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***in education* Volume 29, Number 2, 2024 Spring/Summer**

Editorial

Valerie Triggs and Kathleen Nolan, *University of Regina*

This issue of *in education* spotlights important connections between educational practices and the shaping of sociocultural identities and matters of well-being as these relate to K-12 students, postsecondary students, teachers, teacher educators, and parents. A common ethics of relationality with self and other runs through this collection of diverse research texts that explore educational capacities to disrupt and challenge dominant or standardized structures of Euro-Western perspectives.

Through research articles, a knowledge synthesis study, an essay, and a book review, we are called, in this issue, to re-examine: current knowledge regarding the experiences of loneliness and belonging in Canadian school contexts; how standards, accountability, and high-stakes testing in K-12 classrooms redefine teaching and learning and the meaning of homework for teachers, students, and parents; possibilities for how centering a social justice lens to identity development and well-being in FSL teacher education programs in Canada may result in long term teacher retention; endeavours to enhance critical cultural and intercultural competence in teacher education programs in Denmark; ways forward in Indigenizing elementary school mathematics in Treaty 6 Saskatchewan; the significance of compassionate care for students in post-secondary settings; and the need for increased attention towards the well-being of students and educators. We are confident that the scholarly contributions in this issue will engage the reader in critical reflection on research grounded in well-being, relationality, and ethics for school-based professionals and students.

The first article in this issue, written by **Thomas Falkenberg and Rebeca Heringer**, reports on a knowledge synthesis study of Canadian K-12 students' senses of loneliness and belonging. Through a scoping literature review, they identify thematic clusters of findings regarding students' lived experiences. Their synthesis of current knowledge makes visible the structural factors that compound effects of loneliness and the school educational policies and practices that foster students' sense of belonging.

Carolyn Clarke examines the ways in which standards and accountability through wide-scale testing reshape the nature of teaching, learning, and homework, and extend control over families' lives and social identities in Newfoundland and Labrador. Using Foucault's notions of the ways in which discourses construct and define reality, Clarke undertook case studies of the homework practices of Grade 3 children and the experiences of their families to reveal the ways in which responsibilities for test performance move from teacher to family, reconstructing children's primary skills as individualistic test-takers.

In a consideration of long-term French Language teacher retention in Canada, **Mimi Masson, Alaa Azan and Amanda Battistuzzi** investigate the connections between teacher preparation models and their proposed necessity to develop teacher identities through a social justice lens. Their concern is for the ongoing construction of a critical intercultural competence in relation to the connection of teacher self-identity and language-learning, leading in time to an enhanced sense of well-being.

Also interested in cultural competence, **Artëm Ingmar Benediktsson** reports on a Danish study that explores the ways in which teacher educators' endeavours to enhance students' cultural competence emphasize a need for systemic changes that will enable a shift to a more critical

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multicultural approach. Benediktsson argues for greater institutional accountability in augmenting a cultural competence that moves beyond fixed stereotypes and generalizations, and toward creating space for critical discussion. According to this author, an emphasis on togetherness will foster a sense of community and unity amidst diversity. In alignment with other papers in this issue, Benediktsson challenges discriminatory discourses and a reliance on monocultural orientations that ignore social justice and equity.

Stavros Georgios Stavrou and M. Shaun Murphy write from Treaty 6 territory in Saskatchewan. Using a narrative inquiry approach, they investigate teachers' understandings of Indigenizing elementary school mathematics. While acknowledging the plurality of ways that Indigenization is taken up, they articulate their own interpretation as a specific contextual process which is a Cree Indigenization. Ethical relationality is key to their place-based education (PBE) perspective. The authors emphasize the importance of human relationship to place by bringing historical, social, and cultural realities to the fore. Difficulties and successes regarding PBE and its connection to Indigenization and school mathematics are discussed in relation to the Cree identities of the teachers in this research project.

Challenging the absence of care and compassion in the fast-paced world of academia and post-secondary institutions, **María J. Pighini** draws on a feminist ethics of care and a pedagogy of listening to argue for a compassionate approach to working with graduate education students. In her essay contribution, Pighini explains this approach as an act of resistance. Beginning with challenging the early exclusionary stages of application and selection processes and then moving into addressing the vulnerabilities of student detachment from communities and structures that have nurtured them to this point, the author offers insight into the benefits of relational principles of care that involve active listening, walking alongside students, and the creation of cohorts to support feelings of belonging, rather than loneliness.

Finally, to close out this issue in a manner that bookends the opening of the issue with Falkenberg and Heringer's article, **Heather Phipps** contributes a book review of Thomas Falkenberg's 2024 edited collection, *Well-Being and Well-Becoming in Schools*, published by University of Toronto Press. Phipps shares how this edited book argues for the heart of education to be the flourishing and holistic well-being of all learners and educators. The book contributors draw from a variety of theoretical perspectives, both Indigenous and Western, to connect well-being and well-becoming to social and ecological justice for all.

Acknowledgements

We thank PhD student Nadiya Ekhteraeetoussi for her thoughtful and energetic copyediting work with this journal during the 2023/2024 season. We wish her much success as she continues her studies in the PhD program at the University of Regina.

We also extend deep appreciation to all those who served as peer reviewers for the articles in this issue, several of whom work within our own Faculty of Education. These scholars stepped forward to review and re-review on often very short timelines. They, along with the authors in this issue, demonstrated support and forbearance during our transition into this role as editors-in-chief. Since the journal experienced an extended period of time in 2023 without an editor-in-chief, several manuscripts have been in the journal system for well over a year. Yet, as one author shared, they were happy to wait with patience for the opportunity to publish in this well-respected Canadian education journal. We extend our sincere thanks to everyone involved for their support and patience!

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Loneliness and Belonging in Canadian Schools: A Knowledge Synthesis Study

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Abstract

This article reports on a knowledge synthesis study of three questions around Canadian K-12 students' sense of loneliness and belonging: What are the lived experiences of Canadian students with loneliness and belonging? What factors contribute to students' sense of loneliness and belonging in Canadian school contexts? What school educational practices and policies foster a sense of belonging in students in Canada? Utilizing a scoping review approach, the study synthesizes published knowledge on these three questions from scholarly peer-reviewed publications and documents published by Canadian educational organizations, provincial governments, and school board associations.

Keywords: loneliness, belonging, well-being, students, K-12 schools, Canada

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Loneliness and Belonging in Canadian Schools: A Knowledge Synthesis Study

Over the last twenty years, there has been an increasing interest in, and concern for, student well-being within the Canadian context (Cherkowski & Walker, 2018; Falkenberg, 2024) and around the world (White, 2011). This interest and concern are often focused on the declining mental health of students (Reupert, 2020), but it is also driven by an increasing interest in making student well-being (part of) the central purpose of school education (Brighouse, 2006). For many scholars, this interest is coupled with the additional concern for unequal provisions of opportunities and educational outcomes for students with different demographic characteristics to thrive in school (Krepski, 2024). This article focuses on one important aspect of this interest and concern, namely students' sense of loneliness and belonging.

The World Health Organization (WHO) has recognized that "social isolation and loneliness are important, yet neglected, social determinants for people of all ages" and that "social isolation and loneliness are widespread, with an estimated 1 in 4 older people experiencing social isolation and between 5 and 15 percent of adolescents experiencing loneliness" (World Health Organization, n.d.). Despite an ever-increasing number of opportunities for social connections (e.g., through digitalization and urbanization), citizens in countries of the Global North are more and more "lonely in a social world" (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). The situation is no different in Canada, where a recent population survey by Statistics Canada (2021) found that "13% of people aged 15 and older reported always or often feeling lonely" (p. 1). The same survey also showed that almost half of those who said they felt always or often lonely also reported fair or poor mental health (Statistics Canada, 2021). The level of loneliness and lack of belonging, however, is not equally distributed across different Canadian demographic populations: almost 18% of people who identified as Indigenous, over 20% of persons with disabilities, and almost 32% of LGBTQ2+ people have reported that they always or often feel lonely (Statistics Canada, n.d.), compared to the already mentioned 13% average for Canadians 15 years of age and up.

Loneliness is also a serious problem for the approximately 5.5 million school-aged children in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2018). One in four Canadian teenagers say they "often feel lonely" (UNICEF Canada, 2019, p. 23; see also Statistics Canada, 2021), which is often associated with negative peer relations and social anxiety (Coplan et al., 2013; Ooi et al., 2018). For young Canadians as well, a sense of loneliness is not equally distributed across different subgroups. Favotto et al. (2019), for instance, found in their study that while about 25% of a representative sample of 11–15-year-old Canadians said they were lonely, this sense of loneliness was unequally distributed across gender: 30% of girls versus 19% of boys. Also, Patte et al. (2021) found an unequal distribution across race among 60,000 Canadian high school students surveyed on their sense of school connectedness, with the quality of their social relationships reported as being of great importance to them. In another study, with grade four students, researchers found that "the quality of children's social relationships with peers and adults were among the most commonly mentioned criteria considered when rating their LS [life satisfaction]" (Emerson et al., 2018, p. 2604).

Over the length of a year, children spend about a quarter of their awake time in school, and schools are institutions whose purpose is built on social interactions and social connections among students and among students and adults. As such, schools provide opportunities for developing and experiencing a sense of belonging, but also for experiencing loneliness. In addition, as institutions with an educational mandate, schools provide a place of, and opportunity for, addressing children's sense of loneliness and for developing their sense of belonging, knowing

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that a sense of belonging in childhood makes it more likely that a child will make meaningful social connections and develop a sense of belonging in adulthood (Allen & Kern, 2017). The question for us, however, is what is known from research about Canadian K-12 students' loneliness and their sense of belonging and about schools' and school divisions' policies and practices in addressing student loneliness and fostering students' sense of belonging? This is the focus of the knowledge synthesis study we report on in this article. Before we introduce the study, however, we will share a few words on the concepts of loneliness and belonging.

Loneliness is "a sad or aching sense of isolation; that is, of being alone, cut off, or distanced from others. This is associated with a felt deprivation of, or longing for, association, contact, or closeness" (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1999, p. 58). Loneliness differs from social isolation in that one can feel lonely without being socially isolated, and one can be socially isolated without feeling lonely. Solitude, for instance, is for some people sometimes a desired and chosen form of social isolation (Svendsen, 2017). Belonging, in turn, is a sense of satisfaction of "a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of lasting, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships" (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 497). Thus, belonging is more than the absence of loneliness. Belonging is the sense of having and being able to maintain interpersonal relationships of significant qualities. Some psychological theories that consider human needs as motivational drives for human action (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Ryan & Deci, 2017) consider a sense of belonging to be a fundamental human need. While conceptually related, both loneliness and belonging have generally been researched independently.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the knowledge synthesis study that this article reports on was to describe the current state of knowledge on loneliness and belonging of students in Canadian K-12 schools and on existing policies and practices which relate to these concepts. To address this purpose, the study asked the following three research questions:

(1) What is the current knowledge about the lived experiences of Canadian students with loneliness and belonging in school contexts?

(2) What is the current knowledge about factors that contribute to students' sense of loneliness and belonging in Canadian school contexts?

(3) What is the current knowledge about school educational practices and policies that foster a sense of belonging in students in Canada?

Methodology

Different methods are available for knowledge synthesis studies (Amog et al., 2020; Straus et al., 2016). One of these methods is the scoping literature review (Arksey & O-Mailley, 2005; Pham et al., 2014; Rumrill et al., 2010), which is the method we used for our knowledge synthesis study since we were interested in "focus[ing] on breadth of coverage of the literature conducted on [our] topic rather than depth of coverage" (Rumrill et al., 2010, p. 401) and in identifying broad themes and patterns in research relevant to the identified research questions). In our scoping literature review, we proceeded with the five steps suggested by Arsky and O'Mailley (2005): 1. Identifying the research questions (previous section); 2. Identifying the relevant studies (this section); 3. Study selection (this section); 4. Charting the data (next section); 5. Collating, summarizing, and reporting the results (next section).

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In our study, we faced two methodological challenges concerning the selection and inclusion of relevant literature. First, we were aware that the concepts we planned to inquire into have not always been referred to using the terms we are employing, namely *loneliness* and *belonging*. Thus, our first challenge was to identify a range of relevant search terms. To address this challenge, we conducted an initial literature search with both national and international scope to identify how the terms *loneliness* and *belonging* (in the context of schooling) were referred to in the broader literature. This initial search resulted in 31 peer-reviewed articles and books, of which 14 focused on *loneliness* and 17 on *belonging*. This resulted in our identifying relevant search terms for the literature search for the study (for those search terms, see Table 1 in the Appendix).

The second methodological challenge concerning the selection and inclusion of relevant literature concerned the type of document sources. All three knowledge synthesis questions are questions about the state of affairs in Canadian school systems in terms of students' actual experiences, policies in place, and practices used in schools and school divisions. Publications by educational organizations, provincial governments, and school boards are now much more accessible through the availability of online document posting. However, we faced the question of whether to include such documents, even if they were deemed relevant to the three knowledge synthesis questions of the study, because they were not peer-reviewed scholarly publications. In fact, we decided to include them, thus using the following three types of document sources for the knowledge synthesis: scholarly peer-reviewed publications, documents published by educational organizations (by province and territories), and documents published by provincial governments and school board associations. Table 1 in the Appendix outlines the data sources/databases and search terms we used for each of these three types of document sources.

The seven inclusion criteria we used for this search were as follows: (1) referencing at least one of the identified search terms; (2) being about a Canadian context; (3) being focused on K-12 school education; (4) being published in or after 2010; (5) in case of organization and government documents, being published by the organization/government itself, thus excluding press releases or government/organization-external resources; (6) available as a PDF, thus excluding html-exclusive information; and (7) published in English. Using these criteria, we identified 226 documents of potential relevance to our knowledge synthesis study. A second review of these documents for their relevance excluded 23 documents, because, for instance, they were focused solely on fostering a sense of belonging to Canada or on feeling lonely in life more generally. Following this review for relevance, we ended up including 203 published documents in our knowledge synthesis study. (For an overview of how these 203 documents were distributed across the three document sources, across the two foci of loneliness and belonging, and in terms of their consideration of sectionalities relevant to the study, see Tables 2-4 in the Appendix.)

Following Cooper (2017) in our data analysis and integration of our findings, we first clustered the 203 documents into two groups, namely those that focused on loneliness and those that focused on belonging (see Table 2; very few documents addressed both foci). Within each group, we identified the relevance of the respective documents for each of the three knowledge synthesis questions, and this is how we organized our findings in this paper.

Findings

The findings section is divided into three subsections, each presenting the findings for one of the three research questions of the study.

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Students' Lived Experiences with Loneliness and Belonging

In the considered publications, we identified four thematic clusters of findings concerning our first question on students' lived experiences with loneliness and belonging: a pervasive and increasing sense of loneliness among students; an impact of loneliness on students' health and well-being; age-related and developmental aspects of loneliness; a sectional-based difference in experience of loneliness and belonging.

Loneliness among Students: Pervasive and Increasing

The reviewed research suggested the following: *Loneliness is widespread and increasing among Canadian adolescent students*. One extensive survey undertaken in 2018 suggested that about a third of Canadian adolescents 15-16 years of age feel lonely at school and that the percentage of students who self-declare a high level of loneliness at school has been increasing steadily over the years from 13% in 2000 to 35% in 2018, an increase of over 160% (Twenge et al., 2021). Using data from 2013-14, Favotto et al. (2019) found in their study that 25% of a representational sample of 11-15-year-old Canadians said that they were lonely.

Canadian students experience loneliness not just in school, but also at home after school, when they are either home alone or with only a sibling or siblings. In an online study, 36% of adolescents (10-17-year-olds) said that they "felt lonely and would rather be with people" (Ruiz-Casares, 2012, p. 139). However, Hipson et al.'s (2021) study suggested that the amount of time Canadian adolescents (15-16 years old) experience time alone in itself is not linearly linked to the level of experiencing loneliness. Loneliness and the amount of time being alone (spending time alone) are linked through a curvilinear association, "suggesting that time alone is only negatively associated with positive affect among adolescents who spend an extreme amount of time alone" (Hipson et al., 2021). Furthermore, Hipson et al. (2021) found that the feeling of loneliness when being alone was associated with certain types of activities during the alone time but not with others. The feeling of loneliness was greater among those engaged in what the authors labelled "thinking", like daydreaming, planning, and negative thinking, than among those engaged in passive media use, like watching TV or browsing the internet, or those actively engaged in some form of activity on their own, like listening to music or engaging in a hobby.

Impact of Loneliness on Students' Health and Well-Being

The reviewed research suggested the following: *Loneliness and a lack of a sense of belonging are associated with problems in students' health, well-being, and success in school*. A number of studies found that a lack of a sense of belonging among Canadian high school students contributed to substance use, bullying/victimization, and psychiatric symptoms, such as depression and anxiety (Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2021; Katapally et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2020; Zuckermann et al., 2020). An impact of loneliness on school success was found for students as early as grade 1; for instance, Arbeau et al. (2010) found in their study that loneliness among grade 1 students was significantly correlated with school avoidance.

Age-Related and Developmental Aspects of Loneliness

The reviewed research suggested the following: *There is an age-related and developmental aspect to students' understanding of and experience with loneliness and with being alone*. Older adolescents understand "being alone" more as loneliness than younger adolescents do, who understand "being alone" more as physical separation from others (Borg & Willoughby, 2022). It

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was found that some students have an affinity for aloneness without being socially anxious; this affinity seems to increase from late childhood to early adolescence (Daly & Willoughby, 2020).

Sectional-Based Difference in Experience of Loneliness and Belonging

The reviewed research suggested the following: *Loneliness and belonging are differently experienced by students across sectionalities*. The research considered in this knowledge synthesis suggests that, in general, significantly more adolescents who identified as female experienced loneliness compared to those who identified as male (Favotto et al., 2019; Hipson et al., 2021). Similarly, the number of those who experienced loneliness at home after school was higher among those adolescents who identified as female (Ruiz-Casares, 2012). Gender also seems to play a role in the understanding of "being alone" as it related to loneliness: Adolescents who identify as female understood "being alone" more as loneliness than do adolescents who identified as male, who understand "being alone" more as physical separation from others (Borg & Willoughby, 2022). Oliver et al. (2018) found in their study with adolescent students that "by the end of elementary school, boys and girls display similar, but also distinct patterns of adjustment" (p. 38); for instance, "in our sample, boys displaying internalizing behaviors [e.g., anxious and depressive thoughts] were more likely to also have externalizing and social problems with peers and teachers. This tendency was not observed in girls" (p. 38).

Canadian schools have very diverse student populations, but not everyone feels welcome in their school (CASSA, 2016a, 2021b; MASS, 2013a; Whitley & Hollweck, 2020). While some jurisdictions have noticed an improvement in the sense of belonging among students from marginalized and discriminated-against groups (Korotkov, 2021), in general, our review of research literature suggests that these students, especially LGBTQ2S+, Indigenous, Black students, and students with disabilities continue to be the most common targets of (cyber)bullying, segregation, discrimination, and stigma (Commission on Inclusive Education, 2018; Government of New Brunswick, 2014, 2016b; MASS, 2012; Shewchuk & Cooper, 2018; Whitley & Hollweck, 2020). While recess has been suggested as a great opportunity for (early years) students to foster positive relationships and thus their sense of belonging (McNamara, 2021; McNamara et al., 2015), many students, especially students with disabilities and LGBTQ2S+ students, suffered bullying and exclusion during this time (McNamara, 2021; McNamara et al., 2015).

Racialized students also have different experiences with belonging in schools. In a survey of about 60,000 Canadian high school students on their sense of school connectedness, "Asian and White students demonstrated the highest rates of connectedness, Black and 'other' students had the lowest scores, and the school connectedness scores of students identifying as Latin American/Hispanic fell in the middle" (Patte et al., 2021, p. 70). In their study involving Latinx youth, Parada et al. (2021) found that the youth felt "disconnected or excluded from their educational environments" (p. 7). They felt "that their Latinx identity was often misunderstood or completely ignored by educators and peers", and that this "lack of understanding contributed to Latinx youth's feelings of exclusion" (p. 7). Racially diverse students did not feel safe in school given the high rates of harassment and assault they experience (Gallagher et al., 2021). As a consequence, many embrace "positive" stereotypes attributed to them (e.g., athleticism) so as to try to feel included (Jean-Paul, 2013). Generally, according to Jean-Paul (2013), schools do not give enough attention to the racial experiences of students. Racism and lack of respect hinder Indigenous students' sense of belonging in schools (Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group, 2016). In addition, there is a high rate of Indigenous high school students dropping out of

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and disengaging from school (Davison & Hawe, 2012; MacIver, 2012). Contributing to this situation is the low expectation held by educators of Indigenous students (Preston et al., 2017).

Refugee and newcomer students are particularly vulnerable to experiencing isolation and increased mental health issues due to their complex needs (Arar, 2020; Hadfield et al., 2017; Kurdi & Archambault, 2020; Marshall et al., 2016; Manitoba Education, 2012). Mbabaali (2012), for instance, observed that war-affected refugee students "found themselves faced with isolation, loneliness, acculturation stress, identity crisis, and discrimination after immigrating to Canada" (p. 96). Although refugee and newcomer students strived to make friends, they suffered bullying, marginalization, and racism by peers (Buccitelli & Denov, 2019; Burton & Van Viegen, 2021; Guo et al., 2021; Hamm et al., 2021; Miled, 2020; Poteet & Simmons, 2014). Lacking a sense of belonging further hindered their academic achievement (Manitoba Education, 2012). The results of Nakhaie's (2022) study involving 14 to 24-year-old refugee students in schools showed that "experiences of discrimination and psychological isolation are significant predicators of truancy" (p. 1515).

Students identifying as LBGTQ2+ experienced extremely high rates of bullying, harassment, rejection, and discrimination (Blaikie, 2020; Burke et al., 2018; ETFO, 2022; Grace, 2017; Herriot et al., 2018; Taylor et al., 2015, 2016a) and a perceived lack of teacher/staff support (Grace, 2017). Gender binary washrooms were also reported as a particular source of distress and violence to students' sense of belonging (Herriot et al., 2018). The rate of suicidal ideation among LGBTQ2S+ students is also disproportionally higher (Burk et al., 2018), and they also experience poorer academic achievement (Alberta Education, 2016b; Manitoba Education and Training, 2017b; Taylor & Peter, 2011).

According to CASSA (2017a), students with disabilities have unique needs. They experience inequities and marginalization in schools, for instance, because of assumptions about what they cannot do (Specht, 2013) and expectations linked to specific social norms (Lodewyk, 2020; McNamara et al., 2018). In mainstream schools, students with disabilities encounter negative peer relationships (e.g., bullying) and a lack of positive ones (Beristain & Wiener, 2020). For instance, while recess is for many students an opportunity to connect with other students and build a sense of belonging, in a study by McNamara et al. (2018), children (grades 4-8) with disabilities "described feelings of isolation. For example, a girl in grade four states what she doesn't like about recess is 'there's no one to play with'" (p. 640). The responses by students with disabilities to open-ended questions in that study "highlight the lack of friendships and loneliness and suggest that isolation and victimization during recess are common experiences for them" (p. 641). More generally, "chronic peer rejection, loneliness, and conflictual relationships with friends in childhood and early adolescence" (p. 280) was one major theme in Beristain and Wiener's (2020) study on the experiences of children with ADD/ADHD. However, "although many participants reported becoming resigned to being friendless in adolescence …, the transition to high school where they could find peers who were similar to them helped them develop close friendships" (p. 280).

Factors Contributing to Students' Sense of Loneliness and Belonging

In this section, we present findings related to our second question, and identify some common factors that, according to the reviewed literature, are contributing to students' sense of loneliness and belonging. We have grouped these factors under the following four headers: structural factors, relationship factors, personality and preferential factors, and contingent factors.

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Structural Factors

We identified four structural factors that the analyzed research suggested are contributing to students' sense of loneliness and belonging. First, *racism, bullying, and other forms of victimization* were linked to students' sense of loneliness and to undermining their efforts to develop a sense of belonging (see also the section above on "Sectional-Based Difference in Experience of Loneliness and Belonging"). In a study involving adolescent Latinx students, Parada et al. (2021) report:

> Latinx students often navigate discrimination experiences in isolation. Youth were hesitant to label their experiences as discrimination and racism, despite noting that often, these encounters were ethnically motivated" and that these "feelings of disconnect and instances of discrimination often led youth to feel as if they did not belong anywhere. (p. 11)

Gallagher et al. (2021) found that racially diverse students did not feel safe in school given the high rates of harassment and assault they experience. Social isolation (e.g., through peer rejection) was identified in provincial government documents as a form of social bullying (Government of Saskatchewan, 2013, p. 11) and racism in schools (Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group, 2016, p. 6) as a form of victimization that Beristain and Wiener (2020) and McNamara et al. (2018) report on for Canadian students with disabilities.

A second contributing structural factor to students' low sense of belonging was found to be *not seeing themselves represented in the school (composition and ethos) and in the curriculum*. In turn, students had a greater sense of belonging when they saw themselves represented in the curriculum and in the school at large (Government of New Brunswick, 2016a; Government of Ontario, 2013b, 2013c; Government of Saskatchewan, 2019). Seeing oneself represented in the school and the curriculum was particularly important for racialized students (Parada et al., 2021). Seeing oneself represented in the school is linked to the findings that parental and community involvement with the school contributed to students' sense of belonging (Emerson et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2021; Vargas-Madriz & Konishi, 2021), which, again, is particularly relevant for marginalized and racialized students (Parada et al., 2021). Not seeing oneself represented in school and the curriculum has also been linked to competing cultural identities, particularly for 1.5 to second-generation students with immigrant backgrounds: "Both 1.5 and second-generation youth tended to identify the feeling as if they were positioned between two cultures. … Unable to fully embrace either culture, youth described feelings of 'hybridity' and uncertainty surrounding their Latinx and Canadian identities" (Parada et al., 2021, p. 11).

The third structural factor, *acceptance, inclusion, and accommodation of differences* (e.g., racial, cultural, religious, gender differences), was important to students' sense of belonging (CASSA, 2017a; Government of New Brunswick, 2014, 2016a, 2016b; MASS, 2012), and particularly pivotal for marginalized students (Government of Alberta, 2021b; Government of Saskatchewan, 2013, 2021). The use of inclusionary language was also deemed very important to them (Shewchuk & Cooper, 2018). For students' sense of belonging, an inclusive school climate and school environment that provided students with a sense of safety was crucial for them to authentically participate in school life (Cassidy, 2019; Government of Saskatchewan, 2019), which included *cultural* safety (Government of Alberta, 2021b). For instance, students' religious beliefs and practices could serve as protective factors and could promote their sense of belonging in school (Azagba et al., 2014). Another aspect of this factor that contributed to students' sense of belonging

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in schools was a sense of being treated equitably and fairly (CASSA, 2021b; Katapally et al., 2018; Zuckermann et al., 2020).

Overall, a sense of community and being involved in the school was important for students' sense of belonging (Katapally et al., 2018; Montt & Borgonovi, 2017). However, in some research, scholars warned that a sense of belonging (to a particular school sub-community) might cover up the reproduction of structural inequalities, for instance, when specialized programs like an arts-focused program lead to factual streaming by socio-economic status and a homogeneous grouping that provided a sense of belonging (Gaztambide-Fernández & Parekh, 2017).

