain et al., 2015). Lave and Wenger (1991) used this concept to describe how novices learn in naturally occurring, established communities of experts; for example, someone learning a skill or trade through apprenticeship.

Wenger (1998) noted that "learning is a fundamentally social phenomenon" (p. 3) and suggested one should "place learning in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world" (p. 3). Participation of the learners is seen as the process of becoming active members in "the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities" (p. 4). In these communities, newcomers may encounter certain barriers on their way to full acceptance, especially when they interact with longer-term members of the group, and find they need assistance or guidance to help them integrate.

The concept of CoP has developed greatly since its inception. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2017) claimed that there were three phases in its development, and the focus has expanded from participation in practice for meaningful learning, to learning partnerships, and then to learning within and across boundaries of practices and communities. In their view, learning happens at any time, anywhere, and in any practice; therefore, there are many communities and practices "in which we cannot claim membership or competence" (p. viii). Based on this understanding, CoPs can be defined as any communities where members participate in and contribute to the evolution of a shared practice. They can take various forms; some are formally organized, but others are informal and even invisible (Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner, 2015).

In an article studying communication among construction workers in New Zealand, Holmes and Woodhams (2013) found that to be accepted as members of a CoP, an individual must understand and respond appropriately to various discursive and linguistic elements and comprehend the more nuanced and subtle interaction norms, such as acceptable topics, and quantities and depth of small talk. When international students first attend universities in Canada, they face unfamiliar social and cultural environments and have many uncertainties about social behaviour. By participating in and forming their own CoPs, they can identify cultural differences

and learn proper protocols for social and academic interaction (Montgomery & McDowell, 2009). In an article on the role of peer assisted study sessions in a UK based educational institution, Chivers (2016) used the basic themes of CoP - community, practice, and participation, to study peer support for international students and found that these support sessions formed intermediary CoPs, providing transition to larger CoPs related to academic courses and university community.

Methodology

This research project used phenomenology as its methodological approach. Phenomenology is a qualitative methodology "in search of the essence of lived experience" (Patton, 2014, p.190), which can be used to grasp "the very nature of the thing" (van Manen, 1990, p. 177) from the viewpoints of those who have experienced the phenomenon. The best problems for this approach are those that require an understanding of the shared experiences of a phenomenon by several individuals (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A phenomenological design was appropriate for this study because it explored the lived experiences of Chinese students making small talk with peers, instructors, and other individuals in Canadian communities; specifically, how these individuals "perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it" (Patton, 2014, p. 190).

Ten participants were interviewed and asked about their experiences making small talk and establishing social connections, and about the support they received and expected from their academic institutions and elsewhere. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the interview transcripts and develop categories and themes related to the support expected and received.

Recruitment

After research ethics approval was obtained, a recruitment poster was distributed through various *WeChat* groups (a messaging application popular among Chinese international students) in different universities in Canada to attract potential interview participants. Interested individuals were asked to contact the researcher and those who met the requirements of the study, and provided signed consent, were invited to take part. In total, ten interview participants from four universities in Canada were recruited.

Participants

Chinese graduate students in Canadian universities were the target population for participants in this project. This population included both international graduate students (born and educated in China, and in Canada with a study permit) and immigrant graduate students (also born and educated in China, and in Canada as permanent residents) (Zang, 2007). These students were selected as the research cohort because they were required to demonstrate their language proficiency before admission to graduate school. In addition, graduate students are usually mature enough to have the interpersonal skills and competence to make small talk with classmates, instructors, and others in the wider community.

The original requirements for participants were as follows: self-identified as a Chinese international or immigrant graduate student; received their K-12 and/or undergraduate education in China; currently enrolled in a graduate program at a Canadian university. During the data collection process, it became apparent that, due to COVID-19 restrictions, almost all students enrolled in 2020 had classes online, and many had never been to Canada. As a result, the data lacked input from students with in-person classroom experiences. Therefore, when two recent graduates showed interest, the recruitment criteria were expanded to include those who had

completed a graduate program within the past year. Table 1 shows participant program information and time in Canada.