Finally, the fourth of the structural factors that contribute to students' sense of loneliness and belonging is *providing students with voice and agency*, i.e., for students to be heard and to have a say in their education and in school life, which has been identified as contributing to students' sense of belonging (Emerson et al., 2018; Government of Ontario, 2013b; Kim et al., 2021; MASS, 2013a; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2012; Vargas-Madriz & Konishi, 2021). According to Cassidy (2019), students expressed a clear sense of what a school that fosters belonging looks like: "The analysis of 410 student-created essays and posters suggested five attributes that are present when individuals feel they belong: Support for Others, Respect and Care, Dialogue, Healthy Conflict, and Safety" (p. 154).

Relationship Factors

In this section, we report on three relationship-linked factors that the research literature suggested impact students' sense of loneliness and belonging in school. First, *peer relationships* characterized by mutual support, respect, trust, care, dialogue, healthy conflict, and safety contributed to students' sense of belonging (Arbeau et al., 2010; Government of New Brunswick, 2016b; MASS, 2020; Oberle et al., 2011). Different studies found that structurally based circumstantial opportunities were a factor for some, especially marginalized, students in being able to form positive peer relationships. For instance, some studies found recess and extra-curricular activities to be especially helpful for students to develop positive relationships with peers (Bouchard & Berg, 2017; McNamara, 2021; McNamara et al., 2015). In Beristain and Wiener's (2020) study involving 16-18-year-old students living with ADD/ADHD, participants reported "chronic peer rejection, loneliness, and conflictual relationships with friends in childhood and early adolescence …", while on the other hand, "the transition to high school where they could find peers who were similar to them helped them develop close friendships" (p. 280).

Second, *teacher-student relationships* that were caring, meaningful, and based on trust, acceptance, and interdependence were one of the central factors contributing to students' sense of belonging in school (Bouchard & Berg, 2017; CASSA, 2017a, 2020a; Government of Alberta, 2021b; Government of New Brunswick, 2016b; Government of Saskatchewan, 2019, 2021; MASS, 2012, 2020; Vaillancourt et al., 2021). Some research found that a positive teacher-student relationship was a factor in students' sense of belonging, and this research identified certain teaching practices that resulted in students' learning experiences, which in turn contributed to the quality of the student-teacher relationship. A few of these identified practices were teachers emphasizing students' strengths (Guay et al., 2019); teachers providing for student voice and for student choice (Emerson et al., 2018); teachers using authoritative disciplinary practices to protect youth involved in bullying at school (Kim et al., 2021); and teachers using collaborative learning activities (Government of Alberta, 2021b; Government of Ontario, 2013b; Government of Saskatchewan, 2019).

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The third and final relationship-linked factor was *supportive family-school relationships,* which was identified as a factor contributing to students' sense of belonging (British Columbia Education, 2012; MASS, 2010b, 2013a; MacIver, 2012; Preston et al., 2017). This factor was found to be particularly relevant for racialized students. For instance, in Preston et al.'s (2017) study, principals of Canadian schools with Indigenous populations between 5 and 98% "indicated that fostering positive experiences for Aboriginal students was about prioritizing relationships with students, family and communities" (p. 336). MacIver's (2012) study identified the importance of family and community relationships for the provision of "learning in a culturally affirming environment" (p. 160).

Personality and Preferential Factors

In reviewing the considered literature, we also identified two factors that impacted students' sense of loneliness and belonging that we cluster here under the label "personality and preferential factors" to indicate that those are factors "located" in the bodily-cognitive-affective structures of the students themselves rather than social structures. This categorization is not to prejudge the question of whether and how the former is influenced by the later, but it is rather a recognition that the student as a person plays a much greater role in any approach to address these factors than they would in addressing the social structures that were the focus of the factors in the preceding section.

First, *shyness and preference for solitude* were identified as risk factors. The findings of Morneau-Vaillancourt et al.'s (2021b) study involving 6, 7, and 10-year-old children suggested "that preference for solitude, rather than social wariness, is a risk factor for peer difficulties [in terms of peer victimization and peer rejection]. They underscore the relevance of distinguishing these dimensions of social withdrawal [i.e., preference for solitude and social wariness]" (p. 410). According to Daly and Willoughby (2020), some students have an affinity for aloneness without being socially anxious; these students "reported that they enjoyed being alone" (p. 2013). This affinity for aloneness in these students seems to increase from late childhood to early adolescence (Daly & Willoughby, 2020). The authors suggested "that time spent alone may become more enjoyable and important in early adolescence" and "time spent alone may provide adolescents with the opportunity to pursue their own interests (e.g., reading books, playing instruments or video games; …)" (p. 2013).

In their studies with preschoolers and first graders, Coplan and collaborators (Coplan et al., 2012, 2013, 2014; Coplan & Weeks, 2010) found shyness to be a risk factor for loneliness. Coplan et al. (2014) found in preschool and grade 1 students a significant association between shyness and preference for solitary play. Also, the researchers provided evidence for the need to conceptually distinguish between shyness and what they called "unsociable" children. Shy children reported the most loneliness and least school liking, and they were rated by parents and teachers as having the highest levels of internalizing difficulties and peer problems. In contrast, unsociable children did not differ from comparison children on any of the indices of socioemotional functioning (Coplan et al., 2013). While loneliness was not significantly correlated with shyness in the overall sample in Arbeau et al.'s (2010) study involving Canadian grade 1 students, there was a gender difference:

> Shyness in boys (but not girls) in grade 1 was related to feelings of loneliness … Previous research has also found that shy boys tend to have more difficulties than shy girls … Indeed, gender differences in the implications of shyness have been found to persist into adulthood. (p. 263)

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Second, *the type of activity while alone* seemed to be a factor in students' sense of loneliness. Among adolescents, the feeling of loneliness was found in one study to be associated with engagement in certain types of activities compared to other type of activities. The feeling of loneliness was greater when adolescents were engaged in "thinking" activities like daydreaming, planning, and negative thinking than when engaged in activities such as passive media use (e.g., listening to music) or a hobby (Hipson et al., 2021).

Contingent Factors

The fourth and final group of factors found in responding to the second research question on what contributes to students' sense of loneliness and belonging consisted of what we call *contingent factors*. We identified one such contingent factor from the literature: *compounded transition experiences*. Dupere et al.'s (2015) study involving elementary school children found that the contingency of family (e.g., separation) and school transition were highly correlated with higher levels of social isolation/withdrawal, while experiencing only one of the two was not.

School Educational Policies and Practices that Foster Students' Sense of Belonging

To respond to our third research question, we reviewed documents that provided evidence for policies and practices intended to foster students' sense of belonging and that were in place at the provincial or divisional level. The evidence was generally, but not exclusively, provided by provincial, divisional, and organizational publications. We have grouped the findings into five thematic clusters: creating supportive and inclusive environments, building supportive relationships, expanding the curriculum, utilizing certain types of pedagogies, and monitoring through data collection.

Creating Supportive and Inclusive Environments

School educational policies (Alberta Education, 2012a, 2017; Government of Nova Scotia, 2019; Manitoba Education and Training, 2017a; Whitley & Hollweck, 2020) and practices (CASSA, 2017a, 2020a; Commission on Inclusive Education, 2018; Government of Alberta, 2021b; Government of New Brunswick, 2013, 2016b; MASS, 2012, 2014; Porter & AuCoin, 2012) were in place to create a school and classroom environment which would make students feel welcome, safe, and included. Practices were reported to be in place to promote spaces and moments in which students could interact in ways that helped reduce social isolation (Commission on Inclusive Education, 2018; Government of New Brunswick, 2013; Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2016). For instance, Mbaballi (2012) reported that "lunch clubs for newcomers [to Manitoba] where they ate together with their Canadian born peers in a small group with teacher supervision, was regarded [by war-affected refugee youth] as genuine care by their teachers" (p. 93) and the youth "shared that having an organized lunch with a few peers during the first few months of school reduced their feeling of loneliness" (p. 94; see also Faubert & Tucker, 2019).

Four main approaches to creating supportive and inclusive environments were reported on in the documents reviewed. One approach was the use of a multitiered system of support based on a collaborative team approach that included all school staff, families, and community members. This type of support system was documented at the policy level (Alberta Education, 2012a; Government of Nova Scotia, 2019; Manitoba Education and Training, 2017a) and at the practice level (CASSA, 2017a, 2018a; Government of New Brunswick, 2016b; MASS, 2012; Porter & AuCoin, 2012; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2014a). A second approach consisted of anti-violence and anti-bullying policies (Alberta Education, 2012a) and practices (Government of New Brunswick, 2013, 2014, 2016b; Nova Scotia Teachers' Union, 2014; Social Planning

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Council of Winnipeg, 2016). The third approach to creating supportive and inclusive environments consisted of equity policies (Shewchuk & Cooper, 2018) and practices (CASSA, 2015; Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2016). Some examples of the latter included having an Elder-in-residence (Government of Alberta, 2021b; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2014a) and the provision of alternative schools/schooling structures, such as an off-campus school/outreach experience where a smaller setting allowed teachers to better connect with students (CASSA, 2010a) and to provide creativity-focused programs (Manitoba Teachers' Society, 2019a). Unfortunately, some of the reviewed publications that studied equity policies and practices in Canadian schools suggested that the implementation of these policies and practices reified oppression. For instance, implementation processes served to reproduce systemic inequalities by favoring the enrolment of already advantaged students (Gaztambide-Fernández & Parekh, 2017), or they were not responsive to students' uniqueness within their specific contexts (CASSA, 2015; Whitley & Hollweck, 2020). An example of the latter was what could be considered a reinforced and reinforcing "downward spiral" as the case when a student's behavior is perceived as problematic, leading to the student being suspended, which in turn serves to further isolate the student, and this then impinges on their academic achievement and sense of belonging (Government of Saskatchewan, 2013, 2021; Whitley & Hollweck, 2020).

The fourth approach to creating supportive and inclusive environments consisted of policies (Alberta Education, 2017; Government of Nova Scotia, 2019) and practices (Government of New Brunswick, 2014) linked to the promotion of social justice and equity and an appreciation of diversity; practices linked to restorative justice approaches (CASSA, 2013; MASS, 2012; Nova Scotia Teachers' Union, 2018); and practices linked to the inclusion of Indigenous Elders (Elders-in-residence) (Government of Alberta, 2021b; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2014a).

Building Supportive Relationships

The considered publications suggested that certain school educational practices were seen to develop students' sense of belonging by focusing on building different types of supportive relationships for students with others. This was the case for practices that foster healthy teacher-student relationships, for example by offering regular meeting opportunities for students, by teachers spending quality time with each student, and by being responsive during non-contact hours (MASS, 2012; Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2016).

Other practices in place focused on building supportive relationships among students. The most often mentioned practice in this category was the use of peer-mentoring (CASSA, 2010b; Coyne-Foresi, 2015; Coyne-Foresi & Nowicki, 2021; Government of Alberta, 2021b; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2014a). Other practices included assigning "buddies" (Manitoba Education, 2010) and adopting "family" groupings through multi-age or multi-level structures (Manitoba Education, 2010). It was suggested that the practice of welcoming new students to a school (MASS, 2012) could support the building of supportive student-to-student as well as student-to-teacher relationships.

Finally, a third type of practice for building relationships which support students' sense of belonging was the building of relationships with students' families (NWT Teachers' Association, 2019) and students' socio-cultural communities (Emerson et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2021).

Expanding the Curriculum

The considered publications documented policies and practices that expanded the prescriptive and subject-based curricula in ways that supported students' sense of belonging. We identified policies

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(Government of Nova Scotia, 2019) and practices (CASSA, 2017a; Government of New Brunswick, 2014) that speak to the incorporation of self-regulation initiatives and social-emotional learning, as well as practices that include extra-curricular activities to support students' sense of belonging (Bouchard & Berg, 2017; CASSA, 2010b; Wray et al., 2020).

Utilizing Certain Types of Pedagogies

The documents we considered for this knowledge synthesis also suggested that particular pedagogical practices have been utilized in Canadian schools and classrooms to purposefully help students develop and sustain a sense of belonging:

- providing for students' voices and giving students choice, for instance through student forums (Government of New Brunswick, 2013; MASS, 2020; Saskatchewan School Boards Association, 2012; Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2016);
- engaging students directly and explicitly in the question of their sense of belonging, for example, by providing opportunities for students to say what "belonging" means for them (OSSTF, 2011) and how they perceive their quality of life and sense of belonging (Emerson et al., 2018);
- using inclusive pedagogies, such as differentiated instruction, individualized, holistic, strength-based approaches that focus on each student's potential (Government of New Brunswick, 2013; MASS, 2014; Njie et al., 2018; Porter & AuCoin, 2012);
- using practices that build relationships, such as beginning and wrapping up the week with classroom circles (Government of Alberta, 2021b), the teacher taking extra time to help those who are struggling while motivating those who need motivating (Nova Scotia Teachers' Union, 2016b), getting to know students' interests, highlighting their strengths, giving them opportunities to contribute, and integrating students' interests and stories into classroom teachings (NWT Teachers' Association, 2019, 2021);
- connecting students with others and the school more broadly by, for example, displaying students' work in the school (Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, 2016); and
- using project-based, service and cooperative learning to create authentic opportunities for students to learn about positive interdependence and develop positive relationships (Government of New Brunswick, 2013).

Monitoring through Data Collection

Finally, we found the use of one meta-practice reported in the reviewed documents that had the intent of supporting students to develop and maintain a sense of belonging in school: monitoring students' sense of belonging by mapping classroom relationships (Government of Alberta, 2021b). One such mapping activity described consists of the teacher asking students to confidentially "create a web, with their name in the centre, and then list three to five students in the classroom with whom they would like to work on a specific learning activity" (Government of Alberta, 2021b, p. 18). These mapping data can then be analyzed by the teacher to create a sociogram for the class, which would identify "isolated individuals who were not chosen by their peers" as well as specific groups of students who "were less likely to be connected to a wide range of individuals" (p. 18). A regular mapping of such classroom relationships allows the teacher to monitor the evolution of student relationships.

Discussion

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In this section, we discuss the findings on current knowledge on loneliness and belonging of Canadian students in terms of the three knowledge synthesis questions that guided our study. Before we move into discussing the questions, however, we note that there truly is a productive and ongoing line of research and knowledge generation when it comes to research on students' sense of loneliness and belonging in Canadian K-12 schools. We further note that for the 203 documents we considered, the focus on belonging outnumbered the focus on loneliness about 4:1 (see Table 2). Table 2 also illustrates that while this ratio is less when considering only the scholarly peer-reviewed publications (about 2.5:1), it is higher (about 20:1) for documents published by provincial governments and school board associations, and even *much* higher (about 30:1) for documents published by educational organizations. That the ratio is so much higher for documents published by educational organizations might reflect a principle that we see often enacted – especially at the school and school divisional level, from which educational organizations take their membership – namely, the principle of focusing on students' strengths (sense of belonging) rather than on deficits (sense of loneliness). There is, however, a shortcoming associated with this approach in the context of a concern for student loneliness and belonging: loneliness is domain specific and, as such, is not absent in the presence of a sense of belonging (Enav et al., 2015). For instance, while a student with a disability might feel a sense of belonging in a classroom –due to, for instance, integrative practices used by the teacher – the same student might feel lonely when outside of the classroom, for example when on the playground during recess (McNamara et al., 2015).

Turning to the research synthesis questions that guided the study reported on in this article, the *first question* asked about the lived experience of Canadian students with loneliness and belonging in school context and whether those experiences are different for racialized or other marginalized students and for students with different demographic characteristics. The published documents we considered suggest that loneliness among Canadian students is widespread, increasing, and negatively impacting students' health and well-being. The Canadian public and the school systems supporting it need to understand and address loneliness among students as a serious threat to the very mandate of public schooling.

Another finding of our study with regard to students' lived experiences with loneliness and belonging is that students belonging to discriminated-against populations (e.g., students with disabilities and racialized students) experience higher levels of bullying, segregation and discrimination, which are experiences linked to increased sense of loneliness.

For the *second question,* we inquired into the current knowledge about factors that contribute to students' sense of loneliness and belonging in Canadian school contexts. For this question, we build on the justice issue raised in connection with the first question findings; that is, the structural factors at play that particularly disadvantage the groups of students identified above. The considered research documents demonstrated how belonging to an already disadvantaged (minoritized) stratification of students (e.g., racialized students, students with disabilities) makes students particularly vulnerable to loneliness. On the other hand, several documents, especially (although not exclusively) documents from educational organizations, provincial governments, and school boards reported on policies and practices in provinces, school divisions, and schools (see Tables 3 and 4) that are directed specifically at providing students from these disadvantaged stratified groups a sense of belonging. We take this finding as a positive sign of concern by researchers, educational organizations, provincial governments, and school board associations for the belonging of students, *particularly* those from disadvantaged stratified groups. Nevertheless,

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policies and practices for providing students from disadvantaged stratified groups with a sense of belonging in schools need to result in these students *actually developing* such a sense of belonging.

For students to develop a sense of belonging, the Canadian public, and the school systems supporting it, must acknowledge and address the identified systemic and structural barriers within the school system that hinder these groups of students from developing a sense of belonging. Furthermore, our study's findings also suggest that many of these barriers are derivatives of the structural state of affairs of Canadian society at large, such as structural poverty (Silver, 2014), structural racism (Este et al., 2018), and the stratification of Canadian society at large (Olsen, 2011). These society-wide structural barriers need to be part of the understanding and concern for addressing the identified factors. But it is here where school education has the potential to impact social structures at large, through its impact on students, who are future structural decision makers, and through its impact on attitudes and expectations of Canadian society at large.

For the *third question*, we focused on the current knowledge about school educational practices and policies that foster a sense of belonging in students in Canada. Here, we note that our findings demonstrate that student belonging is a major concern in school educational policies and practices in Canada, as found especially in the published documents by educational organizations, provincial governments, and school board associations. However, the research published in the considered scholarly peer-reviewed publications involving students from marginalized groups suggested to us that the educational vision expressed in the former is yet to be implemented in Canadian schools, toward *all* students developing and sustaining a sense of belonging in their schools. Educational success in this regard can only be measured in terms of students who face systemic and structural barriers to developing a sense of belonging in their respective schools. We reiterate the point previously made in connection with the second question, namely that good intentions can only be the beginning.

Finally, it is important to emphasize a limitation of our study, namely that our third question was about *already existing* policies and practices. It would be beneficial if our knowledge synthesis study could be complemented by the many recommendations of researchers for how policies and practices need to be changed to support all students' sense of belonging. A meaningful integration of these recommendations into the findings of our study presents an important future project.

Conclusion

This knowledge synthesis study has identified the current knowledge reported in a diverse range of published documents on the experience of, factors implicated in, and policies and practices to address the loneliness and belonging of students in Canadian K-12 schools. The study provides a basis upon which further research on Canadian students' sense of loneliness and belonging can build. Furthermore, belonging is an important aspect of human well-being. Loneliness – as distinct from solitude – undermines such well-being. With greater concern given to students' mental health and well-being in Canadian schools, the findings of this study also contribute to a richer understanding of how to address student well-being in Canadian schools.

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APPENDIX

Table 1

Document and Data Sources and Search Terms Used for the Study

Type of Document Source	Databases/Data Sources	Search Terms (in different combinations)
Scholarly peer-reviewed publications	UM Library Scopus ERIC PsycINFO Child Development & Adolescent Studies	loneliness; lonely; lone*; isolation; solitude; belong*; relationship*; connect*; social; attach*; feeling; bond*; student; child K-12; “elementary school”; “high school”; “middle school”; “junior high”; school; policy; “policy making”; “school practice”, “educational policy”; practice; routine; procedure; K-12; Canada
Documents published by educational organizations	For each province and territory, the websites of: the teacher and superintendents associations, the Canadian Association of School System Administrators, the Canadian Association of Principals, and the Canadian Teachers’ Federation	belong*; lone*; relationship*; connect*; social; attach*; feeling; bond*; isolation; solit*

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Documents published by provincial governments and school board associations	For each province and territory, the websites of: ministry of education and school board association	belong*; lone*; relationship*; connect*; social; attach*; feeling; bond*; isolation; solit*

Table 2

Distribution of Included Documents by Document Source and Focus

Type of Document Source	Number of Documents Included	Focus on Loneliness	Focus on Belonging
Scholarly peer-reviewed publications	87	31	70
Documents published by educational organizations	56	2	55
Documents published by Provincial Governments and School Board Associations	60	13	59
TOTAL	**203**	**46**	**184**

Note: Some documents addressed both foci.

Table 3

Distribution of Included Documents by Document Source and Sectionality on Students' Sense of Loneliness

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	Document Source Type			Total
	Scholarly Peer-reviewed	Educational organizations	Provincial governments and school board associations	
No sectionality considered	19	0	7	26
One or more sectionalities considered	11	2	6	19
TOTAL	**30**	**2**	**13**	**45**

Table 4

Distribution of Included Documents by Document Source and Sectionality on Students' Sense of Belonging

	Document Source Type			Total
	Scholarly Peer-reviewed	Educational organizations	Provincial governments and school board associations	
No sectionality considered	24	25	30	79
One or more sectionalities considered	45	29	34	108
TOTAL	**69**	**54**	**64**	**187**

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Standards, Accountability, and Provincial Testing: Shaping Homework and Teaching

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Abstract

This ethnographic case study, situated in Newfoundland and Labrador, Canada, examined the effects of full-scale provincial testing on families, its influences on homework, and familial accountability for teaching and learning. Data were drawn from family interviews, as well as letters and documents regarding homework. Teachers sensed a significant degree of pressure on student performance on province-wide tests. This sometimes resulted in narrowing of curricula in favour of more test-taking practice. Additionally, teachers sent home sample test items for students to practice with their families to increase test scores.

Keywords: homework, families, province-wide testing, teaching

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Standards, Accountability, and Provincial Testing: Shaping Homework and Teaching

In Canada, public education is jurisdictionally directed by government and managed by provincial government departments (Wallner, 2022). Privatization, policy, research, and political agenda shape education (Ball, 2009). High-stakes and standardized testing are at the forefront of current trends in education and are gaining traction globally (Lingard & Lewis, 2016; Smith, 2016). The inception of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) at the beginning of the twenty-first century brought an increase in the number of countries participating in three large international assessments–PISA, PIRLS, and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (Smith, 2016). While these are wide-scale international tests, this testing focus also becomes a narrative at national, provincial, and local levels of education.

Competitive student evaluation through high-stakes testing re-orients educational pedagogical activities in classrooms toward increasing measurable performance (Ball, 2010). As the education system becomes fixated on tests and scores, comparing classes and individual children, the power of government, as defined by Foucault (1982), trickles through the system. Spina et al. (2019) describe the increase in measurable performance as “governing by numbers” (p. 42). Standardization and accountability may lead to a climate where teachers and schools are compared to their neighbours locally, provincially, and nationally. Teachers may become disillusioned in such a comparative teaching atmosphere (Moon, 2017). According to Brockmeier et al. (2014), pressure from district supervisors and principals to improve test scores increases teacher stress and anxiety. Teachers' fears of feeling judged and inadequate if they do not meet the established goals (Ball, 2010) result in the recruitment of families to help children complete work at home in attempts to improve schools’ test scores. While the focus is on family support, it is most often mothers who assume responsibility for their children’s education, which has increasingly led to mothers viewing their children’s achievements as a personal moral responsibility (Doherty & Dooley, 2017). The narratives of declining achievement and the focus on testing align with neoliberal discourses in education (d’Agnese, 2020). The way in which neoliberal discourses are taken up by schools commonly places parents as being responsible and self-sufficient in supporting their children’s education (Vincent, 2017). Such educational views fail to consider “that the category of ‘the parent’ presented as such, in broad and apparently neutral terms, hides a wide range of behaviours, privileges, and disadvantages” (Vincent, 2017, p. 552). As a result, parents’ ability to expend their agency varies greatly depending on privilege and disadvantage.

In this article, I draw on the use of Grade 3 province-wide assessments in English Language Arts (ELA). These provincial assessments (PAs) are criterion referenced tests [CRTs]. I argue that the power of numbers (Spina et al., 2019) obtained from provincial testing and used to govern education in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Canada, influences education at every level and extends to families in homes. I provide an overview of how the focus on PAs shapes homework practices, resulting in expectations on parents to help their children practice and prepare for tests. My analysis involves data from semi-structured family interviews and a critical review of homework documents, which refer to the PAs.

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I conducted this research, which was aligned with institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005), in two communities within one school district in NL. The lived experiences of school-based educators are typically absent from educational debates concerning standardized testing (Cormack & Comber, 2013), as are the experiences of families. Geographical area and socio-economic status differentiate the two communities in this study, Riverdale and Plainview. Riverdale, a rural community, consists mainly of working-class families. Plainview, a more urban community, consists primarily of middle-class families. For this study, I made working-class and middle-class distinctions according to skill, education, and income.

I gained access to families through the school district. I was given permission to speak with the parents of Grade 3 students in Plainview and Riverdale regarding my study at curriculum information sessions carried out early in each school year. Parents were informed that their participation in this study required their child's involvement, to which they would also be consenting. At that time, those interested in participating provided me with their contact information. Six families from Riverdale and five families from Plainview expressed an interest in participating in the study. After the curriculum information sessions, contact was made with each family by telephone. When meeting families for the first time, I received signed informed consent from the participating parents and informed signed assent from children. All family members were interviewed together; parents were always present with their children. Families were provided with a folder and a scrapbook to collect homework artefacts such as assignments, projects, letters from teachers, and/or school newsletters and were informed that such texts might be copied and used for analysis. I assured families that pseudonyms would be used, and that all information shared would be confidential. This article reports on two families from the broader study, as that allows an opportunity to provide more intensive and in-depth case studies. This sample allows for a detailed narrative rather than a generalization of all families.

Theoretical Framework

Foucault's (1982) concepts of power, discourse, and power relations and their applicability to educational contexts provide a robust framework for understanding dynamics between schools and families. Foucault's conceptualization of power and discourse lends itself to the problematization of the familiar, which is commonly accepted as true. Foucault (1972) explains that "the unity of a discourse is based not so much on the permanence and uniqueness of an object as on the space in which various objects emerge and are continuously transformed" (p. 36). By applying Foucault's theory to this research, this article provides a means to show how educational institutions do more than transfer knowledge; they also shape social relations of families and manage individuals through discourses and practices.

Foucault's (1972) notion that discourses construct and define reality is pivotal for examining how educational policies and practices shape the perceptions and behaviours of families. As Luke (1995) states, "Foucault described the *constructing* character of discourse, that is, how both in broader social formations (i.e., *epistemes*) and in local sites and uses, discourse actually defines, constructs, and positions human subjects" (italics in original) (p. 8). Analysis of educational documents reveals how schools create norms and expectations that families are requested to adhere to, thus influencing their daily practices.

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Foucault's emphasis on power as exercised rather than possessed (Foucault, 1983) allows an exploration of the nuanced power dynamics within the school system. According to Foucault (1982), "power applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual" (p. 781). For instance, the expectation that parents support their children's homework places schools in a position of authority over family routines and time management. This shows an extension of the school's power into the daily lives of families, subtly guiding and controlling daily interactions and priorities.

Focusing on how schools categorize and manage individuals (both students and parents) through routine practices reveals the micro-level operations of power. This could include how schools track academic progress, enforce disciplinary measures, or communicate expectations to families. Each of these practices can be seen as a way in which schools exercise control and shape the social identities of those within their domain.

Gilbert's (2003) interpretation of Foucauldian power as productive shifts the perspective of viewing power solely as repressive, to understanding how it produces social realities and identities. This is particularly relevant in educational settings where power relations can foster particular forms of knowledge, social interactions, and even resistance.

Each social body has its own forms of power. Foucault (1982) describes the power of schools by stating that all individuals who are members of a diverse school community are part of "a block of capacity-communication-power" (p. 787). As institutions, schools play a role in the social construction of relationships among those who work within the building and those who live in the school community. Highlighting the interdependence between schools and families introduces a critical aspect of power dynamics. While schools influence families, they also rely on them for support. This reciprocal relationship can be explored to understand how power circulates and is negotiated between these two institutions, impacting the broader educational landscape.

Applying a Foucauldian lens to this study on homework practices can reveal how such activities are infused with discourses that reflect and perpetuate the values and power structures of the educational system. Investigating how homework influences family life can uncover deeper insights into how power is enacted daily.

Literature Review

Throughout this article, I discuss the influence of PAs; however, most literature refers to standardized tests. While the PAs and standardized tests are not synonymous, they do have similar effects on education and on families. Research shows that increased focus on high-stakes and standardized testing and quantifiable data contribute to a global testing culture (Alexander, 2011; Kempf, 2016; Lingard & Lewis, 2016; Smith, 2016). Testing and data result in narrowing of curriculum (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018) and shunting of schoolwork to homes (Clarke, 2021). Tests and standards result from a concern for regulation, external supervision, and external judgment of performance (Apple, 2001); they also serve a role in constructing and disciplining all those involved in the educational system through a process of self-governing. Graham and Neu (2004) claim that "elected representatives, government bureaucrats, local school board trustees, principals, teachers, parents, taxpayers—all of these, and not just the student—are subjected to measurement when the student is examined" (p. 311). As a result, all educational stakeholders are held accountable for measuring schools and students.

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For decades, an increased focus on curriculum and testing procedures that are standardized, content specific, and prescriptive has existed. Comber (2012) shows that there is a "global proliferation of testing with a different underlying intent—compulsory standardized literacy tests aimed at measuring whole populations as a part of school and system-wide audits" (p. 120). Standardization may not be the root of all education dysfunction; however, its power strengthens and compounds issues in already struggling systems (Kempf, 2016). Even though there is some resistance, there is a new common sense in education, where it is believed that standards promote equity and "teachers and professors will perform better if there are stronger merit incentives and performance benchmarks, [and] that to catch up with country or system X in the competitive production of human capital requires a hard-nosed approach to outcomes" (Luke, 2011, p. 372). However, Kempf (2016) claims the push for accountability "deprofessionalizes teachers' work; anchors competition at the core operation of our education system; and alienates students and parents from the constructive, experiential, and social elements of learning" (p. 27). Teachers work hard to ensure students reach performance benchmarks and desired scores established by school districts, government departments, and ministries of education. This does not come without cost as "standardized testing is meant to treat all individuals the same; it leaves no room to treat individuals differently" (Kearns, 2016, p. 128); however, all students are different.

Each spring, many departments and ministries of education require teachers to administer provincially mandated tests to students in their classrooms (Simner, 2000). Taylor and Tubianosa (2001) call for broad levels of testing in all Canadian provinces to measure and improve both school and student performance. Despite the limitations of standardized tests, most of the public views this type of assessment as essential when measuring school and student performance (Volante, 2004). However, "high-stakes standardized testing is tied to a privileged notion of literacy that some students possess, and others do not" (Kearns, 2016, p. 125), which must be taken into consideration in education.

Teachers' voices continue to be practically absent from the conversation regarding PAs, which further marginalizes them as professionals. Nearly all teacher professional organizations in both Canada and the United States have spoken out against the current regime of standardized tests (Kempf, 2016; Lingard & Lewis, 2016). In 2010, the Elementary Teachers' Federation of Ontario called for a two-year moratorium on testing and the People for Education, a parent-led organization, advocated for random sampling when testing. The Ontario government, however, claimed that a moratorium was not part of the province's educational plan. The Minister of Education, at the time, reacted to the union's request by stating that the results of the tests were useful in providing information to support teachers and school boards. There were no changes in testing practices due to this advocacy (Canadian Press, 2010).

Standardized testing remains controversial—there are divergent views and impassioned arguments both for and against its use (Pinto, 2016). A recent report (2022) on teacher allocation in NL calls on the Department of Education (DoE) to continue provincial assessments at the end of Grades 3, 6 and 9. The report asks for the tests to provide individual student and school data for purposes of school analysis and improvement, as Provincial Reading and Mathematics Assessment (PRMA) was originally

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intended to look at provincial wide data as a whole and not compare individual students or schools. The committee also recommended that the DoE continue to conduct provincial assessments at the high school level. The report positioned testing as a means of ensuring teacher accountability, claiming that accountability is not the opponent of creativity and critical thinking. Innovative and engaging teaching is the best route to student learning, including PAs. Kearns (2016) states: "Good students are shown to be literate successful standardized test takers; whereas those who fail are deficient, illiterate, flawed, and in need of remedy, remediation, and transformation" (p. 122); this shows that standardized tests are undemocratic practices, i.e., marginalizing specific groups of citizens, as are PAs.

While governments and various educational stakeholders claim benefits from province-wide testing and maintain that test scores provide valuable information to support teachers and inform instruction, some research indicates otherwise. According to Lingard (2010), focusing on improving test scores may lead to enhanced test taking skills rather than authentic learning. He continues, stating that the 21st century requires "high-order outcomes for all students in terms of individual purposes of schooling and in terms of opportunity, economic and democratic outcomes; it does not require schooling reduced to better test taking on a narrow subset of school curricula" (p. 135). Mandatory attention to testing often interferes with good teaching practices, such as diverse planning, varied instructional approaches, and a wide range of assessment strategies (Kempf, 2016). Teachers recognize the pressures on themselves as well as on their students to perform well on PAs. According to Kempf (2016):

> Whether or not teachers have read the research suggesting it is developmentally inappropriate for children under nine to write standardized examinations, most recognize the tests' limited utility for understanding and assessing their students and know that pressure to bring up test scores can take time away from other activities that are important for children's learning and overall development. (p. 60)

As Bradbury and Roberts-Holmes (2018) note, PAs also tend to narrow teaching as teachers focus more on areas of curricula that are tested.

Kohn (2000) claims that the administration of standardized tests has grown to a point where it is threatening the whole school system. This era of high-stakes testing limits pedagogical practices, such as the use of formative assessment (Smith, 2016), deskills and intensifies teachers' work (Apple, 2013), and discourages children's exploration of topics of interest (Berliner, 2011). Alexander (2011) states that "narrow curriculum dominated by propositional knowledge in traditional subjects is the international curriculum default" (p. 281). Without the pressures of standardized testing or PAs, students are more likely to spend time learning through inquiry and investigation with their teachers as facilitators, rather than spending time on test preparation.

The management of the educational system through performativity is evident in the way results from standardized tests are displayed, goals established, and targets for higher scores set. There is a shift from using performance data to understand student progress to using data to increase evaluation and control teachers' work (Spina, 2017; Stevenson, 2017). While the United States of America, the United Kingdom, and some provinces in Canada, are focused on testing and scores, this is not the case in all countries. Finland has no high-stakes testing (Alexander, 2011) and is not focused on scores, although they are

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"considered the number one high achieving nation in the world" (Berliner, 2011, p. 288). According to Alexander (2011), Finland is "the country whose educational magic everyone wishes to capture" (p. 277); however, most countries are trying to achieve educational success through normative regimes.

The ongoing transformation of education systems results in changes which trickle down through the organization, resulting in teachers modifying their teaching and homework practices. Cormack and Comber (2013) drew on data from interviews with teachers and principals to investigate high-stakes literacy tests and local effects in a rural school. One factor not mentioned in the research, however, is the role families play in standardized testing if test practice occurs at home, identifying a clear gap in the literature. I propose to contribute to an understanding of PAs' impact on families by offering two case studies, which share families' at-home experiences preparing for PAs.

Methodology and Design of the Study

The research problem in this study, methodologically, is built on a qualitative approach and employs a case study design. A group of cases can be studied to form a "collective" understanding of an issue or question (Stake, 1995) and to understand a situation from the participants' perspectives (Hancock et al., 2021). This approach enabled in-depth documentation of families' lived experiences of homework. For this study, family refers to all individuals living together in a household.

Case studies also align with critical discourse analysis (CDA), discussed later in this section, as case studies require the researcher to organize the data according to categories or ideas, themes, and patterns and to "decide which data to include as evidence for the story that is developing" (Simons, 2009, p. 118). They serve a role in the evaluative process; they can document participant and stakeholder perspectives evident in public programs (Simons, 2009) and educational texts. As well, the evaluation of educational documents through case studies can help account for the trends and discourses that are communicated to the home through school texts.

This research is also situated within an institutional ethnographic methodology, beginning with the experiences of individuals in the local actualities of their lives (Smith, 2005). As a methodology, institutional ethnography is open-ended and allows one to 'listen' to the data, which helps guide the analysis. According to Smith (2005), institutional ethnography aids in making visible the forms of ruling that are often not observable from where we are in society. It begins in the local actualities, focusing on the 'everyday' of people's lives (Smith, 2005). The aim is to understand the experiences of those directly involved in a particular situation. In this study, I used institutional ethnography to explore the problem of homework and how two families experienced homework in two different communities. Parents and children were living the situation being investigated, and families who participated spoke of their lived experiences concerning education, homework, and family life.

In the broader study, I investigated the homework practices of 10 Grade 3 children and the experiences of their families. I explored the reasons why there may be an increasing transference of educational discourse from schools to families, the ways in which this increase may be positioning parents, particularly mothers, and how it may be shaping family life. I examined how homework and other educational activities are experienced

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differently in different families, depending on their accessibility to resources and how families access the various forms of capital required. I also considered teachers' views on homework and analyzed some of the homework tasks assigned to young children. The research drew on multiple sources of data generated through focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and textual artefacts. In this article, I report on a small data sample, more specifically, two case studies, to detail how PAs shape homework practices.

I analyzed documents by identifying the subject positions available to parents within these texts, specifically related to standardized tests. Educational documents and homework assignments can be examined in relation to how they exercise power over human subjects (Foucault, 1979). To examine how the documents position schools and families, I used Fairclough's (1989, 1993) approach to CDA because it allows for "multiple points of analytic entry" (Janks, 1997, p. 329). I obtained data regarding homework through semi-structured family interviews, focus group sessions with teachers, and by examining educational documents, including homework activities and letters sent home. As Rogers (2003) suggests, CDA holds "the promise of uniting a critical social approach to the study of language and literacy with an ethnographic perspective" (p. 24). This approach assisted in analyzing homework texts in considering how the discursive practice of homework shaped relationships between children and parents.

CDA provided a means to systematically explore the relationships between the discursive practices and events occurring in the home resulting from the transfer of educational discourse from school (Fairclough, 1993) and to indicate how homework tasks in the form of test practice can shape the social interactions between parents and children (Fairclough, 1989). Because CDA "sets out to capture the dynamic relationships between discourse and society" (Luke, 2002, p. 100), it foregrounds the relationships and activities promulgated by the texts of homework practices. CDA also allowed documents to be analyzed by identifying the subject positions available to parents within these texts, specifically related to PAs.

The practical process of using CDA involved reading and re-reading family interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and documents to identify themes. The reading of, and reflection on, each set of data served as "a process of resolving data into its constituent components to reveal their characteristic themes and patterns" (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996, p. 8). During the first reading, comments that were reoccurring in the data transcripts were highlighted. The overarching reoccurring comments were then documented, with a colour-code added. All data were re-read, and themes were colour-coded throughout. Data for each theme were then added to a separate document for further analysis. Coding and data organization by theme served as entry points for interpretation and writing the data analysis. CDA allowed for an interpretation of themes that emerged from documents, and an explanation of how educational texts shape the social relations of parents and children (Fairclough, 1989), as described by them in the family interviews. Themes emerged which were related to PAs, including practice for PAs and expectations placed on families in letters sent home.

Third grade teachers and students were chosen as the focus for this research because Grade 3 is the year when children write their first PAs in reading, writing, and mathematics and appear to begin receiving a substantial amount of homework. Overall, this article draws on transcripts from family interviews and textual artefacts

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distributed to families in the form of letters and homework assignments. The analysis of this broad data led to emerging themes of how PAs influenced homework and family life.

While all 10 families in this study referenced practicing for CRTs, as indicated earlier, this article documents a small sample of the broader study. It draws on interview data from two family case studies: the Bungay family from Riverdale and the Simmons family from Plainview (see Table 1). Case studies allow for the documentation of multiple perspectives and can be useful in explaining how and why things happen (Simons, 2009; Hancock et al., 2021).

Table 1

Simmons and Bungay Family

Family Name	Family members	Participants in interview	Mother's work	Father's work
Simmons	Carly – Mother Mike – Father 4 Children – Evan Grade 1 Jenna Grade 3 Craig Grade 4 Shawn Preschooler – age 2	Mother, Father* and Jenna *Father participated in second interview only	Social Worker	Air Traffic Controller
Bungay	Dianne – Mother Dave – Father 4 Children – Kyra Grade 3 Nora Grade 8 Jordan Grade 9 Sara completed secondary school	Mother and Kyra	Cashier at local grocery store at beginning of study, receptionist for an optometrist at end of study	Carpenter

Analysis and Findings

This section provides details from the case studies of the two families. It draws on data from semi-structured family interviews and analysis of documents used to communicate with families regarding PAs and homework.

Families

Both the Bungay and Simmons families referenced the practice of PAs as part of nightly homework in the six weeks leading up to the test. On occasion, homework tasks were photocopied directly from previously administered tests; at other times, teachers created homework tasks similar to those on the PAs. Families were questioned: "Have there been any changes in homework practices since the last time we chatted?" The following section provides data describing each family's response to the question, highlighting experiences with PAs' homework practice.

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The Bungay Family

Table 1 provides an overview of the Bungay family, including mom, dad, and four children. The oldest child had finished secondary school and no longer lived at home. When I asked Dianne Bungay and her daughter, Kyra, about changes in homework since our last meeting, Kyra explained, "we don't have homework now because we are doing our CRTs". Leading up to the two weeks of testing, however, homework was centered around test practice. Sometimes, homework included test practice that began in class during the school day but was not completed. For example, "The Grade 3 class had to write a five-paragraph story. She [Kyra] said most people didn't finish it at school, so the teacher sent it home because it's good practice for our test". Dianne continued, "Some of them [children] get stressed out about it [tests]". Kyra added, "[The teacher] said she hopes…she wishes she could just lay the books down and say, well, I don't want any of you to do this, but she said the government wants you to do it so that's all you can do". Kyra continued to explain that some children were upset during the test. Dianne Bungay explained:

> I think it [CRT] puts a lot of pressure on them [children] because I don't think some of them are ready for it. Like, [her daughter Kyra] …if it comes home, she'll take it…she tackles it and will do what she has to do. But, a lot of little kids, you know, they kind of sit there as if to say, 'Okay, what do I do with this?' And their attention span is a little less.

Dianne continued to share that Kyra will "always find a way to do what the teacher asks of her".

Kyra described a situation in her classroom in which, "We got to go to gym, or actually the only time we do what we like [choice activity time], like… today we had CRTs and a few people stayed back from gym because they had to finish them. And a few people cried because they missed it [gym time]". It is time for those in positions of power to consider the detrimental effects of PAs on young children. Kyra continued to explain how four of her classmates did not have to complete the CRT. She claimed, "[The teacher] excuses them or something. And the rest of us have to do all of the test and they only have to do some of the test and I'm like…what?"

Diane was concerned about the situation described by Kyra and countered with: "They should be enjoying school. School's fun. Like, I've learned this, and I've learned that…it's exciting…you know… not putting pressure on them…to know okay, I have to do this test".

The Simmons Family

As reflected in Table 1, the Simmons family consisted of four children, mother, and father, all living in the same household. Both parents supported their children's homework but at times explained it was "difficult to manage it all", which included work, homework, and extracurricular activities. During an interview, when Jenna, the Grade 3 daughter, was asked if there had been changes in homework since the last time we had met, she answered by saying, "We don't have to do response journals anymore…we used to, but now we do CRT practice. We had poems, there's one called *June* and there's another one called *This is My Rock*". I am familiar with the poems Jenna referenced because they were taken directly from previous PAs.

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Carly Simmons explained that her daughter brought home a different CRT practice booklet to complete for homework each week for about six weeks leading up to the test. The booklets included poems and short stories (fiction and non-fiction) with questions to answer on each, a story prompt for demand writing, and for process writing. Carly explained that her daughter Jenna was "tired, and I think she's bored, too".

Carly began questioning the purpose of sending home CRT for practice, even before the interview. During a telephone conversation to set up a time to meet, Carly brought up her concerns about practicing for the tests. She explained, "Mike and I are both really struggling with this. We feel that it's not right to be doing this; it feels like we are cheating. It just doesn't feel right". Mike added, "I thought it was supposed to be unbiased…just a test of where they are…just doing it…no matter what". These parents have different views from those of the teachers regarding the parameters of test situations. Carly and Mike have post-secondary education degrees; therefore, both have ideas about testing regimes and are aware that, in other circumstances, it is considered wrong to know the content in advance. This may be why they struggled with the idea that teachers were sending home practice activities when preparing for tests.

The Simmons' views toward practicing at home for PAs surfaced again during the interview. Carly explained that Jenna's homework had changed, and the regular homework tasks were replaced by practice for the tests: "She's [Jenna] been doing her CRTs for practice….and she hasn't even had spelling words either because of that. They don't do the written response for her reading any more…all because of the CRTs". Carly continued, "Jenna is 'tired of doing it [practice for CRTs]', and those are her exact words to me, 'I'm tired of doing it'". When test scores are publicly displayed and teachers feel pressure to reach benchmarks, practicing at home becomes a common occurrence.

Carly also expressed her concern about the amount of class time being spent on the PAs. She felt "tests are taking away from more important things that children should be learning. I don't think they have done science or social studies for weeks". Carly reported a conversation with another third-grader parent. They discussed the fact that both their children were tired of, and bored with, the practice, and they questioned whether either child would exert any effort when the actual CRTs were administered. Carly commented that it would be better for teachers to "fudge the answers". This remark shows that she is aware of the power such tests have on the education system but, as a mother, she does not see any value in having her children complete such a test.

Carly also questioned whether test scores determined schools' funding. She may have been familiar with the focus in the United States on high-stakes accountability where, according to Berliner (2011), schools that did not improve their reading and mathematics scores sufficiently could see teachers and administrators fired, or schools closed. Again, Carly was questioning and trying to justify the legitimacy of the process and understand why there is such a focus on testing. Even though parents questioned the value and purpose of the process, they continued to be involved, possibly because they wanted their children to do well. Parents may feel pressure to have their children perform well, and therefore, they conform to the school's requests. Both of Jenna's parents referred to her as being "really good" in school and claimed that "she always completed her assigned homework with no difficulties". Carly and Mike indicated that their son had had the same experience

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as Jenna in third grade—lots of homework assignments based on previous years' assessments.

Homework Assignments for Test Practice

In the case of homework, the institutional observability of the education system reaches outside the institution of school. The texts (Figures 1 and 2) serve a regulatory purpose if families assume responsibility for overseeing the homework process and ensuring that homework is completed. Teachers then observe the child's work, and this two-stage process, in essence, serves as surveillance of families. The letter (Figure 1) and the description of writing traits (Figure 2) are documents directly linked to PAs. Such documents position parents as having a clear and direct responsibility for their children's test performance. The letter begins with "Dear Parents" and explicitly outlines that there will be "sample pieces for homework" from tests "from a couple of years ago". The traits of "good" writing are included, in this case, not in the form of a traditional rubric with a number score but included as criteria in the holistic rubric used by those who score PAs. The traits for "good" writing are named with a list of questions under each heading that can be asked to determine whether the writing is "good". The teacher reinforces the fact that "we are always discussing [the traits] in class", which implies that the child should already know the traits as well as expectations for "good" writing.

Figure 1

Letter to Parents: Criterion Referenced Test Samples for Homework

Dear Parents:

For the next month or so I will be giving some previous CRT sample pieces for homework. We will begin with several samples of writing. In the CRT in June, Students will be asked to do 2 demand writing pieces. They will be given a topic and will do just a one copy piece to respond. For homework this week, I have a sample from a couple of years ago. This work is due next Friday. I have included the traits of good writing which we are always discussing in class.

When I send home some reading samples, students should answer the questions in full sentences stating out their reply, support their answers with evidence from the text (I know this because in the poem it said .....), and give their opinion or some connection to their own life or other books they have read where it would further support their answer.

I will score the work and give suggestions for improvement. You will notice that the questions are very similar from one year to the next. We will also work on some samples in class so that the students are well prepared.

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Figure 2

List and Description of 'Good Writing' Traits

Good writing should have:

organization - Did you use a good lead? (Sound effect, dialogue, describe the setting, action, thoughts or feelings, question, startling or interesting fact). Did you include lots of details in an organized way? Did you use a good ending? (Memory, decision, thoughts or feelings, action,)

word choice - Did you use specific words? Could the reader get a good picture in their head from your writing? Did you use a variety of words?

sentence fluency - Did you start your sentences in different ways? Do you have some long and some short sentences?

voice - Does your writing come alive? Does any dialogue sound natural?

conventions - Did you use correct spelling and punctuation? Did you use conventions for special effect such as big letters or dashes or dots?

content - Do you have a beginning, middle and end to your story? Are your ideas and details creative and connected?

The letter to families (Figure 3) begins with "Hi Family", appearing to be more inclusive of all family members rather than being written to parents alone. The teacher lets parents know that the test is to "evaluate your child's school learning since Kindergarten". This may be an attempt to alleviate some of the stress and responsibility felt by third grade teachers and to reinforce the fact that all the child's teachers, since entering kindergarten, have played a role in their education. The letter continues to say that "practice work" completed in school will be sent home for parents to "review the answers" with children. Questions are included to ensure that appropriate strategies are used when answering test questions. Asking families to review work for the PAs with children creates an expectation that they foster a study atmosphere at home, which further validates the importance of testing. There is an assumption in this letter that all families have certain knowledge, as well as time, to carry out test practice without accounting for the diverse circumstances of home situations. The letter also refers to "a story and multiple-choice questions" that are sent home for practice. Included is an outline of the process used in class to answer multiple choice questions. Parents are asked to "take some time and read it over", again making it the parents' responsibility to review and practice with their children for the test. One feature

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of the letter is that parents are asked to "remind [children] that there is nothing to worry about", when writing such a test. However, this view is contradicted by asking parents to review with their children all the work that had been previously completed in school and to take the time to read over the story and multiple-choice questions. If there really were nothing to worry about, parents would not be expected to take up such a position in helping children prepare for the test.

Figure 3

Letter to Family Regarding CRTs

Hi Family,

It is June 2nd and we are about to begin our CRT's. Remember, this is a test that will evaluate your child's school learning's since Kindergarten. Please remind your child that there is nothing to be worried about, as long as you try your <u>best</u>!!

Over the past few weeks, we have been practicing and sharing ideas how to answer questions. Your children have a good idea now of what to write in their answers.

I am sending home some of the work we completed in school. Please take a few minutes and sit down and review the answers. Asking; "Is there anything else you should add? Did you use pictures, numbers and words? (In math) Are you looking for answers around the room?(Word wall) Can you think of an example in your life?" eg. "Meet The Teacher" (May 30th) eg." Math Questions (June 2)"

As well, I am sending home a story and multiple choice questions for practice. Please take some time and read it over. In class we use these three steps:

<u>When reading something new:</u>
1. Scan the questions.
2. Circle the most important words.
3. Read all ….from top to bottom.

Thank you, as always, for your continued support.

Have a great day,

The approach shown in Figure 3 was the teacher's final attempt before the CRTs were administered to ensure that students achieve "good" scores. Most families are supportive of school and want their children to do well. However, such expectations on families are not always viewed in the most favourable light by families, as was illustrated above by the Simmons and the Bungay families.

Figure 4 is a letter written to parents to provide them with information to help their children complete a process writing assignment. The teacher referred to "most of the children" on two occasions in the letter. The use of this term suggests to parents that most

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of the children had their story completed and were finishing up the final copy. There was an underlying tone to the letter, one that may have been considered by parents to be punitive in nature. It indicated that if children were not working on their final draft, they had not completed their writing effectively or efficiently during class time.

Figure 4

Letter to Parents: Process Writing

Dear Parent:

Your child is bringing home a ***process writing*** selection that we have been working on in class. Each child completed an organizational chart and was instructed, step by step, how to include this information in paragraphs. Most of the children then had opportunity to pair up with a classmate and read each other's work to check for spelling mistakes, words left out, anything that was unclear, and so on. Most also had time to begin writing their final copy, with all their errors corrected.

Those who did not finish need to complete their final copy. Each paragraph should be indented; sentences, names, place names, days of the week, months, and the word "I" should be capitalized; periods should be used at the end of each sentence. ***Each paragraph should have a topic sentence (an introductory sentence that tells what the paragraph will be about.)*** Students are aware of these conventions, as we have been doing them each morning in our "daily edit".

The outline given for the children to follow is below, so you will know if your child is on track:

Paragraph #1 - Include a topic sentence about the event, who was involved, when it happened, and where it happened.

Paragraph #2 - Include a topic sentence about what kinds of things made the event happy or sad. Details should be added here, as well.

Paragraph #3 - Include a topic sentence about why the event made your child feel happy or sad, and a closing statement that tells how your child feels about the event.

We have logged about six hours of class time on this activity. The remainder (mostly rewriting) can be done at home. This writing piece will be **due on Friday, March 7.**

Note: ***Process Writing*** refers to a piece of writing in which children have the opportunity to "brainstorm" together, write a "rough" draft, get together with a classmate to edit their work, and then write a final copy, in which their errors are corrected. The final copy should be the child's best work.

I trust I have not been too wordy, but I realize at this age, many children still need parent support, so you need to be aware of the procedure. Thank you so much for valuing your child's school work and spending time with him/her this year!! I have found the parents of this class very supportive. Your child will certainly reap the rewards of your interest and efforts! Thank you, once again.

The teacher stated, "We have logged about six hours of class time on this activity", thereby giving the activity value. Again, the above statement reiterated that much class time was spent on this activity, and six hours was sufficient for most children to complete the work; the note implies there had been adequate time allocated for children to complete the assignment. The implied message to parents was that the teacher had done their part at school, and now, it becomes the parent's job to ensure that the writing is complete. As with any text, if parents take up the position recommended in the letter, the implications may contribute to changes in routines at home, as well as changes in the social relations between parents and children. Dominant messages in the texts, such as parents being positioned as responsible for their children's educational success or failure, may also contribute to an individual's change in beliefs and attitudes toward the school and teachers. At the end of

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this letter, the expectation that a parent would help their child is clearly stated. In this school-to-home communication, the teacher thanks parents "for valuing your child's school work and spending time with him/her". Again, there is a degree of pressure on parents to carry out the teacher's assigned activity. The letter continues, "I have found the parents of this class very supportive", which hints that this may not always be the case while also coercing parents to demonstrate their support for their children's learning.

These types of homework activities show how the PAs shape teaching and homework practices and require new work from families that may well go beyond their own educational experience.

Discussion

Five main themes emerged from the data regarding provincial tests: (1) homework changed leading up to the time of testing; (2) teachers assigned practice activities from previous tests for homework; (3) parents questioned the reasons and validity of practicing for the tests; (4) parents felt the tests created unnecessary stress and pressure on young children; and (5) the language used in the homework documents place schools in positions of power over families.

Both families, Simmons and Bungay, described in this article, valued education and wanted their children to do well but struggled with some tasks they were asked to carry out by the teacher. When parents helped children with homework assignments reflective of PAs, they felt "pulled in" to the testing phenomenon even though they questioned the pressure it places on their young children. As Dianne Bungay said, her daughter would find a way to do whatever the teacher asked her. Both Dianne and Carly Simmons validate Kempf's (2016) claim that children are stressed and test preparation for province-wide tests happens, in various forms.