Table 1

Information about Participants

Participants	Program	Year in the Program	Year Coming to Canada
1	Master's	1st	2013
2	PhD	3rd	2016
3	Master's	1st	2021
4	PhD	2nd	2020
5	Master's	1st	2016
6	Master's	Graduated	2018
7	Master's	2nd	2019
8	PhD	2nd	2016
9	Master's	Graduated	2019
10	PhD	4th	2017

Data Collection

Effective data collection instruments for phenomenological studies on social communication and interaction include in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (Orbe, 1998). Patton (2014) indicates that a variety of data collection methods can reveal different aspects of empirical reality and social perception, and combinations of interviews, observations, and document analysis are expected in most fieldwork.

In this project, data were collected from semi-structured individual interviews with the selected Chinese students conducted through Zoom meetings. Semi-structured interviews were utilized because they provide the necessary flexibility for capturing voices and experiences (Rabionet, 2011). One-on-one interviews allow participants to focus on their own experiences, and free them from the influence of others, as personal experiences can contain information that people may withhold in a more public context (Morgan et al., 2013).

During the interviews, individuals were asked general questions about their experiences as graduate students; the focus was on their feelings and ideas, and successful and unsuccessful experiences, related to engaging in small talk with native English speakers. Some examples of interview questions were: Could you please describe some situations when you had problems making small talk with native English-speaking people at your university? What strategies do you think can help those who have problems making small talk with native English speakers? Have you received any support in terms of social interaction or small talk from others? With permission, interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were then sent back to each participant to review and confirm.

Data Analysis

Based on the work of Moustakas (1994) and others, Creswell and Poth (2018) state that phenomenological data analysis will "generate themes from the analysis of significant statements" (p. 79). The data analysis steps are: first, "go through the data and highlight significant statements,

sentences, or quotes that provide an understanding of how the participants experienced the phenomenon" (p. 79); this process is called horizontalization as every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question is regarded as having equal value (Moustakas, 1994). Second, use clusters of meaning from these significant statements to form relevant themes.

The interview transcripts were imported to *NVivo*, a qualitative data analysis software package, and scrutinized to locate words, phrases, and sentences related to expected or received support. These quotes were then highlighted and classified using thematic analysis to develop relevant themes.

Findings

The analysis identified themes regarding the support offered by the universities and the support expected and received by the participants.

Support Offered by the Universities

All four universities attended by the study participants provide services to help international students, such as orientations, extracurricular activities, mentor-mentee and buddy programs, conversational circles, graduate student gatherings, and other events organized by student clubs. A review of websites targeting international students at these universities reveals many of these programs, as well as cultural awareness training, counselling services, and so forth. These programs were intended to improve oral English, create opportunities for social contact, provide individualized help, promote intercultural communicative skills, and offer professional aid when mental or other issues arise.

Support Expected by the Participants

All participants expected institutional and peer support, but their level of satisfaction with the provided support varied. They all felt that social engagement with those more experienced and familiar with the community could help them gain comfort and confidence when taking part in social interactions.

One participant (P 3) noted, "I know I was cared [for] by the faculty, the community, the school, but I feel like [I was] not that connected to them. I know they are caring about me but I just [felt] kind of lost" (Transcript from P 3). This participant wished for opportunities in which international students could connect and develop a sense of belonging:

I talked to people, they also feel like they they're kind of lost, especially international students. So, I feel … the faculty… can tie us together. [We] don't have to be the community that big … but just feel like we belong somewhere. It's really important for me… [to have] a sense of belonging … people can share their similar feelings. (Transcript from P 3)

This participant expected organized activities or regular meetings for the students, so those who shared similar academic experiences and backgrounds could build a community which would help to reduce loneliness and feelings of isolation.

P 3 also felt there should be a clear statement of responsibilities for those providing a service. With respect to the group mentorship program:

[when there are] more people in a similar position, people tend to not be super responsible… if I'm the only mentor responsible for these two, if I'm not reaching out to

them … we will lose the connection. But when some other people are with me doing a similar job… I will consider, like, if I'm not doing it, someone else will do it. (Transcript from P 3)

The suggestion was that there should be more supervision over these programs. "I feel like probably some of the administration or school board in the faculty and the university need someone to manage the mentorship to ensure that it really is ongoing" (Transcript from P 3).