According to Ball (2010), an "effect of performativity in education is to re-orient pedagogical and scholarly activities toward those which are likely to have a positive impact on measurable performance" (p. 126), which may account for the focus on previously administered tests being sent home as nightly homework assignments. Alexander (2011) states, "The Cambridge Review shows how, over the period 1997–2010, the pursuit of this narrow concept of 'standards' at the primary stage seriously compromised children's legal entitlement to a broad and balanced curriculum" (p. 272). The increased focus on testing not only results in narrowing the curriculum (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2018; Lingard, 2010; Rogers, 2014) but, for struggling students, is a direct correlation to the misery families experience with homework (Dudley-Marling, 2000). Parents are positioned as co-educators (Lareau, 2000; Reay, 1998), who are expected to understand educational discourse and be able to adequately help prepare their children for PAs.

Homework assignments reflective of previous tests "do not randomly or arbitrarily proliferate" (Luke, 1995, p. 15); they emerge to serve the institutional purpose of improving test scores. Participation in test practice at home requires parents to move beyond the role of supervisor, where they ensure that homework is completed, to assuming responsibility for teaching, checking, and providing guidance and feedback. This is a direct indication of how Foucault's (1982) notions of power place schools in a position of authority over family. Such involvement in homework is related to the particular field of knowledge and beliefs prevalent in current educational institutions (Luke, 1995).

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When schools require parents to be involved with monitoring homework and being co-teachers, there is also an assumption that someone is available at home with the time, desire, and capability to help each child. According to Berliner (2011), "when shaming and blaming of teachers and administrators for low student test scores is common" (p. 291), they do "whatever they deem necessary to achieve their goals" (p. 289). This may account for the transference of test practice from schools to homes.

Teachers may be assigning homework activities for test practice as a means to increase scores. Lingard (2010) writes about the erosion of "trust in teachers" and how it affects their "sense of professional worth" (p. 137). Ball (2005) describes how testing and a culture of performativity in schools affect teachers' abilities to practice authentic pedagogies and authentic assessment and has also changed what it means to be a teacher. Authentic teaching practices are eroded when teaching is merely drill and skill practice for PAs. Teachers may be resorting to "small acts of cunning" (Foucault, 1979, p. 139) and deploying "mundane inescapable technologies" (Ball, 2010, p. 129) that are unavoidable by parents if they are to carry out the school's expectations at home.

As described by eight-year-old Kyra, some children were exempt from the test, drawing attention to the inequity of such testing, and reiterating what Kearns (2016) calls undemocratic practices. Students who experience challenges are often those who are exempt from writing all, or parts of tests. This message demonstrates what Kearns (2016) claims about successful test takers: Some children have a privileged notion of literacy, which can be transferred to test taking, and some do not.

Fairclough (2011) claims that "texts have causal effects on, and contribute to changes in, persons (beliefs, attitudes, etc.), actions, social relations, and the material world" (p. 122). One function of the examination is that "it establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them" (Foucault, 1979, p. 184). On the other hand, the power of the examination is exercised through its invisibility (Foucault, 1979), particularly in the case of practice at home for PAs. There is invisibility within the education system as to how test practice is shaping family life, as well as how it may be affecting test scores. While the examination extends power over students, it also extends lateral control (Foucault, 1979) over families. The individualized documentation of students' scores allows and requires surveillance. Practice at home, and the expectation that parents are involved in the process, demonstrate how schools extend their power into homes. As Foucault (1979) explains, "The examination is the technique by which power, instead of emitting the signs of its potency, instead of imposing its mark on its subjects, holds them in a mechanism of objectification" (p. 187). This is true not only for students who are writing the test; it is true for teachers who are teaching in a system where testing and scores are being used to judge their effectiveness. Scores are becoming increasingly important in how governments monitor, steer, and reform the education system at every level (Ball, 2009), shaping teachers' everyday instructional decisions. As described by Kempf (2016):

> Indeed, a student who devoted a day per week (20 percent) to football would be a student athlete, while another who every Friday had attended specialized music instruction would be considered a musician. In this light, the common specialization of twenty-first-century students is test taking. (p. 19)

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As parents, Carly and Mike Simmons and Dianne Bungay were involved with activities viewed by teachers as having a positive impact on measurable scores and outcomes of the class (Ball, 2009). Jenna liked school and usually liked homework; however, she expressed her dislike for CRT practice at home. Jenna's assessment of CRT practice reminds us that there is virtually no literature that takes into account children's perspectives on PAs. Reay and Wiliam (1999) state:

> It is in the silences in relation to children's perspectives that it is assumed either that National Curriculum assessments have minimal impact on children's subjectivities or that children's concerns and attitudes are merely a backdrop to the assessment process; simply part of the social context. (p. 344)

Children, however, are actively and profoundly affected by the testing process (Reay & Wiliam, 1999) and should have opportunities to express their views at the earliest testing grade.

There is a hierarchical observation (Foucault, 1979) at play, one in which the child and parent were both being observed by teachers and school. As a result of this approach to teaching and learning, and the coercion clearly visible in families, it became the unpaid labour of parents—usually mothers (Comber, 2012; Griffith & Smith, 2005)—to ensure that homework practices were completed.

Concluding Thoughts

In this article, I outlined how teaching practices and homework have been shaped by standards, accountability, and testing in one school district. I also demonstrated how a focus on testing and scores affected homework practices that, in turn, resulted in some of the responsibility for test performances being shifted from school to home. Alexander (2011) explains, "The race to industrialize during the nineteenth century (and for that matter American reaction to Sputnik in the twentieth) remind us that the supremacist view of world class education is hardly new" (p. 277) but it has become a political obsession and a multi-national industry with the availability of data, which encourages the ranking of countries, provinces, and schools. As a response to this so-called "political obsession", government officials require data to compare Canada with other countries around the world. The data generated by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) not only provides information to compare countries but also allows comparisons to be made between Canadian provinces. The data generated from PAs "are presented as means to measure and compare 'academic achievement' across classes, schools, districts, provinces and countries" (Nichols & Griffith, 2009, p. 244). All schools, teachers, and families in my study were within the same school district. The DoE's attempt to increase test scores shapes the development of educational brochures for parents and places expectations on school districts to do better. Districts respond by developing policies that focus on increasing instructional time, which are intended to boost scores. These official texts are intended to govern public schools but are only successful when taken up by people in their everyday lives (Nichols & Griffith, 2009), which includes both teachers and families.

In this situation, educational policies are downloaded to schools and conveyed to teachers. Teachers often feel pressure and react by shaping their classroom teaching practices to reflect the content of tests, which is evident in changing homework practices.

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This results in teachers co-opting parents by transferring educational responsibilities to families through homework. In this study, I found that the homework tasks set by teachers often reflected practice for the PAs undertaken in schools. Increased homework for young children, specifically test practice, played a role in shaping everyday family life. Once test practice moves to homes, responsibility for children's test performance moves somewhat from the teacher to family; therefore, success may be connected to the parent's ability and time to support their children.

All those involved in education explore ways to respond to a system dominated by performativity, accountability, and external surveillance. This study specifically shows that test-practice homework serves to construct families as invested stakeholders responsible for their children's test performance. The amount of work demanded of families by schools has changed, and this study confirms research undertaken by others, which found that mothers spend many hours supervising and supporting their children with homework (Griffith & Smith, 2005). As a result of the increased focus on scores and measures, teaching changes, as does homework. Through standardization, the power of the institution of school finds its way into the home in the form of written documents and increased homework demands on families.

NL eliminated standardized testing in 2017 in the primary, elementary, and junior high grades. After a three-year hiatus, the provincial government announced the reintroduction of mandatory tests in ELA and Mathematics for students in the third, sixth, and ninth grades. There was a further disruption due to COVID-19, but provincial testing was reinstated as PRMA in May 2022. The testing context appears to be changing provincially as CRTs are no longer used, and data from PRMA is not intended to compare schools or individual students. However, The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador (2022) report still claims that tests hold teachers accountable. Hopefully, this does not once again trickle down into the home, shifting responsibility onto families for a role that they are neither qualified for nor paid to fill and that is not shown to benefit children. A future study to investigate whether the changes in PAs play out differently in schools and in homes for families may be worthy of examination, depending on how the assessment process and purpose evolve over time.

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Centering Social Justice and Well-Being in FSL Teacher Identity Formation to Promote Long-Term Retention

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Abstract

The French as a second language (FSL) teacher shortage crisis has been a longstanding issue in Canada. In this paper, we examine the links between teacher agency, autonomy and identity in light of findings about marginalization, deprofessionalization, and/or difficulty in developing a strong sense of identity. Taking these findings into account, we propose an FSL teacher preparation model rooted in social justice and well-being which centers identity development through four pillars for success: language proficiency, intercultural competence, pedagogical knowledge and skill, and collaborative professionalism. We examine the implications of taking such an approach in FSL teacher preparation and argue that applying a social justice lens to identity development sets FSL teachers up for effective professionalization and a sense of well-being that can lead to long-term retention in the field.

Keywords: French as a second language, language teacher identity, teacher retention, social justice, well-being

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Over the last decade, French as a Second Language (FSL) programs have become more popular with parents (Canadian Parents for French, 2020). Currently, FSL[1] is taught across a variety of programs, including core French, French immersion, and intensive French. However, FSL teacher shortages have been a longstanding issue across Canada (Wernicke et al., 2022). With chronic FSL teacher attrition a threat to healthy FSL programs, what are we overlooking in terms of understanding the complex political and social forces at play when it comes to supporting FSL teachers for long-term success in the profession? What does the application of a social justice lens throughout the teacher preparation process reveal about issues that may improve FSL teachers' overall sense of autonomy, agency, and well-being?

At the request of the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT), we investigated effective additional language (L+) teacher preparation (Masson et al., 2021) and additional language teacher attrition, retention, and recruitment (Masson & Azan, 2021). The main objective was twofold: 1) conduct a literature review on the skills future teachers need to become effective L+ teachers, and 2) examine factors unique to language teachers that contribute to teacher attrition to make recommendations for retention and recruitment. The research sought to address these questions for all language teachers, with a special focus on FSL teachers. Details about the methodological process for creating the literature review, which counted 122 sources, can be found in the CASLT reports.

As teacher educators and educational researchers, we felt it would be useful to put this information in conversation with our ongoing experiences in FSL teacher education programs and to filter these results more broadly through a social justice lens. As such, this paper seeks to:

1. Present a model for FSL teacher preparation that responds to the socio-political context that teachers and teacher education programs find themselves in.
2. Critically examine the interconnection between FSL teacher preparation and teacher retention.

By placing FSL teacher professional identity as the lynchpin to effective teacher preparation (Fairley, 2020; Morgan, 2004), we can address retention based on the idea that "the process of attrition begins long before teachers leave the profession" (Schaefer et al., 2012, p. 115). In the following sections, we first look at what we can learn from the literature on teacher attrition; next, we introduce L+ teacher identities as a way to understand the connection between attrition and professionalization. From this, we then introduce a model for FSL teacher preparation and critically discuss how its components might be addressed in teacher education programs with a view to supporting long-term retention.

Causes and Impacts of Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition, which refers to teachers' decision to leave the classroom, can be organized into hidden attrition and voluntary attrition (Mason, 2017). Hidden attrition occurs when teachers move from teaching their subject to working as school administrators and consultants, or in the case of

[1] We use "FSL" to refer to French as a "second language" programs in this paper as this is common nomenclature in Canada, in part due to French being one of the two official languages of Canada, however, we note the limitations of this terminology (Tang & Fedoration, 2022). To move past any kind of discourse that reinforces a hierarchy of languages we will refer to "additional language" (L+) teacher preparation throughout the paper.

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FSL teachers, working in English-language streams only—that is, no longer teaching French. Hidden attrition is a major challenge to FSL teacher retention, though we have little to no data to confirm this beyond anecdotal observations. Voluntary attrition is when teachers leave the profession entirely. A national study from two decades ago reported that up to 40% of FSL teachers end up leaving or consider leaving the profession at one point in their careers (Lapkin et al., 2006)

From a systems perspective, teacher attrition is a financial and programmatic drain on schools. It results in financial and professional costs to the educational system (OECD, 2020, as cited in Madigan & Kim, 2021). Financially, as more teachers leave the profession, more time and resources are needed to train new teachers. Educationally, because schools continue to hire new teachers, it becomes challenging to create a community, making schools less efficient in promoting student success. In particular, teacher turnover impacts students' academic achievement and overall staff performance; that is, "new teachers have lesser qualifications and experience than the departing teachers" (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020, p. 14), meaning precious institutional memory is lost every time a teacher leaves the profession. Many factors contribute to teacher attrition, such as burnout (Madigan & Kim, 2021) and teachers' sense of self-efficacy (De Neve & Devos, 2017; Parks, 2017).

The years spent in teacher education programs are an inherent part of teachers' professionalization, which refers to the process of *becoming* a teacher. It includes building a teacher knowledge base, moving through a process of socialization that centers around developing values, responsibilities, ways of being as a teacher, and establishing a sense of identity and belonging in the profession (Ingersoll, 1997). Teacher professionalization is linked to the commitment teachers feel towards their chosen profession (Ingersoll, 1997), indicating that "professionalization could be helpful to stimulate teachers' job motivation and with that retain and maintain teachers for the job" (Hofman & Dijkstra, 2010, p. 1038). In the case of FSL teachers, attrition may be linked to a growing sense of deprofessionalization, which is a feeling that teachers can get when they lose their sense of agency and control over their work (Biesta, 2007). A particular point of interest is that,

> Teacher learning is seen to involve the adoption of a teacher identity, a process that involves an interaction between the teaching and learning processes of the teacher-education learning site and the individual teacher's own desire to find meaning in being a teacher (Richards, 2016, p. 139).

In sum, this identity formation, during the FSL teacher preparation years, is deeply interconnected with teacher agency and autonomy.

Language Teacher Identity Formation

Teacher preparation programs are often the place where teachers begin to develop their language teacher identities (LTI) (i.e., who they are as FSL educators). In these programs, they encounter ideas about what language is, what learning is, how to teach language, and how to teach generally. Along the way, language teachers must develop a vast repertoire of knowledge about the target language, language more broadly speaking, language acquisition theory, and pedagogy, specific to their subject matter and more broadly. Approaches to how they learn in these programs and how they are positioned as educators then set the stage for them as they enter the professional sphere. Teacher autonomy, which represents their ability to make informed choices in their professional context, develops alongside their identity (Teng, 2019). Autonomy has a direct impact on identity formation: "Teachers who are unable to assert professional freedom may embrace a fragile

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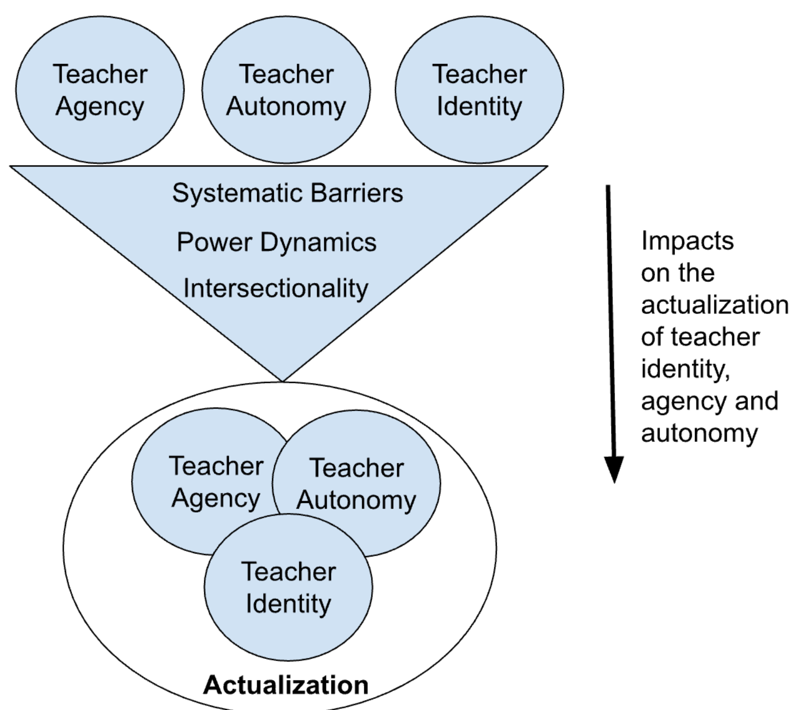
identity. Teachers who are incompetent and reluctant to take control of their teaching may have a rigid identity" (Teng, 2019, p. 84). Another important aspect of autonomy is collective autonomy, a tenet of collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018), the idea that teachers should feel "autonomous from the system bureaucracies but less autonomous from each other" (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018, p. 110) to succeed in the profession.

Agency, another key aspect of LTI (Kayi-Aydar, 2015), affects not only teachers' own learning but also the learning environments they can generate. Indeed, when agency is constrained, teachers struggle to remain openly vulnerable with their students and create trusting learning environments (Lasky, 2005). Agency is not solely located within the individual. For teachers, it also develops as a collective when they work and network with others in their professional environments. To enhance continuous professional learning and organizational change, individual and collective agency must be supported.

The teacher education context is an important site for the development of teacher identity, autonomy, and agency to model how "their identities may be negotiated and may prevent [their] identity as a teacher from collapsing within a site of struggles and constraints" (Teng, 2019, p. 84). We add to Teng's (2019) model for teacher identity actualization, the notion that for L+ teachers, negotiating their identity also entails navigating a complex entanglement of beliefs about knowledge, learning, language, and social identities (Lynch & Motha, 2023). Therefore, teacher educators need to recognize the interconnectedness between teacher identity, autonomy, and agency in their efforts to support the professionalization process and to do this considering social justice factors, such as systemic barriers, power dynamics, and intersectionality of identities, as depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The Actualization of Teacher Professional Identities Filtered Through Systemic Barriers, Intersectionality and Power Dynamics



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We understand LTIs as transformative and in the process of transformation: constantly undergoing discursive (re)/(de)construction that is embodied and socially mediated through self-reflection and collaboration with peers. We locate LTI at the intersection of professional socialization (i.e., teacher learning) and language socialization (i.e., participation in linguistic communities). As Vygotsky argued, it is "essential to incorporate the study of human culture and history into the effort to understand the development of the human mind." (cited in Swain & Deters, 2007, p. 821). We see this as the impetus for turning our gaze to LTI when it comes to addressing L+ teacher learning and long-term retention in the profession (Parks, 2017). If L+ teacher learning occurs through relationship building, then a holistic approach to understanding and developing teacher identities (Schaefer et al., 2012) will provide much needed insight into the links to FSL teacher attrition.

Additional Language (L+) Teacher Identity Formation: Implications for FSL Teachers

Additional language teacher professional identity is an important focus in teacher education as it permeates all areas of educational life: how teachers teach, how they interact with students, how they interact with parents, what role they see themselves playing in the classroom, in their schools, and in their communities, etc. Norton defines it as "the way a person understands [their] relationship to the world, how that relationship is structured across time and space, and how the person understands possibilities for the future" (Norton, 2013, p. 4). Such a definition underscores the importance of truly understanding how FSL teachers situate themselves in their practice and the profession more broadly to even begin to attempt to counter attrition rates and improve retention.

Much of the research on FSL language teacher identity in Canada has focused on their linguistic identity, namely how FSL teachers, many of whom are L+ learners of French themselves, construct their identity around the notion of 'native-speakerness' (Tang, 2020; Wernicke, 2017). Other research has examined how to support FSL teachers' competence and confidence in their language proficiency as it relates to their professional and linguistic identity (Le Bouthillier & Kristmanson, 2023). While prior research has framed the 'non-native' speaker identity, namely among white anglophone teacher candidates, as a hurdle to achieving full linguistic and professional competence (Bayliss & Vignola, 2007), more recent research has attempted to move beyond the 'native-speaker / non-native-speaker' paradigm (Wernicke, 2020) to examine the professional identity construction of FSL teachers more holistically.

Other research has sought to move beyond 'native-speaker' ideologies by adopting a plurilingual stance and acknowledging the multiple partial plurilingual repertoires of future FSL teachers (Byrd Clark & Roy, 2022). This research has further problematized the portrayal of FSL teachers' linguistic identities by accounting for their plurilingual profiles and how that might affect their approach to teaching French (Byrd Clark, 2008). Understanding the relationship between teacher identities and agency reveals the ongoing discursive negotiation of the relationship to language over time (Kayi-Aydar, 2015), allowing teachers to challenge static notions of native-speakerism.

Beyond the connections individuals make to the language they choose to teach, questions also arise about how language teachers are positioned in their practice: How their social, racial or cultural identities intersect and affect their status (Ramjattan, 2019). Most concerning, in our case, is the research in language teacher attrition which shows that racially and socially marginalized teachers are at greater risk of deprofessionalization and departure from the profession than teachers

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who identify as white, cis-gender, heterosexual, able-bodied, among other dominant social markers (Ingersoll et al., 2019; Marx et al., 2023). Given the increasing changes in the makeup of student populations, it is essential to make efforts to retain members of the teaching profession who reflect linguistic, cultural, and racial diversity among other social identity markers, such as gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, immigration status, and (dis)ability.

More recent research has sought to examine the intersection of race with the professional identity construction of FSL teachers, particularly as these identities intersect with the unique linguistic policy of official bilingualism in settler colonial Canada (Masson & Côté, 2024; Wernicke, 2022). These constitute an emerging body of work moving beyond a purely linguistic focus to add other frameworks that consider the intersectionality of linguistic identities with other social, ethnic, and/or cultural identities (in these cases, racial and citizenship/immigration-based identities).

Focusing more explicitly on FSL teachers' professional identities, some research has examined their overall sense of efficacy (Cooke & Faez, 2018), professional belonging and well-being (Knouzi & Mady, 2014; Masson, 2018), and how collaborative practices influence their sense of professionalism (Kaszuba et al., in press). The results, although demonstrating great creativity and resilience among some FSL teachers, also point to a greater need for teachers to build strong professional identities, which will, in turn, affect teachers' decisions to remain in the profession long-term.

More recent and alternative approaches to developing FSL teacher identity have focused on intentionally working with future FSL teachers through transformative arts-based research paradigms to address their linguistic, cultural and professional identities agentively as a means to identify and (re)/(de)construct deep-seated beliefs about language, learning and teaching with future FSL teachers (Masson & Côté, under review).

FSL Teacher Preparation for Long-Term Retention

A growing body of research has highlighted the crucial links between teacher learning and LTI formation (Xu, 2017), pointing to a need for teacher education programs to center teacher identities during the teacher preparation process (Fairley, 2020). Identity-based language teacher education pedagogies make space for taking into consideration social justice issues that will impact language teachers' professional identity development (Varghese, 2016; Cochran-Smith & Keefe, 2022). We argue that centering language teacher identities can be a means of preparing FSL teachers to enter the profession and remain in the long run. As we will show over the next sections, identity permeates all key facets of language teacher preparation, making it imperative to center identity development in language teacher preparation programs.

Among other important aspects that support the development of strong FSL teacher professional identities is understanding how teachers negotiate institutional demands and contexts in which they find themselves. A pan-Canadian study led by Stephanie Arnott to identify ways to better equip new FSL teachers for long-term success found that systemic issues create a metaphorical 'avalanche' that overwhelms many teachers, forcing them to consider leaving the profession (CASLT, 2022). Colleagues on the project, Culligan et al. (2023) and Wernicke et al. (2022) identified language proficiency support, professional collaboration and mentorship as means to support FSL teacher retention further.

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Recent research (Cook & Faez, 2018) has revealed that FSL teacher candidates do not always feel particularly confident in delivering instruction upon completion of their teacher education programs. Core to the impetus for this paper is the notion that the structure of FSL teacher education programs may be negatively affecting future FSL teachers' preparational needs for long-term success in the profession (see Smith et al., 2023 for details on the structure of programs across Canada). Structural challenges in teacher education programs include deficit-oriented perspectives, limited time and access to material and human resources, lack of relational approaches to teaching and collective responsibility toward FSL teacher preparation (CASLT, 2022). Prior research has identified further areas that affect individual FSL teachers' self-efficacy (Faez, 2011), including linguistic and cultural background, language proficiency in French, and their beliefs about language and learning. We suggest that FSL teacher educators and researchers reflect critically on the pathways, content and culture of learning and teaching offered and modelled in programs to support self-efficacy and the development of strong professional identities among future FSL teachers.

To examine more closely how LTI permeates FSL teacher learning specifically, we propose an FSL teacher preparation model based on decades of research on teacher learning and preparation. For instance, Lapkin et al. (1990) set an agenda for French immersion teacher education, which pointed to a need for both general teacher preparation and specific immersion education components – highlighting the uniqueness of preparing FSL teachers for certain contexts. Later, MacFarlane and Hart (2002) elaborated on what FSL teachers should receive in their initial education program: pedagogical qualifications, subject matter knowledge, and language proficiency. Salvatori and MacFarlane (2009) suggest that the knowledge base of the language teacher should include "theories of teaching, teaching skills, communication skills, subject matter knowledge, pedagogical reasoning and decision making, and contextual knowledge" (p. 6). This is reflective of the broad areas of knowledge and skills identified in research that contribute to effective additional language teaching (Freeman & Johnson, 1998) while making specific recommendations for FSL teacher preparation.

Taking the literature on L+ teacher education into account, we present a holistic approach we are calling the *Four Pillars for Success* specific to FSL teacher needs, which highlights the development of language teacher competence across four key areas: 1) target language proficiency, 2) intercultural competence, 3) pedagogical knowledge and skill, and 4) collaborative professionalism. The pillars were identified as ways to promote effective FSL teaching and provide a guided approach to lifelong learning. These pillars do not stand alone; they are dependent on each other, and improvements in one area will likely impact the others.

The first three pillars reflect the literature on L+ education as pieces that contribute to effective L+ teaching (Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Salvatori & MacFarlane, 2009). In FSL teacher preparation programs, French language proficiency is often evaluated before FSL teacher candidates enter their teacher education programs (Bayliss & Vignola, 2007). In some cases, it is also maintained through French coursework and language courses. Intercultural competence, which is the capacity to mediate between languages and cultures as they come into contact, is often addressed to some extent in programs, with varying degrees of success depending on how the notion of culture is discussed, how much teacher candidates think about and interact with the colonial past and present of the French language, and how varieties of French are discussed or absent during the program (Masson et al., 2022). Teacher education programs cover basic overarching and subject-specific pedagogical knowledge and skills, particularly in FSL

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methodology courses. We have added collaborative professionalism (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2018) to the framework as a response to the specific professional learning needs of FSL teachers. As many FSL teachers report feeling isolated within their schools (Knouzi & Mady, 2014; Masson, 2018), this pillar emphasizes the importance of working with and learning from other teaching professionals to develop collective efficacy, autonomy, and a shared vision for effective language teaching. Together, these four pillars, presented in Figure 2, form an important set of skills and professional mindset that link to the idea of teachers as lifelong learners such that their professional identity and well-being become the central focus in hopes of addressing long-term teacher retention in the profession.