Another participant (P 2) emphasized the importance of learning communicative skills and suggested ESL programs offered by Canadian universities should incorporate content on social integration and other social skills, including how to make small talk with locals. One possible teaching method could be to create some simulated situations and invite international and local students to act them out:

I feel the ESL program here in Canada … should have a course about social integration or something about social skills, like how to make small talk with local people...I definitely think that component is essential to international students. They create some sort of like drama classes, they can create a situation and ask international students to act, they can invite some local students to create that sort of situation, the setting, and act in that situation and how you interact with that person when you are waiting for the elevator. Teachers can even tape the whole conversation and then replay the video and evaluate. The teacher may say 'Here, notice that? She is not interested. Look at her eyes, look at her facial expressions.' You can catch that part. (Transcript from P 2)

This program, as suggested by P 2, could help students recognize the subtle nuances that may make a difference in their ability to communicate effectively.

Support Received by the Participants

Although the universities all offer services to help international students, study participants indicated that uptake was a problem. Several said they seldom participated in order to avoid unnecessary distractions from their studies, and some were too nervous to put themselves in a position where they might have to make small talk with others. For example, Participant 7 said the following:

Sometimes I go to those events, not very often, I am always busy with my assignments … Every time when we have classes or any activities, I will go there right on time, just to avoid social interaction, because it really made me very embarrassed, I don't know what to say when other people are talking around…I don't even want to participate in any extracurricular activities because of this problem. (Transcript from P 7)

Although a variety of events and services were offered, experiences varied greatly, ranging from very beneficial to not helpful at all. Experiences with the mentor-mentee or buddy system provide an example.

In all four universities, new students are paired with peers who are in their second or third year of study. One participant (P 8) said this was really wonderful. In this particular case, the mentor and mentee had biweekly meetings online for more than one year and they eventually became good friends. The mentor provided meaningful support and was a trusted insider whenever the mentee had problems:

I should be thankful that I signed up for the mentor and mentee program when I first started, so I am still having this biweekly meeting with my mentor. [If] not for her, I will have zero [opportunities for small talk in English with local Canadians] …With my mentor, we talked about so many things. … So I have no problems making small talk with my mentor. That is actually a rare case, because you see we have known each other for over a year now and we meet regularly, and that's the basis for friendship and all kinds of closer relationships, right? And I just get more comfortable talking with her. (Transcript from P 8).

Other participants, however, did not find the program helpful. They only had one or two email exchanges or meetings and then forgot about each other. P 3 did not have a positive support experience:

I know we have [a] mentor, but I feel like they are not working positively or they're not working frequently. I guess I do have a mentor, but I only have one one-on-one talk. And that is all…She asked if I need any help, but I think sometimes …as a stranger … not every person wants to say that they need help. (Transcript from P 3)

This participant had hoped that the mentor could reach out to mentees to build personal connections and preferred not to impose on strangers when there were problems. P 3 felt that frequent meetings were a must to develop the feeling that the person really cares. "If I would be the mentor, I think I will organize, like frequent meetings, some ice-breaking games or sharing, probably just 30 minutes a month and I think it will just feel like you were cared [for] by the real person" (Transcript from P 3).

P 6 was also not too optimistic about the positive role of the mentor-mentee system:

You can pair international students with a mentor, like pair a student with a more mature student who has more experience, probably an assistant role in the school or just a senior student... But I don't think the program works so well…I guess people may see a positive result … not everyone can benefit from that. (Transcript from P 6)

Although there are some positive comments, it is clear that not everyone was able to benefit from a program of this nature, especially if the institution does not seem to take an active role in supervision.

In short, these five participants all expected specific supports tied to their needs and hoped that the institutions would reach out to make information and support programs more accessible. Although varying levels of support designed to help with social interaction were provided, the effectiveness and uptake of the services varied.

Discussion

This section will outline the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and previous literature and list some implications for institutions regarding student support programs. In addition, suggestions for future research will be provided, and the significance and limitations of the current study will be considered.

Community of Practice

Wenger (1998) notes that "learning is a fundamentally social phenomenon" and suggests one should "place learning in the context of our lived experience of participation in the world" (p. 3). The participation of the learners is seen as the process of becoming active members in "the practices of social communities and constructing identities in relation to these communities" (p.

4). Montgomery and McDowell (2009) state that the social groups formed by international students resembled CoPs as both have shared aims and interests. Several participants highlighted the importance of community during their interviews when talking about how they developed or could have developed confidence and comfort in making small talk with others. The interviews also revealed that many challenges related to cultural differences and the use of language in real-life situations could be resolved by ongoing exposure to social interaction; participants suggested or implied that Chinese students can improve their ability to make small talk by participating in CoPs.

Some participants benefited from forming or becoming members of various CoPs. Several gave examples where they or their friends joined religious groups, sports organizations, and writing clubs, or took part in other leisure activities such as hiking and dancing. In these groups, newcomers get two kinds of help from old-timers: they learn skills related to the chosen activity, and they benefit from personal interaction. There is no evidence of existing CoPs which specifically focus on the topic of small talk. Although taking part in certain activities and groups can be regarded as joining pre-existing CoPs, within these formal communities, participants are also learning how to communicate and socialize from others, and in this sense it can be said they are developing informal or emerging CoPs. This is consistent with Chilvers (2016), who outlined the importance of peer support sessions as CoPs to facilitate social integration, establish friendships, and increase the sense of belonging to the new learning community for international students.

However, some participants, who felt they lacked these experiences, expressed their expectation that institutions should create CoPs for students to feel a part of. If, as Holmes and Woodhams (2013) indicate, one needs to be able to understand social norms and respond appropriately to nuanced interactions to be accepted as a CoP member, one wonders when these subtle rules can be learned. Kojima (2020) and Nagao (2018) suggest establishing CoP-like classrooms or communities to help international students increase their sense of belonging and inclusion. Therefore, the results of this research suggest that international students who find themselves challenged by casual social interaction with locals should turn to various CoPs as a viable solution.

Implications for Institutions

Based on these findings, the following recommendations for institutions and student service centers in universities are proposed:

First, institutions should do more to promote and publicize services offered to international students and make it easier to access information about programs, events, and other activities. Some participants, who focused mainly on their studies, said that they would like to attend these events, but they were often not aware of their existence. As one participant mentioned, students are often overwhelmed with course work and assignments, so they may not have time to look for these events, but if they know they are available, they would like to take part.

Second, more opportunities should be created for frequent social contact among all students. The literature shows that making connections with members of the local community has been an ongoing challenge for international students (Nelson, 2018). Many participants indicated they rarely had occasion to interact socially with others outside their immediate circle. Without opportunities for contact and shared experiences, it is difficult to make friends, so organized activities that can attract students from all backgrounds with common interests can lead to personal connections.

Third, there should be ongoing guidance and supervision for those providing the support services to international students. Volunteers in these programs do so with good intentions, but they may not be aware of the problems faced by international students and, as a result, do not know how they can really help. Training should be provided so that appropriate levels of support are available, and there must be regulations or guidelines about what they can and cannot do.

Finally, courses or workshops covering cross-cultural awareness and communication skills can help international students learn more about the social, political, and cultural aspects of Canada, and help local students learn more about some of the social challenges which confront international students.

Limitations and Areas for Future Research

Although every participant made mention of the social support that they received or desired, it was not the focus of the broader study. In a study more directly related to support for international students, specific questions could be used to gather details about the support they need in response to the challenges they face. It would also be helpful to explore how specific support programs offered by institutions are perceived and received by international students, and how effective the programs are at enhancing comfort and confidence with communication and with providing opportunities to make connections in the community.

In addition, most social support programs expect international students to proactively take advantage of available resources. However, the evidence in this study revealed that some participants were not comfortable asking for help because they lacked the confidence to use English, and some tried to avoid all interactions because they could not manage small talk. Therefore, further research could examine ways that support programs can reach and engage students who have low English language proficiency and who hesitate to engage socially.

Finally, this article discusses the issue of support from the perspectives of ten Chinese graduate students. To have a more comprehensive understanding of the issue, it would also be important to interview relevant coordinators and administrators of the various institutions.

Significance

It is hoped that the findings of this small study will provide useful information about available support for non-English-speaking students who are planning to attend or are currently enrolled in universities in Canada. Educational institutions can also benefit from learning more about student expectations and from feedback on services provided. Finally, perhaps this brief report will encourage further research on the effectiveness of social support programs for international students and immigrants, who are becoming a growing segment of the population in this country.