Figure 2

The Four Pillars for Success in FSL Teacher Education

The model is based on our research and professional experiences working as FSL teachers and teacher educators. Research and conversations with other FSL teacher educators have also greatly informed the development of this model. With this in mind, we also took into account two important factors when designing the model. First, it is important to acknowledge that FSL teachers in Canada have unique preparational needs due to the fact that many of them work bilingually within a monolingual framework (i.e., they teach in French and work in English-language school boards). Second, when it comes to developing a preparational model for teachers, teacher training programs in Canada are situated within their own unique historical, political and cultural context. This informs the professional environment teachers will be entering upon graduation. For instance, in Canada, a low valuation of French as a subject across school boards contributes in part to the ongoing FSL teacher shortage (Lapkin et al., 2006; Masson, 2018). FSL teachers report feeling a sense of deprofessionalization, meaning that their practice and professional judgment are undervalued (Lapkin et al., 2006). FSL teachers in Canada report that their status can be undermined based on whether they are perceived as 'native' speakers of French (Wernicke, 2017). FSL teachers' racial identity also intersects with their 'native-/non-native' speaker identity, often revealing deep-rooted racism and discrimination (Masson & Côté, 2024).

Studies we examined across the four pillars highlighted the intersection of preparation, practice, and identity formation for new FSL teachers. While teacher education programs often deal with the first two prongs, identity formation is not always explicitly addressed or developed,

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particularly as it relates to L+ teacher identity and their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. In the following section, we define each of the pillars and critically discuss the implications of these definitions in light of the studies we reviewed. We include some possible recommendations, but we want to note that approaching initial teacher education (ITE) from a socially just and equitable perspective means that faculties should develop modifications for their programs that account for the unique contextual needs and profiles of their teacher candidates. The recommendations are intended as possible examples rather than advocating for any kind of 'one-size-fits-all' approach to ITE for L+ language teachers. Incorporating LTI development in teacher preparation models is what might help us address FSL teacher attrition and improve retention in the profession.

Language Proficiency

Under this holistic model, language proficiency is just that: a measure of proficiency rather than deficiency. Taking a socially mediated approach to language learning, language proficiency becomes an interactive skill that happens within and is influenced by social and cultural contexts in which it is being used. Pinpointing levels of proficiency, then, also becomes dynamic as it depends on how the language is used in a given context. As knowledge is co-constructed, language proficiency can only be evaluated and re-evaluated on a continuous basis, rather than determined and held at a certain point in time.

Conceptualizations of language and language learning that are rooted in pluralistic frameworks, such as those that promote plurilingual competence or translanguaging, align with more holistic understandings of language learning. They are anchored in an asset-based perspective to language learning and favour approaches to language learning that draw on learners' linguistic and cultural funds of knowledge as a starting point.

Naturally, the level of language proficiency in French matters for future FSL teachers. Language proficiency is closely related to identity and affects teachers' sense of self. How they develop their sense of expertise in this area is crucial, and for this, it is essential to consider future FSL teachers' linguistic identity. L+ teachers' identities have long been constructed around the notion of 'native' / 'non-native' speakers. This conception of linguistic identity has been problematized (Canagarajah, 2013) for being an oversimplification rooted in a monolingual paradigm that often excludes racialized teachers and those from the Global South (Pillay, 2018; Ramjattan, 2019).

In the FSL context, this ideology continues to impact teachers negatively (Wernicke, 2017, 2020). It is problematic as it can create feelings of linguistic insecurity among FSL teachers (Wernicke, 2020, 2023), or what Tang and Fedoration (2022) have rebranded as a lack of 'linguistic security' to take an asset-based approach towards the healing and legitimizing work that FSL teachers who are L+ learners of French must embark on to feel a sense of belonging to their professional context. They also highlight the way in which discussions around 'linguistic insecurity' are rooted in deficit-oriented perspectives when they attribute teachers with the primary responsibility for not feeling 'secure enough' to teach effectively or stay in the profession (Tang & Fedoration, 2022). In reality, L+ FSL teachers are regularly confronted with monolingual and exclusionary discourses in the media, in schools, from parents, and in programs, about who can speak/teach French and what those speakers should look and sound like (Masson & Côté, 2024).

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This perspective is reinforced in teacher training programs (Masson et al., 2022), where L+ FSL teachers' language proficiency is policed, and tests are used as a gatekeeping measure[2].

In the Canadian context, the notion of 'native speaker' is often tied to the idea of being 'francophone', 'anglophone' and/or 'bilingual'. However, linguistic identity markers such as francophone, anglophone and bilingual can reinforce divides between teachers and entrench feelings of 'otherness' among L+ teachers (Riches & Parks, 2021; Tang & Fedoration, 2022). Francophone communities have unique cultures and settler colonial histories that are part of the Canadian landscape. While 'francophone-ness' has long been associated with whiteness and portrayed through a Eurocentric lens (Wernicke et al., in press), speakers of French in Canada are actually present in every province and territory in the country, including in some Indigenous and Métis communities. What is more, the francophone community as a whole in Canada has undergone large ethnic, racial and cultural shifts in the last decades, in part due to the migratory movements of many speakers of French from the African, Asian, and South American/Caribbean diaspora (Madibbo, 2021). Many L+ French teachers struggle to identify as francophone, bilingual, or even plurilingual, and how these identities are taken up intersect in complex and nuanced ways when racial, ethnic, and cultural identities are also taken into consideration (Wernicke, 2022; Masson & Côté, 2024).

Recommendations

As teacher candidates come from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, efforts to improve FSL teachers' language proficiency should draw from teachers' resources in their language support efforts. For this, conceptions of FSL teachers' linguistic identity need to be revisited. While researchers have moved away from the conceptualization of FSL teachers as 'native'/'non-native' speakers, it remains unclear whether and to what extent this notion is reinforced and/or deconstructed with teacher candidates in preparation programs. For this, FSL teacher educators need to look inward at the linguistic ideals they are reproducing in their programs. One recent exemplary study shows how three FSL teacher educators deconstruct their understanding of linguistic identity in their local context and how this affects their practice in teacher preparation programs (Tang et al., 2023). Reframing FSL teachers as additional language (L+) speakers can account for their plurilingual and pluricultural experiences. In fact, L+ speakers of French make up the majority of FSL teachers in some provinces (ACPI, 2018). Taking an asset-based perspective towards the language proficiency and capacity to speak multiple languages among FSL teachers would not only enhance their self-efficacy but also create a shift that empowers teachers to explore their own and their students' linguistic repertoires holistically. Taking an intersectional lens to linguistic identity can also account for intersections with cultural, ethnic, racial, and immigrant/settler identities to reveal unique life trajectories and learning needs. For instance, most FSL teachers find themselves in predominantly anglophone contexts, where they have fewer opportunities to use French. They may have had linguistic journeys in which they made more or less use of their French at different points in their life, or they may come from international contexts and need to familiarize themselves with local varieties of French in order to teach in Canada. The argument, here, is to expand our understanding of FSL teacher candidates as simply 'native speakers' or 'non-native speakers' since reality often shows that this categorization is too

[2] We wish to stress that we are not suggesting that future FSL teachers should not be provided with support to work on their language proficiency. Simply that many of the current approaches in place in teacher education programs are deficit-based.

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limiting to encompass the wide array of FSL teacher candidates' linguistic profiles, in turn delegitimizing their identities as language speakers (Wernicke, 2020).

Teacher education programs need to consider what experiences they offer their students to improve their linguistic proficiency and how they position teacher candidates throughout these offerings. The short duration of ITE programs and insufficient immersive experiences hinder their linguistic gains (Roskvist et al., 2014). Addressing this would require providing authentic, intensive, immersive experiences in French communities to support their proficiency and confidence throughout all phases of the teacher education program, including coursework and practicum (Culligan et al., 2023; Masson et al., 2019).

Intercultural Competence

Teaching languages also means being able to teach how to mediate between cultural groups as they come into contact during communicative exchanges. Intercultural competence (IC) is tied to language teaching in that stronger cultural knowledge supports language learning (Ruest & Wernicke, 2021). The prongs of IC have been defined in various ways but generally encompass some or all of the following components: awareness and understanding of cultural differences, experience with other cultures, and understanding of one's own culture. It has also been defined as a set of skills, knowledges and attitudes (Byram, 1997). For teachers, this knowledge combined with language proficiency, can lead to language teaching that is in tune with how learners take up language usage in different contexts.

Language teachers not only need to develop their own IC, but they also need to learn how to teach it in their classrooms and develop intercultural teaching and learning (ICTL). This means that FSL teachers must have a good understanding of themselves as cultural beings, an awareness of the plethora of French cultures in Canada and across the world and be able to acknowledge and interact adeptly with the presence of local cultures in their professional context (i.e., their students' cultures, the local community's cultures). However, language teachers do not always understand their role and responsibilities as reproducers of cultural or linguistic models (Keating Marshall & Bokhorst-Heng, 2018). Recent work (Kunnas et al., 2024), which used an anti-biased, antiracist (ABAR) framework to examine how FSL teachers defined culture, reflected on the link between language and culture, and the role of students' cultures in the FSL classroom, showed that while teachers increasingly held more socially-oriented views on culture, there is a strong need to develop critical orientations in ICTL teacher preparation. This aligns with more recent literature in ICTL which advocates for a more intentional accounting of power relations in the process of intercultural communication (Guilherme, 2022), and even infusing advocacy work that supports social and political action when developing IC (Ladegaard & Phipps, 2020), as a way of responding to teachers' mandates of preparing the critical thinking skills among the youth of tomorrow.

FSL teachers equipped to teach in the 21st century must balance teaching *about* culture, *with* culture and *through* cultural artefacts and activities. Specifically, implementing culture in the classroom should "require us to reach beyond the paradigms which are sustained by intercultural discourse" (Phipps, 2010, p. 5) and not reinforce a policy of liberal multiculturalism (Kubota, 2004). Liberal multiculturalism, in which diversity and culture are addressed as a form of political correctness, provides little substance in terms of cultural knowledge. Instead, interactions with cultures are often limited to "celebrating" diversity and place an over-extended focus on commonalities or differences (exoticizing and essentializing the Other) between cultures. Worse,

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liberal multiculturalism paves the way for colour-evasiveness among language professionals (e.g., claiming to treat all students the same, or limiting inclusive practice to promoting tolerance as a virtue), which ends up denying or silencing racial (and other social) realities for students, and obscuring issues of power and privilege.

Recommendations

Teacher education programs need to promote cultural proficiency as much as language proficiency for L+ teachers. That is, L+ teachers must be able to engage with culture as an object of study in respectful ways, and they must be able to navigate (and teach how to navigate) intercultural communication. For teachers to understand their role as social agents of language and culture, they need more robust hands-on experiences to understand who they are as bi-/plurilinguals in Canada, as members of the francophonie in general and/or as French speakers and teachers. While having teacher candidates participate in a teaching abroad experience can help improve their intercultural competence (Bournot-Trites et al., 2018), this recommendation might be a classist luxury that is not available to many teacher candidates who do not have the time or funds to travel abroad. Opportunities to develop as cultural beings should be embedded more concretely into preparation programs through open critical discussions about French cultures and intentional identity work on their cultural identities. One way to do this is through the use of art-based activities (Masson & Côté, under review). Specific examples of activities are available for teacher educators at the L2 ART website (https://sites.google.com/view/l2-art/accueil-home). With these experiences, language teachers could better understand their cultural identities, French cultures, their interactions, and how to engage students culturally.

Developing intercultural competence also extends beyond knowledge about and interaction with French cultures to include the interaction of French language classrooms within their local communities. For instance, teacher education programs can explore the following with teachers: *What is the local history of French communities in this context? What are other language groups in this area? How do these cultures come into contact? What does it mean to be teaching a colonial language in my context? What forms of privilege or oppression have local communities experienced, and how might this inform our interactions?* Such questions can lay the foundation for developing a critical approach to teaching French that is essential to establishing culturally adapted and responsive teaching practices. Indeed, FSL preparation programs do not always address culture in their programs in ways that respectfully acknowledge the local realities of teaching French, a colonial language, in a settler colonial context and may, in fact, reproduce oppressive and discriminatory ideas and practices (Masson et al., 2022). For FSL teachers, it is therefore essential to consider what it means to be working and learning in a settler colonial context, and more specifically, what challenges it presents to following mandates for promoting equity and inclusion in the language curriculum. FSL teachers need intercultural competence to work with colleagues and students who may be from the post-colonial diaspora (i.e., those who have emigrated from former colonies), part of Indigenous communities, or part of the settler-colonial community which continues to settle this land and impose its cultural dominance (see Wernicke, Calla & George, *under review*, for an example of how one teacher preparation program addresses this with their candidates). Developing critical perspectives that recognize the power relations between different groups on this territory is an integral part of applying intercultural competence for Canadian FSL teachers, what we have also termed critical intercultural competence (Kunnas et al., 2024; Masson et al., 2022).

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Vital to the success of preparing FSL teachers to teach in culturally adapted and responsive ways, which is increasingly becoming the norm across school boards and ministries of education, includes preparing teachers to engage with intercultural competencies and knowledge based on the principles of antiracist and anti-oppressive education; to critically assess materials they choose to work with and mandated materials, and; to ground themselves in strong professional identities that draw from their own and their students' cultures.

Pedagogical Knowledge and Skill

Pedagogical knowledge has been defined as the "knowledge, theories and beliefs about the act of teaching and the process of learning" (Gatbonton, 2008, p. 162). These categories form the knowledge base that is key for teachers' success. In L+ education, researchers emphasize the unique positioning of L+ teachers' pedagogical knowledge (Salvatori & MacFarlane, 2009; Faez, 2011). In our definition of pedagogical knowledge and skills for FSL teachers, we include general pedagogical knowledge, subject-specific knowledge (knowledge about the French language) and subject-specific pedagogical knowledge (knowledge about how to teach French as an L+). FSL teaching is unique in that the content of the course (the French language) is also often the medium of communication in class. Yet, additional "language teachers typically enter the profession with largely unarticulated, yet deeply ingrained, notions about what language is, how it is learned, and how it should be taught" (Johnson, 2009, pp. 13-14).

Because teachers' knowledge base determines how they operationalize theories of learning in their teaching practice, a process known as *praxis* (Freire, 1970), the concept of identity-as-pedagogy (Morgan, 2004) is crucial for understanding how FSL teachers develop their pedagogical knowledge and skill. It operates at the intersection of how they embody pedagogy in their classrooms, how they understand language as a construct and how they position themselves toward language learning and teaching. At this core, self-efficacy is an important component in developing the pedagogical knowledge and skills pillar. A well-developed sense of self-efficacy translates into confidence in the teacher's teaching philosophy (Bigelow & Ranney, 2004).

Alongside the need for FSL teachers to develop their linguistic identity (Pillar 1) and their cultural identity (Pillar 2), they must develop their pedagogical identity (Pillar 3) to truly be able to position themselves with confidence and intentionality in their practice. However, pedagogical knowledge and modes of transmission do not exist in a vacuum. As Lynch & Motha (2023) have shown, understandings of identity and knowledge can reproduce colonial ways of thinking and viewing the world, and these will have an impact on teacher identity formation. Critical pedagogy (Freire, 1970) states that developing critical consciousness among future teachers is essential for promoting social justice and equity (Chan & Coney, 2020). This is particularly true in FSL programs where there is a great need to trouble the reproduction of standards of Whiteness, oppressive pedagogical practices, and colonial ways of thinking (Grant et al., under review; Kunnas, 2023; Masson et al., 2022).

With increasingly rapidly changing professional contexts, FSL teachers need greater support to prepare for 21st-century teaching. Specifically, FSL teachers need greater preparation in terms of developing anti-biased, anti-racist practices (Masson et al., 2022; Kunnas, 2023), gender and queer inclusive practices (Grant, 2022), using digital technology (Boreland et al., 2022), and, working with multilingual learners (Mady et al., 2017). Add to this, that official policy documents meant to support teachers, such as curricula, can also reproduce oppressive ideologies

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and be limited in the ways that they support FSL teachers to challenge dominant discourses of what is ‘normal’ (Carroll et al., 2024; Grant et al., 2024).

Recommendations

For FSL teachers of the 21st century, integrating and adapting content that is relevant to current issues (such as addressing social justice, reconciliation with Indigenous communities, environmental preservation, developing critical media literacy and digital literacy) means that teachers must be better equipped to modify their lessons to better meet the real-world needs of their students. For FSL teacher educators, the challenge is to bridge general and language-specific pedagogical knowledge. For instance, while action-oriented or neurolinguistic approaches are valuable tools for learning how to teach language, these also must be anchored to broader general pedagogical approaches, specifically those that promote equity and inclusion, such as universal design for learning and culturally responsive teaching. A commonly reported challenge facing FSL teachers is the lack of French resources in schools, often forcing teachers to spend hours translating English resources (ACPI, 2018), or the lack of awareness about where to find and how to adapt resources (Wernicke et al., 2022; Culligan et al., 2023). To support them, teacher candidates should be introduced to pedagogical currents such as multimodal/critical literacy education, culturally responsive teaching, project-based learning, and the like. The commonality across these pedagogical currents is that they place teacher autonomy and critical reflection at their core, and thus, for teacher educators, this can be a means to encourage self-efficacy among future teachers. Some of these have been explored in FSL contexts to great success, demonstrating how FSL teachers enact pedagogical efficacy and creativity in ways that support social justice and equity in their classrooms (Lau et al., 2017; Masson, 2021; Sabatier et al., 2013).

In our practice, we also witnessed a lack of ability to find, evaluate, and adapt French resources in the context of teacher education. French resources that reflect the professional needs of teachers and the learning needs of students are crucial to promoting self-efficacy and, in turn, affect FSL teachers’ identity development. One example of developing 21st-century professionalism among FSL educators has been led by the group called FSLdisrupt (www.FSLdisrupt.org) which sought to find French-language books that respond to culturally responsive teaching and learning needs in the high school FSL classroom to develop FSL students’ critical literacy. In collaboration with a teacher education program, this professional learning community has been developing skills, materials, and resources to re-orient its practice to include critical literacy in FSL.

Collaborative Professionalism

Collaborative professionalism is an intentional, ongoing form of collaboration which requires teachers to engage meaningfully with other professionals. This is distinct from professional collaboration, which can be understood as teachers working together in any capacity. Collaborative professionalism involves teachers’ commitment to being ongoing learners who are willing to be vulnerable with colleagues. The end goal of collaborative professionalism is to improve student learning and success (Hargreaves & O’Connor, 2018). Collaborative professionalism is important for fostering teachers’ sense of belonging to the school community as “teachers in collaborative cultures realize there are others who can help and support them” (p. 2). Through collaborative professionalism, teachers engage in reflective activities and problem-solving, which helps them overcome challenges, such as feelings of isolation and devaluation of their subject matter.

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Like the other pillars, a strong sense of self-efficacy is essential for successful collaborative professionalism. For FSL teachers teaching in primarily anglophone school contexts, FSL teachers can experience low self-efficacy, limiting their abilities to form positive professional relationships with their non-FSL colleagues and leading them to feel overworked and isolated in their L+ teaching practice (Knouzi & Mady, 2014; Masson, 2018). This barrier to collaboration limits FSL teachers' ability to succeed by making them feel unsupported and unsatisfied, which could, in turn, lead them to leave the profession. Fundamental to the notion of collaborative professionalism is the idea of building a shared vision with colleagues (e.g., on how to teach French) to foster collective efficacy and collective autonomy, as well as build networks of accountability and support among the community of teachers.

Recommendations

This pillar promotes the stance of teachers as lifelong learners. It challenges the myth that FSL teachers should be completely prepared as professionals by the end of their teacher education program (CASLT, 2022). By encouraging collaborative professionalism between FSL teachers specifically, their development as professionals becomes a collective experience that provides them with opportunities to challenge their own standpoint and grow as teaching professionals. For teacher education programs often characterized by neoliberal policies, the logic of professional learning communities has the potential to become altered among future FSL teachers, such that it loses its fundamental value and long-term benefits (Kaszuba et al., 2024, in press). Hence, developing FSL teachers' collaborative professionalism must be intentional.

By making collaborative professionalism a cornerstone of teacher education programs, associate teachers, teacher candidates, professors, and practicing teachers can work together synergistically before, during and after they enter the profession. Professors in the program can model forms of collaborative professionalism; teacher candidates can be encouraged to practice collaborative professionalism with their colleagues, mentors and professors (see www.readyFSL.ca for examples of how to apply collaborative professionalism within teacher education programs). However, for such changes to take root, teacher education programs must make structural changes that will support teacher educators in investing time and energy into developing equitable professional learning communities. This would mean making time for full-time and part-time professors to meet and collaborate with each other, and with seconded and associate teachers affiliated with the FSL teacher education program. In a study funded by the Ministry of Education in Ontario that implemented the *Four Pillars for Success* in two faculties of education, participants reported that they needed more time and training to understand and apply the principles of collaborative professionalism, such as mutual respect, allowing space for discussion/debate, feeling comfortable, being open, and learning from each other and with each other. They also reported that they could develop their language proficiency, intercultural competence, and pedagogical knowledge through collaborative professionalism in learning communities (www.readyFSL.ca).

Not only would an orientation towards fostering collaborative professionalism promote future FSL teachers' sense of self-efficacy, but it would also lay the groundwork for their burgeoning leadership skills and the creative professional risk-taking necessary to enhance FSL programs throughout their careers. Consequently, teacher candidates would enter the profession with strong levels of self-efficacy and establish collaborative networks with colleagues, which is key to maintaining their sense of identity as teachers and lifelong learners.

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Discussion

Fundamental conceptualizations about language and language learning are at the core of transitioning language ITE towards more equitable and re/humanizing approaches (Lyle, 2022) to teacher preparation that considers the whole learner. As such, in this paper, we seek to encourage language teacher educators to challenge ideas of language proficiency, the francophonie and intercultural competence rooted in reified notions of what language is and how it works, the connection between language teaching methodologies and inclusive teaching practices, and the potential for collaborative professionalism to create a safety net for future FSL teachers.

Although we offer a model to enhance FSL teacher retention starting in teacher education, teacher preparation is only one aspect of teachers' professional lives. As the leaky pipeline continues while teachers enter the profession (Masson, 2018), it is important to recognize broader influences on L+ teacher attrition (Parks, 2017). Schaefer et al. (2012) distinguished between individual and contextual factors leading to attrition. Individual factors include teacher demographics, resilience, and any personal factors, such as family-related restraints. Teachers' salaries, available support, and professional development are viewed as contextual factors. Nevertheless, Borman and Dowling's (2008) meta-analysis revealed that working conditions are the most prominent predictor of teacher attrition. As a result, we cannot place the onus of remaining in the profession solely on teachers' shoulders and need to look at broader systemic issues at play across schools and school boards (CASLT, 2022; Masson et al., 2019; Wernicke et al., 2022).

Once they enter the classroom, other social and political factors will influence teachers' sense of self, belonging and identity development. For example, systemic influences can undermine FSL teachers' professional sense of self once they are working (Masson, 2018). Teacher preparation programs are also under pressure from institutional expectations and systemic forces (Masson et al., 2022; Smith et al., 2023). This calls for more research on systemic issues through concerted collaborative efforts with school boards, ministries, officials, superintendents and principals to address retention issues to ensure that the systemic forces at play do not erode FSL teachers' sense of self and well-being over time. There is a need for research with these same shareholders for ways of building up FSL teachers and maintaining their professional identities so that they can thrive and contribute to building strong FSL programs throughout their careers. Preparing FSL teachers by instilling strong professional identities can *begin* to address challenges and exclusionary practices that are part of broader systemic issues.

Concluding Thoughts

FSL teacher attrition is threatening the future of FSL programs in Canada. Professionalization, which was identified as one of the key factors in reducing FSL teacher attrition, can begin during teacher education. In this article, we offered the *Four Pillars for Success* model as a means to critically evaluate common practices in teacher education programs and support teachers in developing a stronger sense of professionalization. Offering tools and experiences that will help teachers navigate the complexities of the FSL teaching practice, can allow teachers more time to develop the level of agency and autonomy needed to mitigate persistent barriers and challenges throughout their careers.

The roles teachers play in the classroom are inextricably tied to their professional selves, their professional knowledge, and the context in which they operate. How we understand knowledge and who holds the privilege of generating, disseminating, questioning, and critiquing it, will reveal critical understanding of the roles and responsibilities of teachers within their sphere

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of sovereignty. Ultimately, with teacher education programs designed to foster agency among teachers to contribute to their own knowledge base, FSL teachers will create a more nuanced, complete view of educational environments and experiences, leading to more meaningful teaching and learning of FSL in schools and more satisfaction among teachers towards their profession.

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Teacher Educators' Endeavours to Enhance Students' Cultural Competence: A Qualitative Study within Danish Teacher Education

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Abstract

This paper explores teacher educators' endeavours to enhance their students' cultural competence in the context of Danish teacher education. It analyses how these endeavours resonate with the theoretical principles of critical multiculturalism and multicultural education. The study employed dyadic interviews as its primary method for data collection. The findings revealed that the educators felt constrained by the lack of awareness among politicians and policymakers of the significance of multicultural education, which made it difficult for them to develop in-depth knowledge and critical views on culture among students. The educators emphasized a need for a holistic approach that encompasses systemic changes and a shift in mindset toward critical multiculturalism in teacher education. This study calls for more institutional accountability to invest in preparing future teachers to work in multicultural classrooms.

Keywords: teacher education, critical multiculturalism, cultural diversity, dyadic interviews, Denmark.

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Teacher Educators' Endeavours to Enhance Students' Cultural Competence: A Qualitative Study within Danish Teacher Education

In the contemporary era of globalization, cultural and linguistic diversity in educational settings has evolved into an undeniable reality, offering a multitude of opportunities and advantages. Nevertheless, previous international research indicates that educational professionals at different educational levels continue to grapple with the establishment of learning environments that embrace this diversity (Benediktsson, 2023b; Borrero et al., 2018; Dervin, 2023; Dixson, 2021; Obondo et al., 2016; Ragnarsdóttir et al., 2023). In the context of Danish compulsory education, cultural and linguistic diversity has likewise become an everyday reality. Yet, a body of research indicates that school personnel are inadequately equipped, both in theoretical and practical terms, to implement teaching and assessment methods that incorporate pupils' diverse cultural and linguistic identities into their education (Frederiksen et al., 2022; Häggström et al., 2020; Steffensen & Kjeldsen, 2021).

The Danish educational system is distinguished by its focus on the concept of togetherness [Danish: fællesskab], underscoring the significance of cultivating a sense of community and common spirit (Jantzen, 2020; Mason, 2020; Nielsen & Ma, 2021). In this context, togetherness is not just about being physically together; it also involves a shared feeling of belonging and collective purpose. Furthermore, the concept of togetherness stems from the philosophical tenets advocating that individual enlightenment and a fortified sense of belonging attained through education are essential for societal well-being (Jantzen, 2020; Mason, 2020). Nonetheless, within contemporary multicultural settings, school personnel need to examine this concept critically, particularly its merits and constraints. Such reflective practice may enable the effective adaptation of the concept of togetherness to foster learning environments characterized by cultural and linguistic diversity. In the absence of a comprehensive understanding of the concept of togetherness within contemporary contexts, educational institutions may fail to equip young people with a robust sense of empathy, social justice, and a critical view of policies and practices designed to advance equity (Nielsen & Ma, 2021).

The critical responsibility of higher education institutions offering teacher education programs is to provide future teachers with both theoretical knowledge and practical skills for empowering all children, regardless of their cultural, linguistic, socio-economic, or any other status. However, existing research within teacher education in Denmark and other Nordic countries has identified certain challenges in cultivating holistic perspectives on diversity and adequately preparing future teachers for work in multicultural classrooms. For instance, Ozuna (2022) conducted a comparative study of teacher education programs in California and Denmark, concluding that while Danish student teachers exhibited some understanding of methodologies appropriate for multicultural settings, they witnessed limited application of these methods during their practical training. Another comparative study involving Danish and Icelandic student teachers highlighted gaps in their understanding of assessment methods that account for cultural diversity (Benediktsson, 2023a). Both groups expressed the need for greater support and specialized training to implement these assessment methods effectively (Benediktsson, 2023a). Similarly, a Norwegian study within a five-year integrated teacher education program emphasized the need for improved preparation, specifically in teaching methods pertinent to cultural diversity, along with stronger connections between theoretical instruction and practical experience (Tavares, 2023).