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A Review of Ibrahim, A., Kitossa, T., Smith, M. & Wright, H. (2022). *Nuances of Blackness in the Canadian Academy: Teaching, Learning, and Researching while Black.*

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The edited book, *Nuances of Blackness in the Canadian Academy*, by Awad Ibrahim, Tamari Kitossa, Malinda S. Smith, and Handel K. Wright, is made up of twenty-two chapters, each written by different authors who share experiences and insights of Black life in teaching, learning, and researching in the academy. The essays in this collection showcase narratives and accounts of how Blackness shapes scholarly life in the Canadian academy, as well as implications for Black communities that hitherto, have not been highlighted in such a rich examination of interconnected themes. The book offers stories about what transpires when working, teaching, learning, and even researching while being Black, thus exposing the various reactions and actions Black people have faced when they enter academia at different levels. The major ideas of the book have to do with exposing and confronting the concept of Blackness through a White mentality, especially the dehumanization of Blackness. The book is subdivided into four parts, each with its own focus, namely *Blackness: What's in a Name; Blackness and Academic Pathways; Blackness: A Complicated Canadian Conversation;* and *Black Pasts, Black Futurity.*

In Part One of the book (*Blackness: What's in a Name)*, the reader is introduced to the concept of Blackness and why its study is critically important at this time. Blackness is defined as being entangled with concepts of history, freedom, liberation, colonialism, and imperialism; it is more complex and nuanced than one essentialized identity. Instead, Blackness is about the humanity of a people, a people denied and deprived of the opportunity to excel in all endeavors. In addition, the book examines the totality of the human who refuses to give in to the embedded racism of White stereotypical perspectives. Blackness is conceived not just as a colour but can be observed in action and resilience in a culture of Whiteness, and must be realized only in recognition of Africa and Africanness (p. 21), from where all Blackness evolved.

Also in Part One, the authors emphasize the importance of the study of Blackness because Blackness has to do with survival, which is the ability to stand and remain standing despite all the adversities that have come and could still come. This means standing in the midst of struggles. As the book explores, Immanuel Kant, a philosopher, associated Blacks with a lack of intelligence (p. 67), and this has contributed in part to why African-Canadian academics are still being misrecognized, and even further subjected to suspicions about their professional capacities and their ethical qualities. The authors argue that Blacks in Canadian academy always feel inadequate and under surveillance and scrutiny. This situation is even worse for Black females in the academy, for the simple fact that they are female.

In Part Two of the collection (*Blackness and Academic Pathways)*, the authors delve deeper into Blackness in the Canadian academy to discuss the challenges that Black academics face in Canada in terms of contestations and contradictions. For example, chapters in this part explore structures and systems that are in place to deal with issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion, often operating in principle, but, in reality, a lot of brazen inequalities remain in academic institutions and environments. Furthermore, this part deals with the underrepresentation of Blacks in the academy. Wisdom J. Teetey, the Part Two Commentary author, asserts after much study that "the Black presence within the Canadian academy was woefully inadequate" (p. 121). The book further states that the few Blacks who have reached a higher-ranking position within the hierarchy of the

academy often still feel marginalized, and are faced with barriers that limit their further progress in terms of appointments, promotions, and even nominations to positions in the academy. While the onus is placed on the institution of the academy to look into and revise policies and systems that support such discrimination, the idea of common purpose for all Black academics and the building of alliances is encouraged to ensure that Black colleagues find support and succor in one another.

The various forms of ongoing dehumanization are the main thrust of Part Three (*Blackness: A Complicated Canadian Conversation*) in this book. Questions that Black academics face while on their job are investigated. For example, the authors in this part discuss some of the questions posed to them that are perceived as being ridiculous and invasive and thought to be asked simply because they are Black, and often to subjugate Blacks by Whites into one generalized objectification of the 'other'. The idea of trying to fit into the stereotypical prototype expected of Blacks is analyzed, as are the diverse expectations placed on them, including the expectation that they will think and behave in a certain way or manner. Encouraging observations made in this part of the book include the emergence of communities of Black academics that help to cushion the effects of interrogations made on minoritized bodies and the anti-racism that is faced. In this part, it is further highlighted that the Black community could be considered a family that can assist and encourage one another. Academics are encouraged to be part of such communities, wherever they find themselves.