This paper examines the perspectives of Danish teacher educators, specifically focusing on how they perceive and engage with cultural perspectives within teacher education programs.

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It explores their reflections on recognizing and incorporating the existing cultural diversity of contemporary Danish society into the education of future teachers. Utilizing data from three dyadic interviews with six teacher educators, the study seeks to address three central research questions:

- What place do cultural perspectives hold in teacher education, as perceived by six teacher educators from three Danish university colleges?
- What methods do these educators employ to enhance their students' cultural competence?
- How do these methods resonate with the theoretical principles of critical multiculturalism and multicultural education?

In the context of this paper, cultural competence is defined as teachers' ability to understand, respect, and actively integrate cultural and linguistic diversity into teaching practices, aiming to establish empowering learning environments.

This study provides a critical analysis of Danish teacher education, offering valuable insights relevant both within the domestic context and for international educational stakeholders. This relevance is substantiated by the study's alignment with global research trends concerning cultural and linguistic diversity in education.

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The study's theoretical framework builds upon critical multiculturalism as conceptualized by May and Sleeter (2010). In the educational context, critical multiculturalism diverges from trivialized multicultural education by not merely promoting awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity but also seeking to interrogate the underlying power structures that perpetuate inequities among different cultural groups (May & Sleeter, 2010; Vavrus, 2010). By employing a lens of critical analysis to scrutinize systemic inequalities, critical multiculturalism encourages both teachers and students to challenge and transform oppressive systems of power (May & Sleeter, 2010; Vavrus, 2010). Hence, it aims for a more comprehensive and transformative impact on educational settings.

When it comes to the practical implementation of the theory of critical multiculturalism, Skrefsrud (2022) critically examined the underpinnings of multicultural education and concluded that it is a multifaceted concept which should not be narrowed down to a single approach. This perspective challenges traditional Eurocentric curricula by advocating for a more inclusive educational system. Aligning with May and Sleeter (2010), Skrefsrud (2022) also highlighted the pitfalls of trivialized multicultural education practices that lack integration into everyday school activities, arguing that such isolated approaches can be counterproductive and may perpetuate existing structural inequalities. This argument is supported by Dervin (2023), who discussed the general reluctance among teachers to address issues related to power and social justice, largely due to the lack of confidence and fear of being labelled as troublemakers by other school personnel. The matter is further complicated by the imprecise and often problematic use of terms such as 'ethnic' and 'cultural', which can lead to stereotyping and treating minority students as spokespersons for 'their culture' (Dervin, 2023).

Borrero et al. (2018) add another layer to this discussion by investigating the constraints teachers face in implementing culturally relevant pedagogy, which is a pedagogical approach introduced by Ladson-Billings (1995). Culturally relevant pedagogy aims at empowering students academically and socially by actively integrating their cultural backgrounds into the educational process (Ladson-Billings, 1995). The study by Borrero et al. (2018) indicates that administrative demands often hinder teachers' abilities to engage in culturally relevant

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pedagogy. Moreover, a lack of peer support and the absence of established curricular models further discourage teachers from adopting more holistic, culturally relevant strategies (Borrero et al., 2018).

In the Danish context, various studies explored the practical implementation of multicultural education, focusing on linguistic and cultural minority students. For instance, Steffensen and Kjeldsen (2021) criticized Danish curriculum documents for the lack of a comprehensive understanding of culture, suggesting that its pedagogical discourse tended to overlook the cultural diversity present among students, thus enforcing colour-blind views. A study conducted by Frederiksen et al. (2022) indicated that ethnic minority schoolchildren faced academic challenges and lacked scaffolding. Moreover, their findings revealed that the teachers predominantly adopted monocultural deficit-based perspectives on their students while positioning 'Danish culture' as the norm (Frederiksen et al., 2022). Both studies called for a more nuanced and holistic approach to multicultural education in Danish schools. This can be achieved by, for instance, viewing children's diverse cultural and linguistic resources as assets and prerequisites for learning that enrich their educational experience (Martin & Pirbhai-Illich, 2019).

Different ways of promoting multiculturalism and critical thinking were researched and discussed in the international literature. Dunn et al. (2022) described a creative approach to fostering an empowering learning environment by designing activities focused on helping youths of colour from urban communities articulate their experiences with discriminatory narratives. Particularly innovative was a 'hacking' project, where students were tasked with transforming a social injustice into visual counternarratives while critically reflecting on the value of their voices and experiences. Through these counternarratives, the students revealed a disconnect between governmental promises and lived realities (Dunn et al., 2022). This underscored the importance of an education rooted not solely in theory but in students' lived experiences and critical perspectives.

Regarding assessment in multicultural classrooms, the existing literature underscores the significance of adopting holistic assessment methods that incorporate diverse approaches, including peer, group, and self-assessment (Brookhart & Nitko, 2019; Kirova & Hennig, 2013). Specifically, language portraits are recognized as an effective self-assessment tool that facilitates the exploration of an individual's linguistic identity. Conceptualized by Busch (2012), language portraits serve as visual representations that plurilingual individuals create to depict their linguistic repertoire. They illustrate the array of languages an individual interacts with and the specific contexts in which these languages are utilized.

Teacher education plays a significant role in equipping future teachers with the necessary practical skills to implement culturally relevant pedagogy and to create and sustain empowering multicultural school environments (Carter Andrews, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2021). Abel (2019) and Navarro et al. (2019) call for a substantive transformation in teacher education programs, moving from a superficial commitment to diversity toward actively disrupting systems of inequity. This can be achieved by active involvement in critical discussions about the positions of minority groups within dominant society. Maloney et al. (2019) argue for transformative teacher education that builds meaningful relationships with communities, thus echoing the need for a praxis-oriented approach. This conveys the imperative for not only teacher education programs but also practicing educators to continually engage in critical reflection and community collaboration as a route to social justice in education (Maloney et al., 2019).

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Andrzejewski et al. (2019) emphasized critical collaborative work and knowledge exchange as necessary strategies in multicultural teacher education. To have an empowering effect, such collaboration should extend beyond faculty to include students, thereby breaking down traditional hierarchies and facilitating a more dialogic learning environment. This approach involves embracing teaching as a humanizing and holistic approach, recognizing and challenging power dynamics (Andrzejewski et al., 2019). Nevertheless, in reality, multicultural education courses within teacher education curricula continue to fall short of adopting a critical orientation, opting instead for conservative or liberal perspectives centred on simple diversity appreciation (Gorski & Parekh, 2020). The absence of in-depth critical engagement with multiculturalism could compromise the empowerment of future teachers, who need to experience such nuanced understanding to effectively incorporate it into their own pedagogical approaches (Carter Andrews, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2021).

In summary, critical multiculturalism diverges from the theoretical framework of multicultural education. Although multicultural education offers a promising avenue for fostering inclusivity and equity, its practical implementation is fraught with challenges. These challenges range from the superficiality of poorly integrated interventions to constraints imposed by administrative requirements and a lack of resources or support for school personnel (Borrero et al., 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Vavrus, 2010). Thus, critical multiculturalism, as argued by scholars like May and Sleeter (2010), offers a foundation for interrogating these issues in a more comprehensive manner. It seeks to not just insert diversity into existing power structures but to fundamentally transform them.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing dyadic interviews as its primary method for data collection. Dyadic interviews are an effective mechanism for gathering rich and nuanced data, facilitating interaction between a researcher and two participants, thereby allowing them to reflect upon and critically engage with each other's perspectives and experiences (Morgan, 2015). This active interaction often leads to the introduction of topics that might otherwise remain unexplored in individual interviews. Previous research by Lobe and Morgan (2021), which compared the efficacy of dyadic interviews with focus groups, found that participants and researchers generally felt more comfortable in dyadic settings. Furthermore, dyadic interviews offer pragmatic advantages compared to focus groups, particularly in participant recruitment and scheduling. These logistical benefits enhance the feasibility of the research process, making dyadic interviews not only academically robust but also a pragmatic choice for qualitative inquiry.

Given that the study was conducted by a researcher based in Norway, it underwent evaluation by the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. The agency concluded that the study's handling of personal data complies fully with all relevant data protection legislation.

Participants

Denmark has a total of six university colleges with multiple campuses throughout the country. These university colleges offer four-year teacher education programs designed to prepare student teachers for careers in Danish compulsory schools [Danish: folkeskole], which encompass both primary and lower-secondary education. The teacher education curriculum is highly organized and divided into distinct modules that are largely predetermined by the Ministry of Higher Education and Science. These modules cover general pedagogical competencies as well as subject-specific expertise, reflecting the subjects taught in compulsory

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schools. Students are normally required to choose three school subjects as their specializations (Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2023).

Since the study's objective was to explore teacher educators' perspectives on ways to enhance students' cultural competence, the initial step in participant recruitment involved reaching out to the international offices at all six university colleges. The researcher's request was to distribute a call for participation to teacher educators facilitating subjects on bilingual education, foreign language instruction, or teaching Danish as a second language. Three university colleges agreed to participate in the study. The recruitment target was six teacher educators in total – two from each participating university college. This objective was achieved, facilitating a balanced representation across the institutions involved.

All six participants in the study are female teacher educators with over five years of experience in the field. They identify themselves as ethnically Danes, having Danish as their first language. Their specific areas of interest include multicultural education and cultural diversity. The participants have experience facilitating subjects on bilingual education, foreign language instruction, and/or teaching Danish as a second language. This wealth of expertise adds a layer of depth and nuance to the study, enriching the data collected and their subsequent analysis.

Data Collection

The teacher educators were invited to participate in dyadic interviews conducted via video conferencing software. Each participant took part in one dyadic interview. In total, three interviews were conducted with six participants. Prior to the interviews, they were provided with an information sheet and a consent form, both written in Danish. They were also encouraged to pose any questions they might have regarding the study and their participation in it. By signing the consent form, the participants agreed to be audio-recorded during the interview. The interviews were conducted in Danish by the researcher (author of this paper). Table 1 provides information on the interviews and includes pseudonyms for the participants involved in each session.

Table 1

Interview information

Interview	*Interview duration (min)*	*University College*	*Participants' pseudonyms*
Dyadic interview 1	39	University College A	Veronika, Vibeke
Dyadic interview 2	37	University College B	Kirsten, Karen
Dyadic interview 3	39	University College C	Ursula, Ulrikke

The interviews were guided by a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions designed to prompt discussion between the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The interview guide was developed based on the literature review, ensuring the questions were grounded in the research objectives. Echoing techniques commonly employed in group interviews, the researcher facilitated the discussion but allowed the participants to lead the conversation, encouraging interaction between the pair to elicit natural, co-constructed responses (Morgan,

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2015; Smithson, 2000). The dyadic nature of the interviews created a dynamic atmosphere of opinion sharing and reflection on the interview topics. During the interviews, the researcher remained attentive to the dynamics between the participants, subtly steering the conversation to cover all relevant topics while allowing a space for free discussion.

Data Analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim. During the transcription phase, the participants' names were substituted with the selected pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. As presented in Table 1, the pseudonyms assigned in this study were Veronika, Vibeke, Kirsten, Karen, Ursula, and Ulrikke. Quotations cited in the findings section were translated into English by the author of this paper. Efforts were made to ensure that the English translations adhered as closely as possible to the original Danish text. These efforts included engaging a colleague to review the translations, followed by a back-translation to verify the alignment with the original meanings.

The interviews underwent a thematic analysis, as delineated by Braun and Clarke (2013). ATLAS.ti software was utilized to manage the data throughout the entire analytical process. Initially, the interview transcriptions were subjected to close reading, during which annotative observations were made to identify the main topics in the interviews. These observations facilitated the construction of a codebook that was subsequently employed to code the data. Following this, a full-coding approach was utilized which involved the use of both researcher-derived codes and data-derived codes. The former were developed based on theoretical considerations and a literature review. The latter emerged from patterns identified through a detailed examination of the transcriptions, where recurring or significant concepts were formulated as codes and subsequently added to the codebook. After completing the coding process, the codebook was reviewed and refined. This review involved evaluating each code for its relevance and applicability by comparing them against the transcriptions and checking for consistency in code application. Codes sharing thematic commonalities were then grouped into categories and subsequently brought together to form themes.

For the objectives of this paper, two interrelated themes have been selected: *Cultural perspectives in teacher education* and *Methods to enhance students' cultural competence*. The theme of *Cultural perspectives in teacher education* included categories that presented different aspects of how cultural issues are recognized, discussed, and integrated within teacher education programs. This theme encapsulated data related to curricular content, educator attitudes, and institutional policies. The theme of *Methods to enhance students' cultural competence* included categories that illustrated specific strategies, pedagogical approaches, and programmatic initiatives aimed at enhancing students' cultural competence. To increase the conceptual clarity of the themes, a visual representation was developed in the form of a content network, which illustrated the content of the themes and their interconnections. Figure 1 displays this content network and presents the outcomes of the analytical process.

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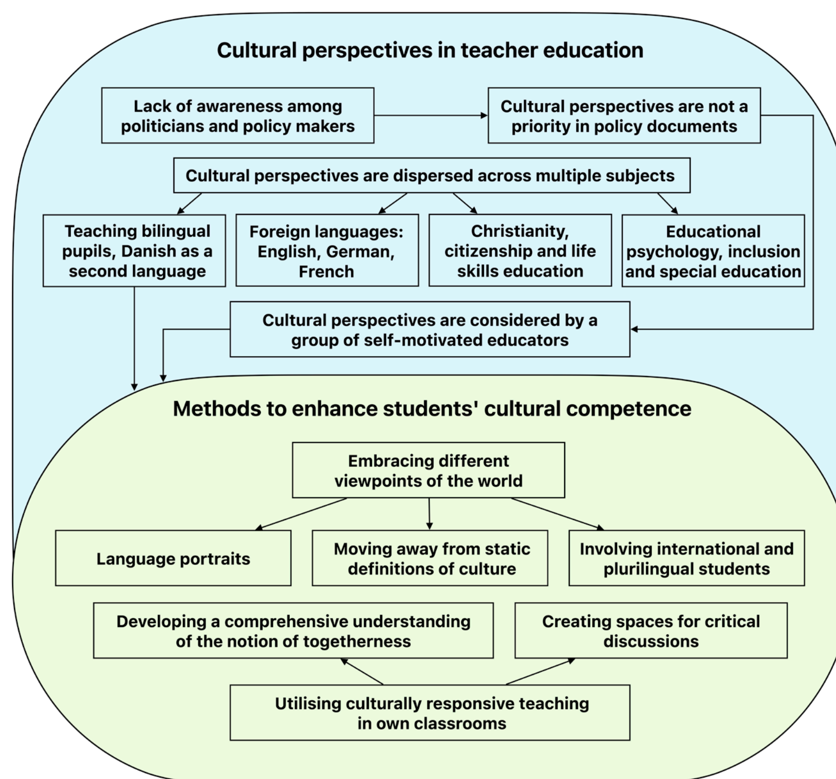
Figure 1

Teacher educators' reflections on cultural perspectives in teacher education and methods used to enhance students' cultural competence



Findings

During the interviews, the participants reflected on the place of multicultural education within the context of teacher education in their respective university colleges. Furthermore, they shared a range of methods and strategies they utilized to enhance students' cultural competence. All participants underscored the importance of systematic integration of cultural perspectives in teacher education to prepare future teachers to better accommodate the needs of children from diverse cultural backgrounds in Danish compulsory schools.

Cultural Perspectives in Teacher Education

This section presents findings related to the participants' reflections on the place of cultural perspectives in policy documents concerning teacher education, the integration of cultural perspectives across various subjects, and the continual shifts in the subject of *Danish as a second language*.

Cultural Perspectives in Policy Documents

When contemplating the place of multicultural education and cultural perspectives within teacher education, the participants emphasized that both were challenging to define due to the ever-changing nature of the Danish policies governing teacher education. Overall, they pointed out a lack of awareness among politicians and policymakers of the importance of integrating cultural perspectives into teacher education. The participants emphasized that the absence of

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clear guidelines and objectives for fostering student teachers' cultural competence exacerbates this issue. For instance, Kirsten explained this by saying:

> When it comes to cultural competence, the students have few opportunities to develop it. However, there is no need for it based on what is written on paper. And there have been some political movements in Denmark in recent years that have influenced the development of teacher education and what is considered necessary in teacher education. It has been decided, for instance, that technology is important and essential in teacher education. So, it becomes necessary to make room for it. And culture may be one of the areas that is deprioritized in this context.

Kirsten's statement reveals how educational policies may reinforce existing cultural hierarchies by failing to systematically integrate cultural perspectives. She highlighted the issue of accountability, implying that without appropriate attention to cultural competence, this topic might end up being side-lined.

Integration of Cultural Perspectives across Various Subjects

According to the participats, although some traces of cultural perspectives can be found across various subjects within teacher education, they are mainly introduced to students specializing in foreign language teaching (i.e., English, German, and French). However, the participants expressed concern that the current approach to integrating cultural perspectives in these subjects is notably narrow. As an illustration, they shared that in courses designed for preparing English language teachers, there is a pronounced emphasis on literature from American and British sources. Veronika, who taught a module for future English language teachers, illustrated this point by sharing:

> For example, the students who specialize in teaching English mostly read American or British texts. Sometimes, I include texts from other English-speaking countries. But really, we [educators] should be doing this consistently to make sure our students actually bring this knowledge into their classrooms.

The participants pointed out that the subject of *Christianity, citizenship, and life skills education* might incorporate certain cultural perspectives when discussing aspects such as upbringing, socialization, and identity formation. However, Karen explained that the depth of exposure to cultural perspectives varies depending on the specific interests of each individual educator:

> Cultural perspectives are sometimes included in subjects such as KLM [*Christianity, citizenship, and life skills education* – Danish: *Kristendomskundskab, livsoplysning og medborgerskab*]. But it depends on who is teaching the subject. If the educator is interested in culture or multicultural education, [they] may include it in KLM. But it is totally up to them, it is not required.

Additionally, the participants pointed out that cultural perspectives are incorporated within the subject of *Educational psychology, inclusion, and special education*. However, similar to the situation described by Karen, the depth of integration of these perspectives varies depending on the individual educator.

Continual Shifts in the Subject of Danish as a Second Language

The participants noted that the most attention to cultural perspectives is given within the subject of *Danish as a second language*. However, they have witnessed significant changes and transformations in this subject over the course of their professional careers, including name

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changes between *Danish as a second language* and *Teaching bilingual pupils*, as well as adjustments in the ECTS credit value (ECTS referring to the European Credit Transfer System). Ulrikke pointed out how the decision-making process surrounding the subject's development and adjustments is heavily influenced by politicians, who often possess limited knowledge of teacher education and follow the prevailing political agenda. She summarized these continual shifts:

> In the old days there was *Danish as a second language* as an elective teaching subject. It dealt with the entire field – culture, language acquisition, language pedagogy, language assessment, etc. Then it became a compulsory subject [*Teaching bilingual pupils*] worth 10 ECTS credits as part of the general pedagogical competencies. So, now we have both a compulsory subject and an elective one. But the compulsory one was reduced to 5 ECTS credits, which meant cutting out a lot because you cannot fit everything into one semester. It is a political decision. But let's be honest, politicians don't really understand what goes on in teacher education and what teachers need to know nowadays. So, they just mess around with the number of credits.

The participants also underlined that the subject has never included a comprehensive examination of cultural diversity in the context of compulsory schooling, nor has it focused on equipping students with knowledge of culturally relevant pedagogy and assessment methods. Instead, developing students' knowledge of second language teaching methods has always been the primary objective. Similar to the subject of *Christianity, citizenship, and life skills education*, the integration of multicultural education and cultural perspectives is, according to the participants, systematically undertaken only by a small group of self-motivated educators. This situation potentially leaves many students at risk of completing their education without receiving training on working with children's cultural diversity. Vibeke encapsulated this by saying:

> There is a very big discussion about whether you should work with multicultural education. And we have colleagues who don't do it at all, who only talk about language in that subject [*Danish as a second language*]. And then we have others who insist on working with multicultural education, even though it is not part of the learning objectives. I personally think that you cannot work with language and plurilingualism without working with multicultural education. That is where I want to start every time.

The participants also observed that the subject of *Danish as a second language* (previously *Teaching bilingual pupils*) was the only chance many students had to encounter the ideas of multicultural education. Hence, equipping them with holistic theoretical knowledge and practical skills within the relatively short timeframe of the subject, typically spanning several months, presented a considerable challenge for the participants. Despite these challenges, they remained dedicated to enhancing students' cultural competence and employed various methods to do so, which will be presented under the second theme found in the data analysis in the following section.

Methods To Enhance Students' Cultural Competence

This section presents findings related to the second main theme encapsulating the participants' reflections on the diverse methods they employed to enhance student teachers' cultural competence. These methods include fostering a holistic understanding of culture, differentiating between intercultural and multicultural concepts, employing language portraits, leveraging diversity within teacher education, creating spaces for critical discussion, and exploring the notion of togetherness.

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Fostering a Holistic Understanding of Culture

The participants were highly positive toward the tenets of multicultural education. They firmly believed that integrating cultural perspectives into their teaching practices is essential for developing their students' cultural competence and equipping them for future work with children from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, one of the participants' main challenges was fostering a holistic understanding of culture among their students. They observed that students often enter their classrooms with a narrow and static perspective on culture, associating it solely with factors such as nationality, ethnicity, race, or language. Vibeke, who taught a module for future French language teachers, expressed the concern that some learning materials contribute to this static understanding of culture:

> It is challenging with language-related subjects because textbooks often present a classic and static view of culture. For example, they depict school and life in France as being fixed in a particular way. Incorporating a modern view of culture within a textbook context is very difficult.

Therefore, the participants considered expanding students' views on culture beyond fixed stereotypes and generalizations as crucial, as necessary to developing students' cultural competence.

Differentiating between Intercultural and Multicultural Concepts

Another challenge faced by the participants in their teaching practices was addressing students' confusion regarding terms such as *intercultural* and *multicultural*. While the participants acknowledged that there is an ongoing debate about potential differences in terminology, they explained that these terms are used interchangeably within the context of the teacher education program in their respective university colleges. During the interview with Ursula and Ulrikke from University College C, a discussion on the choice of terminology emerged. Ulrikke contributed to this topic by stating:

> Differences between inter- and multicultural in the long run depend on whom you read. I think more that it is a question of discourse – what kind of definition lies behind the different terms rather than that there is actually a difference in the meaning of the terms. I don't think there is a discrepancy between the terms as such.

While Ulrikke was speaking, Ursula nodded in agreement and eventually shared her own thoughts:

> I think there is a tendency to use them interchangeably here. I have a feeling we [educators] do not distinguish. And I do not think students do. Like once in a while when there are some conversations about [these terms]. Otherwise, they are used interchangeably.

Overall, the participants stressed the significance of equipping students with a more nuanced and dynamic understanding of culture, prioritizing the embracement of different worldviews over engaging in theoretical debates about terminology.

Employing Language Portraits

The participants from University Colleges A and B viewed language portraits as a powerful method to embrace different viewpoints and promote active knowledge exchange in multicultural classrooms. Veronika explained that she developed an activity for her students that was linked to their on-site training in schools. This activity involved the student teachers creating language portraits for themselves and guiding their pupils to create theirs. Later, the

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student teachers had to present and discuss the portraits in Veronika's class. She described the exercise:

> I always focus my students' attention on how important it is to understand children's language repertoires. One activity I use involves sending them out to schools to create language portraits together with children. This helps them understand children's language repertoires and reflect on their own. When they come back to my class, they share their experiences. It has been both fun and good exercise that broadens their [student teachers'] views on linguistic diversity.

By introducing the concept of drawing language portraits, the participants aimed to give student teachers a creative means to express their linguistic backgrounds and to reflect on the linguistic diversity among children in schools. Furthermore, by sharing their experiences with their peers, student teachers were able to involve themselves in discussions about how language portraits can serve as a useful self-assessment tool within educational settings.

Leveraging Diversity within Teacher Education

The student body at the participating university colleges mirrored the cultural diversity of Danish society. This diversity was considered by the participants as an invaluable asset that deserves greater recognition. They believed that the diverse student population possesses unique perspectives, experiences, and knowledge that have the potential to enrich the learning environment and contribute to the overall quality of teacher education. During the interview with participants from University College B, Karen posed several rhetorical questions:

> In the teacher education program, we have a diverse classroom. We have minority and majority ethnic students. We [educators] have discussed multiple times about what we do ourselves as teachers. How should we approach our classrooms? How do we establish relationships with our students? How can we incorporate more multicultural education into our own teaching to become role models? We could do much more. But these discussions tend to arise periodically and then fade away again.

In her quote, Karen is alluding to student cultural resources not being incorporated into the teacher education program in a systematic manner. In the interview at University College A, Veronika echoed similar concerns. She argued that instead of merely presenting the theory of multicultural education, educators should provide student teachers with hands-on experiences and opportunities to actively engage in culturally relevant teaching:

> We [educators] did small exercises on how to implement multicultural education. My experience is that when they [students] are presented with approaches, activities, and assessment forms, they tend to want to try them. And as soon as we [educators] use these methods in our own teaching and the students experience them first-hand, they tend to really want to go ahead with them.

Veronika later elaborated that she aims to serve as a role model for her students, demonstrating that it is possible to employ a variety of teaching methods and to capitalize on the cultural and linguistic diversity present in the classrooms.

Creating Spaces for Critical Discussion

The participants from University College B shared a story about a group of motivated students and academic staff who took the initiative to establish a critical discussion club focused on addressing various forms of discrimination within teacher education, including diversity-related issues. The primary objective of this group, they noted, is to foster an environment

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where every student feels valued and to explore ways to enhance critical perspectives within the field. Kirsten described the group as follows:

> On a positive note, there is a group of both students and teachers who have set up what they call a norm-critical forum – as a meeting space. They are interested in, among other things, supporting more norm-critical views in general and finding a way to make [University College B] more inclusive.

During the interview at University College A, Veronika mentioned that she, along with her colleagues, facilitated a series of workshops for student teachers. These workshops aimed to create spaces for discussions, as they required student teachers to work in groups to reflect on various issues related to multicultural education. Veronika explained:

> In the module on teaching bilingual pupils, we facilitated a series of workshops – a social media workshop, a workshop about mother-tongue education, a workshop about refugees, and a workshop about family-school cooperation. The students mainly worked in groups and presented the results of their group work. I have a feeling that these workshops were quite effective.

However, echoing previous findings, the participants noted that the initiatives, such as discussion groups and workshops, are inconsistent in terms of frequency and lack implementation at the institutional level.

Exploring the Notion of Togetherness

The notion of togetherness was also discussed during the interviews. The participants revealed that togetherness holds great importance within the context of teacher education, since compulsory schools are regarded as key institutions for fostering a shared sense of community and unity. Furthermore, they revealed that compared to multicultural education, the notion of togetherness is more prominently emphasized within Danish teacher education, and students generally demonstrate an awareness of its significance. For instance, Ulrikke mentioned that teacher educators at University College C devote considerable time to discussing the notion of togetherness with student teachers:

> We talk a lot about the notion of togetherness. And we talk about public schools as community-building institutions, and that public schools are in some way a place to develop a sense of belonging. So, we spend much time discussing various methods to facilitate togetherness within school environments.