Part Four (*Black Pasts, Black Futurity),* the final section of the book, forms a bridge between the past and the future regarding Black academics. The authors emphasize speaking up about the past while speculating on what might be done in the future in educational institutions to ensure an end to inequality so that Blacks feel included in the academy. The authors in this part express the opinion that issues of inequality and discrimination against Blacks, such as racist attacks and racism, are well-known by university administrators, yet nothing seems to have been done to remedy the situation. In Chapter 19, it is stated that "institutional whiteness is produced or reproduced when people know that they won't be challenged on their action: they know they can get away with it" (Kelly, p. 396). The authors in this concluding section argue for putting an end to inequality and discrimination in Canadian institutions. Institutional change, however, happens too slowly, so the authors argue for addressing past suffering by rising up into action. For example, suggestions are offered for Black academics to speak up and refuse to remain silent, rather than be silenced. By recognizing the pain and denial experienced by Black people, the authors in this part encourage them to channel energies into defining their existence through the positive actions of teaching, learning, and research.

This book is a great resource and source of encouragement for Black academics in Canada specifically, and in the world in general. The book's message resonates with the struggles of Blacks, not only in the academy but in every sphere of society. The book emphasizes that no Black academic should believe that they are going through a unique and peculiar experience, but instead, they should be aware that Black people suffer universally. At the same time, each Black academic experience contributes to a more nuanced understanding of Blackness. This book helps expose ongoing dehumanization of Blackness in the subtleties of ongoing White colonial aspirations in the Canadian academy. Within the pages of this book, solutions and remedies are proffered for situations in which Black academics encounter hostilities and inequalities in the line of their duties. The book is expository, aiming to open up issues faced by Black academics that have long been neglected and blatantly ignored.

In looking at all forms of Black academics— whether they are scholars, researchers, teachers, or even departmental chairs— this book is comprehensive. The constant and continuous struggle in the exclusion of Blacks is expressly highlighted in the book, as it serves as a source of encouragement to Black academics regarding their survival, resilience, and refusal to back down. Examples are provided of people who have excelled in their chosen field in the academic system. Drawing on the dynamics of interrelated communities, the authors across the chapters of this book emphasize Black futurities emerging from this united force, while also recommending practical survival techniques and strategies to flourish in the midst of ongoing anti-Black racism. The book encourages Black people to speak out and not die in silence or inactivity.

The book is well-researched and well-written, particularly because it comes from the perspectives of various authors and researchers. The editors of the book aim to make everyone, especially academics, begin to look inward by asking themselves if they are contributing to the discrimination being faced by Blacks. The aim is also to encourage institutions to review their policies, structures, and systems to make concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion more real in academic institutions. In my view, the aims and objectives of the authors of this book regarding complexifying and sharing Black experience in the academy have been achieved. I highly recommend this book, not only to Black academics in Canada and globally but also to all White academics. It has the potential to evoke in readers awareness and feelings that otherwise may have been dormant or silent in their hearts. The collection is a must read for anyone who desires to understand what Black academics are facing in the dominant White Canadian academy. The popular expression that 'change begins with me' is quite apt, as everyone is encouraged to look inward and make that change.

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Ashlee Sandiford, a Master's student at the University of Regina, is passionately engaged in examining pedagogy through an anti-racist and anti-oppressive perspective. With extensive teaching experience spanning high school and middle years, Ashlee is committed to challenging social constructs within education. Outside of her academic pursuits, Ashlee embraces an active lifestyle and contributes as an assistant coach for the University of Regina Cougars women's volleyball team.

Hui (Shelley) Xu is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina. Her research explores the intricate dynamics of social interaction and integration of international students in Canada, with a goal of cultivating inclusive learning environments. Hui possesses a rich academic background, having completed a Master's Degree in Applied Linguistics at Northwest University in China and an MEd at Queen's University in Canada. This foundation, together with many years of experience teaching English language learners, gives her a unique research perspective.