In the same interview, Ursula expressed some skepticism about how the concept of togetherness is presented in teacher education. She voiced concerns over the lack of critical perspectives on this topic, especially regarding its application in contemporary Danish schools:

> I hope they [students] really think about it when they say *togetherness*. However, I almost think that it is something that is implied in teacher education, and they [students] take it nearly mindlessly without being critical of what we mean when we talk about togetherness. And how much space do we have in our so-called togetherness? If it is a narrow togetherness. Is there space for diversity?

At the end of the interviews, the participants were prompted to consider potential changes in the teacher education program to elevate cultural perspectives. In response, they emphasized that merely adding ECTS credits or incorporating additional subjects on cultural perspectives in education would not be sufficient. Karen advocated for a holistic approach that entails systemic changes and a fundamental shift in the underlying mindset of the program:

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> It is the entire system that needs to be reformed. I do not think that it would make a big difference if we had five subjects about multicultural education. There is more that needs to be done. There must be a more systematic approach to integrating multicultural education in teacher education to really have an impact.

In summary, the findings from this study suggest that Danish teacher education predominantly adheres to a monocultural framework, with the integration of multicultural education occurring sporadically and largely dependent on the initiative of individual teacher educators, such as those participating in this study. Despite the constraints imposed by the monocultural policies concerning teacher education, the participants discussed various methods and strategies they employ to enhance their students' cultural competence. The participants primarily concentrated on cultivating a dynamic understanding of culture among their students by incorporating authentic learning materials and facilitating workshops and discussions, whilst adapting their work in the face of the monocultural reality.

Discussion

The analysis of the interviews revealed two interrelated themes, which encapsulated the views of the participating teacher educators on the place of cultural perspectives in teacher education in their respective university colleges. Furthermore, this paper elaborated on the methods and strategies the participants employed to enhance their students' cultural competence.

Overall, the participants pointed out the lack of awareness among politicians and policymakers of the importance of cultural perspectives, which manifests in the unclear status of multicultural education in the documents regulating teacher education. The continuously changing policies and regulations add a degree of uncertainty and inconsistency that hinders teacher educators' ability to establish a clear focus and formulate reliable strategies to successfully incorporate cultural perspectives in their classrooms. This challenge is further exacerbated by the prevailing Eurocentrism within teacher education, as illustrated by the participants who pointed out the lack of cultural diversity in the current contents of Danish teacher education curriculum.

The literature on multicultural teacher education highlights the issue of unexamined whiteness and privilege, wherein dominant cultural norms and perspectives are privileged at the expense of minority voices and experiences (Carter Andrews, 2021; Gorski & Parekh, 2020; May & Sleeter, 2010; Navarro et al., 2019; Vavrus, 2010). According to Gorski and Parekh (2020), teacher education programs often relegate multicultural education to isolated courses, which adopt a liberal or conservative stance, and focus predominantly on 'appreciating diversity' while bypassing the crucial aspect of fostering a critical orientation that prepares future teachers to confront and challenge educational inequities The implication of this limited approach is that it perpetuates existing systemic injustices and fails to address the discriminatory practices within educational institutions that affect minority groups (Gorski & Parekh, 2020; Vavrus, 2010). Therefore, it is urgent to critically examine and reform educational practices and policies to dismantle entrenched power structures, discriminatory discourses, and monocultural curricula. Such reform is necessary because it has the potential to confront the oppression and injustice that minority groups face due to the Eurocentric nature of schooling in Western societies. By advocating for a holistic approach to teacher education that includes systemic changes and a paradigm shift toward critical multiculturalism, educational institutions can achieve more substantial and enduring outcomes (Dixson, 2021; Gorski & Parekh, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2021). These changes would not only help eradicate various forms of oppression but also ensure that cultural perspectives are not treated as additional or optional components but rather as integral aspects of teacher education.

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During the research interviews, the study participants indicated that current teacher education in Denmark predominantly situates cultural perspectives within the domain of language teaching. However, they criticized positioning American and British cultural viewpoints and their respective linguistic variations as the standard, which tends to overlook other English-speaking cultures and global perspectives. Such a narrow scope neglects the opportunity to broaden students' cultural understandings and fails to challenge the dominance of 'traditional' cultural narratives in English language education (Kubota, 2010).

When it comes to the subject of *Danish as a second language* (previously *Teaching bilingual pupils*), the study participants pointed out that the discussions about diversity within educational institutions are predominantly confined to language-related topics. This narrow focus not only limits the scope of discussions but also leads to generalizations and objectivizations of culture. Moreover, such an approach embodies essentialist views that are deeply rooted in Eurocentrism by simplifying complex cultural identities into fixed, homogenous categories, ignoring the dynamic and multifaceted nature of individual cultural experiences (Abel, 2019; Gorski & Parekh, 2020; Maloney et al., 2019; Navarro et al., 2019; Tavares, 2023). By perpetuating this simplistic view of culture, educational practices inadvertently reinforce systemic oppressions, further entrenching the power structures that privilege dominant cultural norms. In the context of critical multiculturalism, it is imperative to challenge these entrenched systems and advocate for a broader, more inclusive approach to understanding cultural diversity, one that transcends mere linguistic considerations and addresses the underlying social inequities embedded within educational policies and practices (Dixson, 2021; Gorski & Parekh, 2020; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Vavrus, 2010). As illustrated by Dervin (2023), many teachers still refrain from tackling issues of social inequities out of fear of being labelled as troublemakers or because they lack confidence in their own understanding of complex, culturally sensitive subjects. Therefore, it is essential for future teachers to be involved in critical discussions about topics that are politically or culturally sensitive (Dervin, 2023; Dixson, 2021; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Skrefsrud, 2022; Vavrus, 2010). By discussing these topics head-on, future teachers can be better empowered to challenge oppressive power structures and advocate for culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 2021).

Despite the challenges related to the constraints imposed by the monocultural educational policies, the teacher educators in this study demonstrated a strong commitment to enhancing their students' cultural competence, employing a range of pedagogical strategies. Moreover, their decision to participate in this study and share their insights can be viewed as an act supporting social justice. However, the success of their efforts is undermined by the lack of comprehensive, institution-wide support. As previously highlighted in this paper, integrating critical multiculturalism into teacher education will likely falter without robust institutional support. The urgency of implementing social justice initiatives is clear, yet their success still depends solely on the goodwill or discretion of individual educators. Therefore, this research aims not only to highlight the gaps in Danish teacher education but also to illustrate how the absence of institutional backing for critical multiculturalism impedes the potential impact motivated educators can have on enhancing students' cultural competence. The study by Dunn et al. (2022) demonstrates that a holistic approach to program development is essential for incorporating critical perspectives and empowering students to reflect on the value of their own voices and experiences, thereby contributing to the transformation of dominant narratives.

The concept of togetherness holds significant relevance in a Danish educational context. It is rooted in the belief that individual enlightenment and a strong communal identity fostered

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through education are vital for societal well-being (Jantzen, 2020; Mason, 2020). Cultivating the ethos of togetherness has a potential to generate motivation "to act as both a recipient and contributor in the community of practice. This means that togetherness is an important key when it comes to creating meaningful and inclusive processes in schools" (Jantzen, 2020, p. 36). However, in the context of this study, the participants highlighted the necessity of investigating this notion more thoroughly. Specifically, they called for an exploration of the complexities and practical applications of togetherness within the contemporary context of multicultural classrooms. While acknowledging the importance of cultivating a sense of togetherness, the participants also emphasized how crucial it is to strike a balance between fostering a shared community spirit and creating an inclusive space for unique cultural backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. Along these lines, the participants expressed skepticism regarding how togetherness is presented, raising concerns about the lack of depth and critical perspectives surrounding this concept.

As previously emphasized by Nielsen and Ma (2021), while it is valuable to foster a common spirit, the concept of togetherness should go beyond surface-level unity by critically engaging with questions of equity and social justice. This deeper engagement is imperative to examining and confronting the underlying power dynamics and discriminatory narratives that may exploit the concept of togetherness for exclusive purposes. In this context, Nielsen and Ma (2021) underscore that "any 'togetherness' education must be fluid and adaptable to changing contexts in order to prevent reductionism and, simultaneously, be strongly rooted in guiding ideals, values, and principles from which all pedagogy and practice is influenced" (p. 185). When student teachers are encouraged to think critically about the notion of togetherness, they can develop a deeper understanding of its limitations and potential pitfalls, enabling them to navigate the challenges and dilemmas that may arise in the future when working in multicultural school settings.

Finally, the participants in this study addressed a key aspect of teacher education, namely their role in serving as positive exemplars for a transformative change. For instance, they emphasized the need for embracing diversity within their university colleges and leveraging student teachers' cultural backgrounds and resources, thereby illustrating the practical foundations of culturally relevant pedagogy. Within the literature on multicultural education, there is a compelling argument for a systematic integration of diverse cultures into educational contexts (Ladson-Billings, 2021; May & Sleeter, 2010; Nieto, 2010). Systematically integrating the diversity of student teachers has the potential to enrich the learning environment within teacher education programs and exemplify the promotion of equity in educational settings (Abel, 2019; Dunn et al., 2022; Navarro et al., 2019). This approach can serve as a model for student teachers to replicate in their future workplaces, thereby perpetuating a cycle of equity in education.

Conclusion

This paper emphasized the critical need for a stable policy framework that adopts a holistic approach to cultural diversity, transcending narrow perspectives on culture in contemporary educational settings. Previous scholarly works underscore that clear guidelines and emphasis on social justice in policy documents are important for facilitating a shift from a monocultural orientation to a critical multicultural orientation in teacher education (Carter Andrews, 2021; May & Sleeter, 2010; Vavrus, 2010). A holistic integration of cultural diversity across an entire teacher education program can benefit future teachers in developing the knowledge, competence, and skills necessary to navigate cultural complexities, challenge discriminatory discourses, and facilitate empowering educational experiences for all children.

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The teacher educators in the study reported on in this paper emphasized that exposing students to different cultural perspectives is necessary to enhance their cultural competence. However, the current placement of cultural perspectives mainly within language-related subjects, together with constant amendments and readjustment of regulations, makes it difficult to draw clear pedagogical trajectories toward developing critical views on culture among students. Furthermore, as underlined by the participants, the depth of students' exposure to cultural perspectives varies significantly between subjects, or even within a subject, depending on the specific interests of each individual educator. This brings attention to the absence of institutional accountability to invest in preparing future teachers to work in multicultural classrooms. It is also imperative for teacher educators, curriculum developers, and policy makers to acknowledge their crucial role in equipping future teachers with the knowledge required for successful engagement in multicultural environments, as this directly correlates with a meaningful commitment to social justice and equity.

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Experiences Indigenizing School Mathematics Through Place-Based Education

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Abstract

This article describes the experiences of two Cree elementary school teachers who taught school mathematics through place-based education (PBE) in a Treaty 6 First Nations community in the Canadian prairie province of Saskatchewan. Using narrative inquiry, we discuss the teachers' understandings of Indigenizing school mathematics in relation to their Cree identities and PBE, their difficulties and successes in addressing curricular outcomes, and their recommendations for other teachers wishing to take up a similar practice. As described in this article, this research expands upon our existing work in which we sought to provide more nuance and substance around the meaning and practice of Cree Indigenizing school mathematics in the specific context of Treaty 6 Saskatchewan.

Keywords: Cree Indigenization, place-based education, school mathematics, teacher education

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Experiences Indigenizing School Mathematics Through Place-Based Education

Author Self-Situating Prologue

We acknowledge that we live and work on Treaty 6 territory and the homeland of the Métis peoples. The First Nations and federal government signed Treaties 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10 between 1871 and 1906 in the political region now known as Saskatchewan. Nêhiyawak (Plains Cree), Nahkawininiwak (Saulteaux), Nakota (Assiniboine), Dakota and Lakota (Sioux), and Denesuline (Dene/Chipewyan) are the original inhabitants and stewards of this land.

Γεια σας, με λένε Σταύρο. My name (first author) is Stavros, which comes from the Greek word σταυρός, meaning cross. My father emigrated from Cyprus to Prince Albert on Treaty 6 in 1987, where he met my mother. I was born and raised there. I have a White settler identity with Greek-Cypriot heritage on my father's side and French and Ukrainian heritage on my mother's side. I am a cis, gay, able-bodied, and neurotypical man. I am a lecturer and researcher in mathematics and teacher education at the University of Saskatchewan.

My name (second author) is Shaun Murphy, and I am White with settler ancestry. I am a professor in Educational Foundations, where Stavros completed his PhD work. I served as his research supervisor, and I am a collaborator in this research.

Our social locations are partially informed by the work of nêhiyaw and nahkawininiwak scholar Margaret Kovach (2021), who taught us that relational work involves purposeful introductions which function as a prelude in narrative writing and "signal to the careful reader that woven throughout the varied forms of our writing—analytical, reflective, expository—there will be story, our story, for story is who we are" (p. 2).

Chelsea Vowel (2020), a Métis woman with otipêyimisiw-iyiniw ancestry, reminds us that positionality locates us within a constellation of kinship, "linked through familial, cultural, and political relations through a shared history and through territory" (p. 4). Necessarily, we acknowledge the Indigenous-settler relationships with PK and Kiwi—the educator participants shared shortly—as they are complicated by historical and ongoing settler-colonial genocide. As we—Stavros, Shaun, PK, and Kiwi— hold space for the strained political, social, familial, and economic histories that shape contemporary relationships, we work towards positive futures.

Chelsea Vowel (2016) described the complicated function of names and terms—such as White, non-Native, non-Aboriginal, non-Indigenous, European, settler, and so on—in describing our relationships, past and present, thereby reminding us of the significance of challenging pan-Indigenous and White-settler binary constructions that obscure sociopolitical histories and power dynamics. With Vowel's descriptions in mind, we will use the names and terms chosen by scholars throughout this article so that we are consistent and true to their self-identifications and published work. In cases where terminology is not made explicit, we follow Maggie Kovach (2021), who used *Aboriginal* to draw attention to Canada's colonial constitution and *Indigenous* as the First Peoples of a place and their cultures.

This article describes the experiences of two Cree elementary school teachers who taught school mathematics through place-based education (PBE) in a Treaty 6 First Nations community in the Canadian prairie province of Saskatchewan. Using narrative inquiry, we discuss their understandings of PBE and its connection to Indigenization and school mathematics in relation to their Cree identities. We share their difficulties and successes addressing curricular outcomes and their recommendations for other teachers wishing to take up a similar practice.

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In the following section, we provide a review of the literature surrounding Indigenization, PBE, and school mathematics for the purpose of articulating the interactions of these phenomena in a broader context before we attend to the specific considerations of this article. Our research is guided by the methodological commitments of narrative inquiry, which we will describe after the review of literature.

Note that we will sometimes shift from our first-person collective voice (we) to third-person voice when describing specific interactions between Stavros and the Cree teachers.

Indigenization, Place-Based Education, and School Mathematics

Practitioners (such as policymakers, educators, and researchers) have shared the necessity and potential of Indigenizing educational spaces (such as K-12 classrooms and post-secondary teaching environments), curriculum, and pedagogy (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Indigenization is a broad concept that encompasses multiple processes, contexts, intentions, and educational mandates (Stavrou, 2020).

Some of the dynamic conceptualizations and processes of Indigenization include: reinforcing Treaty rights, land stewardship, and mobilizing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* (Korteweg & Russell, 2012; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015); foregrounding tribal epistemologies, ontologies, and axiologies (Kovach 2010a, 2010b, 2021); working towards a necessary reconciliation that rectifies the traumatic and destructive legacy of residential schools, ongoing foster care, the 60s scoop, and continued land theft (Razack, 2002; Regan, 2010); decolonizing Eurocentric ideologies that subjugate Indigenous knowledge systems through cognitive and cultural imperialism (Battiste, 1986, 2011, 2013; Battiste & Henderson, 2009; Wildcat, 2001); challenging Indigenous racism and intersecting forms of oppression (Kumashiro, 2000; Schick, 2000; St. Denis, 2004, 2007, 2011); integrating land and place-based education (Miller & Twum, 2017); revitalizing and legitimizing Indigenous values, perspectives, languages, cultures, and worldviews (Brake, 2019; Deer, 2013; Snively, 1990); transforming curriculum and pedagogy through cross-cultural teaching and two-eyed seeing (Aikenhead, 2006; Goulet & Goulet, 2014); and understanding the need for social justice through sharing the diverse experiences of Indigenous voices (Brandes & Kelly, 2004).

The preceding list of conceptualizations and processes is meant to provide a general overview of the plurality of ways in which Indigenization is taken up. In the following subsection, we make explicit our understandings of these in the context of the directives of our institution (University of Saskatchewan). We use the word *Indigenization* to refer to the overall phenomenon, and we use *Indigenizing* to refer to a specific contextual process. This aligns with the most common convention in the literature.

Indigenization at the University of Saskatchewan

Kirkness and Barnhardt (1991) explained that some Indigenization directives from institutions are shaped by their perceived accountabilities for interrupting colonial and racist systems that exclude and disadvantage Indigenous and Aboriginal identities. In the context of our own teaching and research, we were guided by the University of Saskatchewan's (University of Saskatchewan, n.d.) conceptualization of Indigenization mandates, which are a collaborative effort between local elders and the University of Saskatchewan administration and faculty members (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous). These mandates include strengthening inclusive communities and partnerships that respect and understand the value and importance of Indigenous knowledges and practices

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(e.g., histories, teachings, languages, traditions, ceremonies, protocols, creative expressions, etc.) belonging to the diverse peoples of Saskatchewan and beyond; engaging in critical reflection on the systemic effects of colonialism on Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, including Treaty relationships and Métis and Inuit land rights; operationalizing the *Calls to Action* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and to enact a transformative reconciliation of University of Saskatchewan's commitment to inclusion and authentic voice and engagement of First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples in Saskatchewan and beyond; and promoting and supporting Indigenous visions and aspirations for self-determination through transformative education for Indigenous well-being, growth, and prosperity.

With regard to enacting this work of reconciliation, we agree with our current president, Peter Stoicheff, that it is our moral imperative to do so. We attend to the words of Donald (2009), who stated:

> Ethical relationality is an ecological understanding of human relationality that does not deny difference but rather seeks to more deeply understand how our different histories and experiences position us in relation to each other. This form of relationality is ethical because it does not overlook or render invisible the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a standpoint arises. Rather, it puts these considerations at the forefront of engagements across frontiers of difference. (p. 6)

These words help us attend to ethical relationality that is rooted in community, across time, and among people. To make sense of the current state of Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations, we must interrogate how our past trajectories shaped our present and will shape our shared future. To us, the spirit and intent of reconciliation mean we must consider the enmeshment of current and past relationships—including the more-than-human beings amongst us—to truly understand our reliance on each other within the broader context of our past, present, and future existence.

Place-Based Education and School Mathematics

Place-based education (PBE) links students' experiences to formal education through connections and partnerships between schools and communities in ways that support local environmental, social, economic, and ecological wellbeing (Gruenewald, 2003a; McInerney et al., 2011; Sobel, 2004). By focusing on community needs and interests, the experiential nature of PBE resonates with students and facilitates a sense of land stewardship, land ethics, and rural revitalization (Smith & Sobel, 2010; Sobel, 1996; Theobald, 1997). Place-based educators foster *place consciousness* through problem-based learning that involve students in questioning their community's social and ecological history and its connection to broader global concerns. (Gruenewald, 2003b; Gruenewald & Smith, 2008).

Indigenization aligns with PBE through a critical pedagogy of place that aims to "(a) identify, recover, and create material spaces and places that teach us how to live well in our total environments (reinhabitation); and (b) identify and change ways of thinking that injure and exploit other people and places (decolonization)" (Gruenewald, 2003b, p. 9). Donald (2009) proposed Indigenous Métissage—a place-based approach to curriculum based on ecological and relational understandings of the world—as a way to describe connections between place, identity, and sovereignty, as well as to reconsider colonial divides that continue to plague Aboriginal-Canadian relations. By foregrounding our social location in the context of physical landscapes through discourses of colonialism, Donald (2009) argued that "Aboriginal peoples can still honour places made meaningful by earlier generations [and that] landed citizenship also requires an

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acknowledgement that such places have changed as a result of colonization" (p. 20). By considering how to reverse and mitigate colonialism while teaching us to reconstruct our environments, Donald's work aligns with Gruenewald's (2003b) framework of critical pedagogy.

Chambers (2008) shared her work in Blackfoot territory in terms of a curriculum of place, in which children's hands-on learning activities—alongside masters of the crafts—are those required to nourish place and identity. She explained that this "knowledge enables people to find their way in that place where they dwell and this knowledge and these skills endow them with identity" (p. 120).

In regard to school mathematics, teaching and learning in a cultural context is relational work. Considering Chambers, the masters of crafts include mathematics practitioners, elders, and knowledge keepers with aims to nourish and affirm identity by connecting mathematical skills to languages, ways of being, and ways of knowing. For example, Donald et al. (2011) found mathematical knowledge to be in relationships alongside Blackfoot peoples in Eagle Flight First Nation. Blackfoot concepts of *aoksisawaato'p* (visiting/renewal of relations), *aokakiosiit* (be wisely aware), and *aatsimaak'ssin* (responsibility to balance giving/taking reciprocity) guided their culturally relational work. Through his study, he found that Indigenous ways of knowing and being are anchored in their specific context.

In related work, Doolittle explained the challenges in thinking about his Mohawk identity as a mathematics educator and wondered, more generally, if Indigenous peoples' understandings of their specific worldviews would be displaced by mathematics education (Doolittle & Glanfield, 2007). In this context, we believe that Chambers's (2008) framework might alleviate this issue if Mohawk peoples worked alongside mathematics practitioners to create a shared space that affirmed children's identities while constructing mathematical content knowledge informed by place, experience, and community.

Masters of their craft, Sterenberg et al. (2010) also considered ways that place, community, culture, and languages shape peoples' understandings of mathematics education. In the context of Blackfoot and Cree, these authors explained that learning mathematics from place means teaching from the particular culture and language of the host territory, and that people's perspectives are revealed through understandings of culture and place. This exemplifies the side-by-side learning of skills that shape identity.

In regard to Indigenizing school mathematics in Saskatchewan, our own work as educators and researchers has focused on conducting narrative inquiries into the ways that familial, experiential, linguistic, and cultural contexts of Cree elementary school teachers shaped their classroom teaching (Stavrou, 2020). For example, we described *Cree mathematizing* as a process of reconsidering Euro-Western school mathematics from the perspectives of Cree teachers in an urban Saskatchewan school (Stavrou & Murphy, 2019). This mathematizing process, which involved translations of mathematical terms between English, Cree, and *Creelish* (a Cree-English blend) in the context of their local communities and experiences, partially represented facets of their identities. This exemplified Chambers's (2008) framework of how masters of craft co-construct spaces of hands-on and experiential learning with youth.

In subsequent research, we noticed that Cree teachers demonstrated promising practices of Indigenizing school mathematics via ways of being guided by *miyō-pimōhtēwin* (walking in a good way) and principles that balance *kohtawān* (our spiritual being) and make curriculum into a relational space (Stavrou & Murphy, 2021). It was through their Cree language—shaped by their

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social, spatial, and familial contexts—that gave rise to teaching in a way that "foregrounded self-awareness, doing things properly, learning new ways, being thankful, being humble, leaving problems behind you, helping yourself, and keeping trying" (Stavrou & Murphy, 2021, p. 22). Furthermore, Stavrou (2021) examined Indigenizing school mathematics assessments through miyō-pimōhtēwin, and kamskénow, which was found to be a holistic way of looking at the life lessons, ethics, and discovery-oriented learning of children. This significantly organizes the life of a student to be at the heart of their mathematics education in ways that attend to their well-being.

In the narrative inquiries described above, the Cree teachers resided in urban settings, with some born in an urban setting while others were born in reserve communities. In the research described in this paper, we share the experiences of two elementary school teachers who used Cree-based approaches in teaching mathematics through PBE in a Saskatchewan reserve. Novel to this study is that the Cree cultural contexts are often outdoors in a reserve community located hours away from the nearest urban school. Through the methodological use of narrative inquiry, we discuss the teachers' understandings of Cree Indigenization and PBE in relation to school mathematics, their difficulties and successes addressing curricular outcomes when using these Cree-based approaches, and their recommendations for other teachers wishing to take up similar practices.

Narrative Inquiry

We are transparent about using narrative inquiry, a Western methodology, as we are non-Indigenous (White) scholars researching alongside Cree teachers. Although one might wonder why an Indigenous research methodology is not used, we attend to this matter by proposing that narrative inquiry is compatible with Indigenous forms of research by locating narrative inquiry in Indigenous research. To this end, it is important to first distinguish Indigenous research from an Indigenous research methodology. Kovach (2018) aptly differentiated between these, stating that *Indigenous research* is a broad term in which Indigenous matters are studied and does not necessarily include directly researching with Indigenous peoples, nor does it require using Indigenous methodologies given by Indigenous researchers. She explained that Indigenous research can be found in many disciplinary contexts, such as "education, social work, law, sociology, health, and environmental studies" (p. 215), and includes "community-based, ethnographic, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, decolonizing, and Indigenous methodologies" (p. 215). That is to say, Indigenous research is interdisciplinary and is open to study through *Indigenous methodologies* (which are founded on Indigenous knowledge systems), as well as Western methodologies such as narrative inquiry. While we understand there are other methodological approaches—such as Storywork (Smith, 2019) and Métissage (Burke & Robinson, 2019)—that would reveal their own unique and nuanced richness to the interpretation and representation of our research stories, we chose narrative inquiry.

In work by Cardinal et al. (2019), the authors wrote that although they were "guided by Indigenous scholars such as Bruno (2010), Cardinal (2010, 2011, 2014), Lessard (2010, 2014), Swanson (2013, 2019), and in particular Mary (Young, 2003), we felt the resonance and possibilities of Indigenous knowledge and narrative inquiry" (p. 127). In this way, we also understand how our inquiry is shaped in relation to Indigenous research. Battiste and Henderson (2000) explained that stories are enfolding lessons that transmit experiences, honour spiritual forces, and focus on processes of knowing. The experiences of Kiwi and PK—our teacher participants— helped us focus on the processes of knowing in this inquiry.

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Experience, as described by Dewey (1938), is foundational to narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiry posits that people understand their experience narratively and relate it narratively to each other, in this case to the researcher. This aligns with Clandinin and Connelly's (2000) initial phases of the narrative inquiry cycle of living and then telling. Our job as researchers resides in the retelling, which may engender possibilities for reliving. Clark (2016) wrote:

> It is in the stories we tell about ourselves, the stories that people tell about us, in the stories we act by, and the stories we tell in our actions. Story becomes the warp and weft of all experience – it weaves its way through every moment. Stories are central to understanding the nuances of human interactions in any context. (p. 48)

When considering Clark's words, it helps to consider earlier work by Connelly and Clandinin (2006), who wrote:

> People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experience of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. (p. 375)

This way of thinking about story reveals the complexity of experience as a narrated act. Our lives are composed of stories that, as Clark (2016) wrote, "become the warp and weft" (p. 48). In this way, story (experience) is the fabric of our lives and central to understanding human interactions in context, which, in the case of this paper, is teaching mathematics. The narratives that we explore are those of the teachers, but these stories happen in relation to the children/youth they teach, the mandated curriculum guides, and *place.*

In the research conducted with Cree participants Kiwi and PK, the first author (Stavros) sought a narrative telling of their experiences contextualizing school mathematics with attention to place. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) referred to the dimension of place as that "which attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes" (p. 51). According to these authors, place is an important aspect of the three narrative commonplaces—sociality, temporality, and place—that bound an inquiry. As will be apparent in this paper, the teachers' stories occur in specific places of their reserve communities, throughout periods of time, and are mediated between relationships.

Connected to the importance of place in our research, Chambers (1999) theorized a topography of Canadian curriculum theory by challenging researchers to consider education from the place they live and work, described through their language, using place- and linguistic-specific interpretive tools. Moving from the general research to the specific context of our research, Cree worldviews shape an understanding of life, *iniee mamitoneneetumowin*. It is in the respectful honouring and supporting of relationships and the ethical relationality foregrounded in our personal and professional alliances (*weechiseechigemitowin*) that we embody *miyōpimōhtēwin* (walking in a good way). These words, which are Cree ways of being that shape relationships, came up throughout our research process.

Relational inquiry is constituted by the "stories, places, memories, relationships, and communities that are part of who we are in the world" (Quiles-Fernández et al., 2022, p. 154). Relational narrative inquiry captures, in part, who we are in the world. King (2003) offered, "the truth about stories is that that's all we are" (p. 153). We take this to mean that our experiences can be shared through stories, and, in the living of our stories, we shape the stories of others; when we

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tell our stories, we are sharing ourselves. Further, Battiste and Henderson (2000) explained: “Stories are unfolding lessons. Not only do they transmit validated experiences; they also renew, awaken, and honour spiritual forces. Hence, almost every ancient story does not explain; instead, it focuses on processes of knowing” (p. 77). Kiwi and PK help us to understand the lessons they taught us through the inquiry regarding mathematics taught with attention to place in the context of their Cree culture and lands.

Our work as narrative inquirers involves coming alongside educators and students. We used purposive sampling (Cohen et al., 2000) to gain access to our participants for this research in order to learn from the experiences of teachers whose practices are guided by the dynamic conceptualization and operationalization of Indigenization and PBE in school mathematics. Stavros met the teacher participants, Kiwi and PK, through his professional development work with teachers and related research (Stavrou, 2020). Kiwi has been teaching on his reserve for nineteen years. PK is a colleague with Kiwi in the same community and has been teaching on his reserve for almost a decade. At the time of the interviews, PK was on leave from work to care for his mother, who broke her leg in a fall at home. Both Kiwi and PK teach a blend of elementary and middle years classes. PK has experience as a consultant for schools located in northern communities. His consulting role involves facilitating conversations around sharing resources.

Through a series of 10 group interview conversations between November 2020 and April 2021 (conducted through Zoom due to Covid parameters) of approximately one hour each, data in the form of audio-recorded field notes and written field notes were collected. The audio recordings were transcribed and discussed in subsequent conversations as prompts for further open-ended discussions. The initial topic of the interviews was about the teachers’ understanding of PBE and Indigenization (in general and in regard to school mathematics). From this starting point, Kiwi and PK shared their difficulties and successes in addressing curricular outcomes as well as their recommendations for other educators. We unpacked these by co-composing interim texts (in the form of narrative threads) that wove together the plotlines of these findings. Field texts are identified by the month and year in which they occurred.

As Stavros interviewed Kiwi and PK, they shared stories of mathematics teaching (some around shared lesson plans) during group Zoom conversations. Evident in the transcripts was the relational aspect of narrative inquiry, in which the work was not transactional because all of us involved shared a part of ourselves. At a later point, Shaun came alongside Stavros to reflect with him on these group conversations with the teachers.

This research was not conducted with the intention to generalize the practice of these teachers but rather to provide a more nuanced understanding of the ways educators are taking up Indigenization and PBE in mathematics education in their Cree communities, through their language, ways of being, and ways of knowing. The ways in which educators and practitioners take up Indigenization and PBE are varied. It would be problematic to provide a monolithic understanding of these diverse processes and concepts since they are highly dependent on temporality, sociality, and place.

The sharing of these experiences during the interviews and co-composing of interim texts were always situated in a context of ethical relationality. In our research and writing, we have been attentive to the centering of experiences in the world as we inquired into the “social, cultural . . . institutional [historical, colonial, racial, economic, gendered and political] narratives within which individuals’ experiences were constituted, shaped, expressed and enacted” (Clandinin & Rosiek,

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2007, p. 42). This narrative thinking—across time, place, and attentive to the social interactions—opened the potential to experience the ongoing multi-dimensionality of experience (Huber et al., 2022). Ethics in narrative inquiry is situated in the relationships that occur with participants and is attentive to the narrative commonplaces of sociality, temporality, and place. Furthermore, it is the grounding of ourselves in living in relationally ethical ways that we acknowledge our commitments to all our relations (Cardinal et al., 2019).

This study's findings focusing on the teachers' experiences are broken down into the following three areas: understandings of Indigenization and PBE in relation to school mathematics, difficulties and successes addressing curricular outcomes, and recommendations for other teachers wishing to take up this practice. The first two findings are presented as sections, within which we separate the experiences of Kiwi and PK into subsections.

Understandings of Indigenization and PBE in Relation to School Mathematics

Experiences of Kiwi

In early conversations with Kiwi, he spoke about mathematics and its relationship to human experience, nature, and time:

> Humans have an internal clock. We have an instinct that guides us to the passage of time that comes from our interactions with nature. I had to take a calculus course in university and the only chapter I understood were the real-world problems about rates of change. I was really fascinated about how we measure the passage of time as a rate that's related to *things we do.* I wanted to share my interpretation of this to my students at a lower-level, without as much emphasis on x and y. No offence—'cuz I know how much you math people love all the letters and symbols. (Field text, March 2021)

Kiwi described how the overly symbolic nature of mathematics can make learning challenging, but he expressed being inspired by the applications. He wanted to share the applications with his students.

> I was really impressed by the way we could model things like travel and predict exactly when things would occur based on different rates, like kilometres per hour. This related to our canoe trip this summer. We were able to use formulas to model how long it would take us to arrive at different junctions depending on the rates we were traveling. We do a lot of measuring of distances using referents like paces or looking at the length of our shadows.

He said sitting in the classroom and writing is important but, at some point, we need to experience what we are thinking about. He likened it to taking a cooking class in which a person only reads recipes but never actually cooks anything. He questioned how a person could learn to cook or discuss ingredients without ever having cooked something.

> When you are outside without a clock, it can be difficult to know how much time has passed, but we can feel the passage using our shadows. The rates our shadows stretch and shrink is a way to measure time. You can connect all of these activities to something we need to teach in the classroom—the difference is we can experience it. We can feel it. (Field text, March 2021).

Kiwi underscored the need for mathematics to be experiential. The disconnection for students comes from abstracting these experiences to numerical descriptions that rely heavily on symbols. In other words, students can lose sight of how mathematics applies to their everyday lives if they

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spend too much time on theoretical orientations of mathematics. This finding is consistent with our previous research in which classroom learning with our Cree teacher participants was disrupted by the mathematical notion of *generalization* (Stavrou & Murphy, 2020). In relation to this, Kiwi did not deny the necessity of these abstractions but rather sees an opportunity in the teaching of mathematics through outdoor experiential learning.

> One of my teachers focused on modeling real-world situations. I found that to be the most engaging and exciting. My students see that I'm excited and this is infectious. It worked for me and I hope it works for them. We start with a problem or activity and we model it. Experiencing what we're doing makes it easier to develop formulas after. (Field text, March 2021).

Kiwi believed PBE promotes effective teaching experiences, where students feel motivated to engage in more nuanced learning when it applies to their lives. This is also described in Miller and Twum (2017), whose study looked at teachers' responses to student learning in their outdoor education programs. Furthermore, Kiwi believed inquiry-based learning and real-world learning are synonymous. Since everyone experiences the world differently, Kiwi explained that his students' projects are diverse and reflect their individuality. He argued that traditional pencil and paper desk work limits students' abilities to express themselves in meaningful ways. This is important to students who feel bored when they are expected to sit in a classroom and solve the same predictable assignment questions as everyone else.

Kiwi's experiences relate to PBE in clear ways in that these real-life experiences are connected to ways of being on the land (as indicated in the canoe trip, for example). It is not a discussion about imagined real-life experiences but rather connected to the experience itself. Kiwi indicated that math can easily rely on abstraction, but he made it clear that abstractions make more sense when tied to experiences that are, in turn, tied to place. This way of seeing experiences and culture in education is consistent with work produced by Aikenhead (2006), who found that Eurocentric thinking compartmentalizes knowledge into subject matter strands that purport to be value- and culture-free through an emphasis on objectivity as being superior to the subjectivity of life and cultural experiences.

We conclude this subsection with Kiwi's comment that commitment to working through PBE and mathematics education is not easy work:

> We see different things when we teach math and you really notice it when we talk about what we're doing […] You learn to appreciate where people come from when you come together with a common goal, and you let your guard down […] You have to make a commitment. (Field text, February 2021).

Experiences of PK

PK described the ways in which mathematical acts are woven into our lives, but that the curriculum draws out descriptions through the curriculum strands of Numbers, Patterns and Relations, and Shapes and Space. PK shares:

> There are lots of ways to explain what we do every day. You are a math person, so correct me if I'm wrong, but I believe math is one of many ways to explain something. We go about our daily lives, figuring things out, trying to be efficient, trying to be accurate. I don't need to say I'm doing math because it isn't a specific thing that I turn on when I'm living

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> my life, but I can appreciate that math people think it's cool to think about things through patterns, numbers, shapes, and so on. (Field text, February 2021)

To avoid treating mathematics as a decontextualized classroom endeavour, PK sees the advantage of connecting to other subject matter, such as biology and home economics, thus providing a more meaningful, rounded understanding of mathematics in our lives. Mathematics is a language for describing everyday events and PK said that we cannot go about our day without a reliance on mathematics for relating or understanding our experiences. Murphy (2009) wrote, "mathematics is a language necessary to describe experience" (p. 1); it would seem PK felt the same way:

> Everyone likes describing how math is used in gardening because it's so easy to see. Our school's annual project is making a big garden. I don't have to justify the value in being outdoors growing food, but I do feel like I need to explain when curriculum math is used. We had to put a wooden fence around the garden to keep animals away, and obviously making a rectangular perimeter was easiest. The students helped with measuring and we did the cutting. All the operations were used there – adding, subtracting, dividing, and multiplying. Then we had to buy bags of soil. That involves calculating approximately how many bags of dirt we'd need to cover the area of the garden. This relates area and volume. You also have to factor cost in there. Then we plant the seedlings we grew inside over the winter. Students use referents like arm span to make sure there's enough space between the plants. As the plants grow, we take different measurements, like height, and compare it to our Gardener's Almanac. We can compare how much our plants are growing this season compared to previous years. We can represent this data using charts and graphs. There's a lot we can do. Students like doing it because it makes sense to perform these tasks in the first place…and because everyone loves being outside, of course. (Field text, April 2021)

PK explained the ways outdoor activities can be described using mathematical terms involving measurements, shapes, and space. He makes a conscious choice to connect his students' daily lives to mathematical processes, as is consistent with different Cree teachers in our other related research (Stavrou, 2020; Stavrou & Murphy, 2019).

> The Indigenization aspect of my work seems strange to explain. The importance of learning to get food from the land to our table is universal, but I think that since you big-city-folk can get groceries at anytime, you might see what we do as Indigenization. In that sense, I guess me explaining how we use math in our outdoor activities is an Indigenized way of learning. To me, students in big cities sitting in their desks all day learning through a book should be named something. (Field text, March 2021)

To us, the idea of book learning in desks that he referred to is a Eurocentric learning style. It is interesting to us how he troubled the notion of what is considered by many educators to be one of the 'normal' standards of conventional learning. We believe that the teachers' enactment of some of the processes of Indigenizing school mathematics in PBE drew attention to the colonial nature of classroom learning.

Difficulties and Successes Addressing Curricular Outcomes

It is expected that teachers will encounter barriers in implementing PBE since these concepts and processes subvert the pedagogical status quo of classroom desk learning and rote memorization for high-stakes assessments. Some challenges to Indigenous cultural inclusion and relevance in education include perpetuating racist stereotypes and colonial notions of success in education

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(Battiste, 2013; Deer, 2013; Stavrou & Miller, 2017); colorblind ideologies by teachers who refuse to acknowledge classroom diversity and racial oppression (Kumashiro, 2000; St. Denis, 2004, 2007); uncertainties in developing cross-cultural content (Aikenhead, 2006); and a lack of support by peers and administrators in affirming Indigenous educator representation (Doolittle, 2006; Goulet & Goulet, 2014).

Challenges implementing PBE include a lack of financial support and safety issues such as the cold weather of our Canadian prairies (Miller & Twum, 2017); resistance and hesitancies by teachers and school administrators (Smith 2002, 2007); de-schooling in the form of unlearning the conventional practices of schooling and embracing new methods (Clark, 2012; Illich, 1971); addressing curricular outcomes (Archibald, 2002; Powers, 2004; Skoutajan, 2012); meaningfully connecting experiential outdoor teacher education with the local community and natural environment (Twum, 2014; Zeichner, 2010); uncertainties in how to create and execute outdoor programs (Demarest, 2015; Hall, 2015); problematic notions about the ways place is conceptualized as a shared space (Eijck & Roth, 2010; Sobel, 1996, 2004); developing critical pedagogies and ecological consciousness (Gruenewald, 2003a, 2003b); challenging colonial practices that undermine Indigenous sovereignty and land stewardship (Battiste, 2002; Wilson & Battiste, 2011); and uncertainties in how to foreground Indigenous epistemologies and pedagogies in place-based education models (Kirkness, 1998)

In the following subsections, we share Kiwi's and PK's experiences addressing curricular outcomes. Their experiences represent our research findings and illustrate some of the challenges addressed in the literature above. For example, the teachers discussed ways their practice subverted traditional classroom learning methods, addressed safety concerns, and attended to curricular outcomes.

Experiences of Kiwi

Kiwi is cognizant of demonstrating his approach to meeting curricular outcomes to his administrator. He understands that he is accountable to his colleagues for the activities he does and is prepared to justify the ways the curriculum is integrated into the activities. For example, he is attentive to the ways place-based features—such as the location of rivers, animals, and plants—are integrated into existing curricula through measurements.

> It's important to keep a portfolio of everything you teach when you're outdoors. Administrators really want to know that you are meeting outcomes any time you leave the school. The other day, our principal asked one of my students what she learned. She talked for ten minutes straight about using a compass to locate the position of different landmarks animals use for migration. She talked about how we charted the growth rates of plants and trees at these landmarks and graphed our data to make it easier to visualize. The administrator then asked one of my colleague's students what he learned in school today, and he said 'Nothing.' Obviously, he didn't learn nothing—but it wasn't memorable or fun to be in his desk all day. (Field text, November 2020)

Portfolios and self-assessment documentation track the development of student learning. Being able to articulate connections to curricular outcomes and curriculum mapping is important for teachers who will be called upon to legitimize their pedagogical approach to administrators and parents. This is described as a challenge in, for example, Powers (2004), who used a model called the Place-Based Education Evaluation Collaborative to mitigate the constraint of a lack of time to devote to curricular change in the midst of current curricular pressures felt by educators.

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Documenting the trajectory of programs might make it easier to request funding and resources. Kiwi explained wanting to move away from calling his pedagogical approach a *field trip*. To him, a field trip represents a tangential experience that is a treat rather than a normalized way to learn. Kiwi also exposed the need for de-schooling in the form of challenging the normalized notion that schooling only occurs in desks and classrooms, thereby supporting Illich's (1971) call for transformative pedagogies:

> A big challenge we face is the weather. It can be too dangerous when it gets [very] cold. We are currently applying for funding to get specialized outdoor gear so that we can continue our learning regardless of the temperature. It's expensive to purchase the appropriate clothing and we can't let the burden fall on our children's families. We know there are financial resources available, and I hope the community will see how important it is to remove this barrier. (Field text, November 2020)

Kiwi attended to the need for aligning curricular outcomes with outdoor activities by documenting the trajectory of his work. He integrated place-based features like rivers and plants into the curriculum and emphasized keeping portfolios for accountability. He challenged traditional schooling notions. He acknowledged that weather poses a significant challenge and attempted to remove financial barriers by seeking funding for specialized outdoor gear.

Experiences of PK

PK shared that he has invested a lot of time in building a convincing case for the benefits of PBE. He said there is a burden on educators to convince administrators, parents, and school boards of the success that outdoor inquiry-based learning has to offer. He said, "we talk about what works, what doesn't, what stays, and what goes". He described his work as a grassroots movement to make the curriculum work for his community's specific needs and explained that his job involves getting teachers to collaborate and share what they have.

> It's my job to keep a written track record of all the activities I do, with detailed explanations that justify how we are addressing curricular outcomes. I have folders and folders of reflections written by me, some colleagues, and my students. I'm constantly being asked 'How did you teach this math topic?' I pull out my students' journals and I show them what we did during our overnight trips to [Location]. We experienced biology, chemistry, physics, and math. We experienced Phys. Ed. My students make charts and graphs and use formulas to explain what we're exploring and seeing. Parents are excited to see their kids learning something they can actually explain at the kitchen table. (Field text, January 2021)

PK thinks of his work as being about skill development. In other words, he sees his practice as emphasizing the skills students need to thrive in their community, such as safe fishing and hunting practices, proper food handling and fire safety, and understanding how to care for local ecology. In our interview conversations, he explained that having empathy for the environment and world around us comes from locating ourselves in nature. He shared that developing a critical consciousness comes from experiential learning and stated, "we will protect our earth if we live and learn alongside nature".

Recommendations for Other Teachers

In this section, we provide our interpretation of Kiwi's and PK's recommendations. These are based on analysis of various field texts (interview conversations) that are not reproduced in this article but which we analyzed and then shared our findings with Kiwi and PK. They were invited

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to clarify and modify those findings, which is part of co-composing interim texts and final research texts in a narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006).

Through our interview conversations, Kiwi and PK demonstrated the ways PBE promotes community engagement. They noted how teachers and students connect with small businesses to get the supplies and resources needed for outdoor activities. In turn, the community saw concrete ways to support children's learning, such as donating supplies and offering expertise. When the community as a whole bought into what the teachers were doing, word spread to other communities and schools. This promoted collaboration between teachers and communities. Ideas were shared, and organizations saw what worked and what did not work without having to metaphorically reinvent the wheel along the way.

Kiwi and PK recommended that teachers reflect on how they have been socialized to think about the environment around their communities. They believe this helps develop an emotional connection to place that compels people to think of their land stewardship—specifically, the ethical imperative to protect shared land. They recommended that teachers see PBE as a motivator to move towards environmental collectivism through collaborative efforts of sustainability.

Kiwi and PK recommended that teachers reflect on the ways their practice fosters inquiry-based experiential education that is mindful of respect, reciprocity, and relationships with each other and the land. They encouraged teachers to develop activities that explore medicinal properties of local plants, skills needed to grow food, and tasks around minimizing our carbon footprint. For example, students applied statistical analysis to track changes in pollution levels in local bodies of water. Their students also used trigonometry to measure light refraction while fishing and to determine the height of tall trees without directly measuring.

The evidence supporting the benefits of PBE was affirmed by Kiwi and PK, who both recommended that colleges and universities provide structured programming for teacher candidates across all subject matters so that they can develop competencies and proficiencies in PBE. In addition, teacher educators modeling the integration of PBE and inquiry-based learning will reinforce the promising practices that arise from learning in natural environments (Archibald, 2002; Clark, 2012).

Closing Remarks

Kiwi's and PK's experiences highlight important first steps for mathematics teacher educators. We hope other teacher educators will see the benefits of connecting Cree Indigenization and PBE to the teaching of school mathematics. Through our research conversations with Kiwi and PK, we confirmed that classrooms extend beyond the walls of a school to include the natural environment and local community—particularly for school mathematics, which is a subject often disassociated from cultural, linguistic, and familial experiences.

Kiwi and PK remarked on the difficulties of overcoming the established practices of schooling that normalize passive learning from desks that face chalkboards. Part of PBE is interrogating long-held beliefs about what is deemed legitimate regarding learning and assessments (Hall, 2015; Wilson & Battiste, 2011). For example, de-schooling mathematics might shift the focus from rote learning and standardization towards student-centred contextualization rooted in one's individualized sociocultural experiences and environments.

Kiwi and PK described their work as *weechihitowin* (stewards of education on the land). Part of their Cree worldview is providing the drive toward change needed to support and nurture

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their relationships with each other, their students and communities, and the land on which they live and play. They agreed that by using Cree language whenever possible to animate school mathematics, they are adding to the mysteries of Indigenization. Importantly, *miyō-pimōhtēwin* is in the way Kiwi and PK hold space in their relationships with students—an ontology of being—that is the lifeblood of Cree Indigenization in their practice.

There are more opportunities for differentiation when the classroom is expanded to include the environment and local ecology. When students are given a meaningful task that engages community organizations and promotes ecological justice, they are motivated to demonstrate their skills. Students learn to collect, interpret, and represent data that is relevant to them.

As authors and researchers, our intention is not to prescribe methods of incorporating PBE pedagogical approaches but to share experiences that might help us shape an understanding of the promising practices and potential of Cree Indigenization and PBE. We hope this article opens up the conversation to more stories of student-centred sociocultural experiences and differentiated instruction grounded in community engagement and ecological justice.

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Handholding, Walking with Students. Compassionate—Not Customer—Care in Post-Secondary Education

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Abstract

Values of independence and self-determination predominate over relations of care and compassion in fast-paced academia and post-secondary institutions, a "malaise" that faculty and students alike experience. Large-scale production rewards the "Invictus" (undefeatable, unconquered), leaving others mostly to their own and allowing little or no space for individual care, for handholding. As a graduate cohort advisor in early childhood education (ECE), I have resisted giving in to such values. Inspired by principles of a feminist ethics of care and pedagogy of listening, in this paper I reflect on a decade of handholding and walking with ECE post-secondary students as an act of resistance.

Keywords: academia, feminist ethics of care, early childhood education, post-secondary students, pedagogy of listening, resistance

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> Let me take you by the hand. It is a supremely human gesture, and in it, you and I are joined: we hold on to one another and go along together. In the linking of hands, palm meets palm while the fingers, bent to form a hook, literally interdigitate. Caught in each other's flexion, the pull of my hand on yours, or yours on mine, only tightens the grasp. (Tim Ingold, 2016, p. 3).

Discourses sustaining fast-paced academia value independence and self-determination over inter-dependence and relational-based exchanges. They dismiss open expressions of care or compassion. Such discourses reflect the trend towards large-scale production that rewards those making it to the finish line unconquered, undefeated, and resisting external and internal pressures—The "Invictus" — while leaving others mostly to their own. Hartman and Darab (2012) depict a "malaise" in post-secondary institutions that allows little or no space for individual care and where praise and rewards are reserved for a few.

Post-secondary students studying early childhood education (ECE) are not exempt from the impact of this "malaise." Navigating up and down multiple channels or "canals," their dual roles as professionals and students demand they follow the flow of their rhythmic, active, intensive days at work with children, families, and other educators, comply with early childhood program regulations, and at the same time provide the same level of focused attention to a minimum of 30 hours of coursework for each one of the three-credit courses they must complete. These hours are distributed between class, study, and assignments. Their personal and family commitments are not accounted for in such time calculations.

A program expectation for ECE part-time students, identified as "professional" in its having been designed for students mostly holding full-time jobs, requires an average of one core course per semester over two years. As an instructor in the ECE program, I have been a part of post-secondary students' journeys for over two decades. I have also served as a graduate cohort advisor and instructor in an early childhood professional master's program (MEd). As a cohort advisor, I have embraced the practice of walking the journey with my graduate students. Walking this journey together, side by side, entails intentional listening, acknowledging and honouring with deep respect where students are. Recently, I heard the term "handholding" mentioned in reference to my embracing, as if perceived as coddling or perhaps even stunting someone's growth. Instead, and echoing Ingold's (2016) words, "Let me take you by the hand…" (p. 3), I decided to own the term "handholding." Within the practice of walking together, handholding is nested within a collective vision of post-secondary pedagogy, one that supports student identities and faculty autonomy by engaging in and maintaining dialogue. This vision resonates with Freire's pedagogical praxis as it "circulates, is acted upon and revised —not being pre-determined . . ." (McLaren, 1999, p. 4). It has also become my expression of resistance to individualistic discourses embedded within the prize-winning, fast-paced academia. Kohan's (2019) philosophical biography, "Paulo Freire, Mais Do Que Nunca" (Paulo Freire, More than Ever), analyzed the political essence embedded in Freire's work. A trained lawyer who never practiced law, becoming instead an educator and a philosopher, Freire introduced a pedagogy that reveals the oppressing powers of the very institutions which are expected to provide tools and support to their users (banks, yes, but also schools). The dichotomy for ECE students is that they are trained to provide care and compassion against the backdrop of their own educational and training experience, which

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is focused on quick-paced results, no considerations for life beyond training, and a culture of fierce independence.

Walking *with* ECE Post-Secondary Students

Turning to principles of a feminist ethics of care and a pedagogy of listening, I reflect on a decade of walking with ECE post-secondary students as acts of resistance. In this essay, I use short narratives as grounding points to elaborate on my particular experience of cohort advising. I also draw from Langford and Richardson's (2020) reflections on "care*ful*" listening, a call for "caring *for*" others, and not simply engaging in "care*giving* activities" (Noddings, 2015, as cited in Langford & Richardson, 2020, p. 36). I also call on Buber's (1959) "I and thou" as a script that accompanies my intertwined venture(s) with students. I identify the system inequalities that quietly and subtly pose a threat to the very success of students from the beginning of their program. I then dwell on the tensions that I encountered amidst the university guidelines and requirements. I examine my, and my students' navigation, which includes supporting students' individual pathways within the collective efforts of their cohorts. My reason for sharing my experiences is to offer handholding as an act of resistance across the ECE landscape. In a world of recognizing equity as a focus in most institutions, handholding offers a simple and effective way to resist oppressive practices embedded into many aspects of student academic life. Handholding enacts an ethics of care and fosters strong relationships across the student and faculty body. My experiences in handholding offer examples of how this practice can be taken up by other institutions so that, in time, they can become less like acts of resistance and more like best practices for student success and well-being.

Regarding the process I followed toward writing this essay, I sought (and obtained) feedback and consent from the graduate students whose work is included here; excerpts have been chosen to illustrate specific aspects of my pedagogical practice raised in this essay. I communicated with the students using e-mail, attaching the abstract for this essay, and asking their permission to cite their work and quote some of their e-mail correspondence or blog posts, without using their real names. I close this essay with reflections and considerations for program completion, and what success even looks like in this context.

What is Your Dream: I and Thou

In the beginning it is the prospect of a journey. I received e-mail and voicemail messages like the ones below for approximately 13 years:

> Dear Ms Pighini, I am a kindergarten teacher with 10 years' experience living in Nova Scotia. I would like to complete my master's program. I saw the online cohort course, is it all online?
>
> Hi! I am preschool teacher in a community program. I have completed my ECE certification and hold a Bachelor of Arts. I am interested in the master's program in ECE. Do you think I have enough qualifications for this program?
>
> Dear Mari, I am coordinator in a program serving young children and families. I have seen a recording of an info session for the online MEd in ECE program and I have a few questions. May I call you?

I read, I listen to, and I try to honour these e-mail and voicemail messages, each one speaking to me, using Tuck and Yang's (2014) words of the applicant's "desire" (p. 232) —one I recognize as their own yearning to embark on a new route. For reasons the interested early childhood

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educator(s) may not even be aware of, these individuals are ready to trouble their existing lives, perhaps keen to embrace what Berger (2015) calls "a moment of not knowing" (p. 130), even though it means confronting their own fears about continuing into graduate school.

Relationality as An Act of Resistance

As I reflect on these e-mail and voicemail messages, I become aware of my first act of resistance: To allow for principles of *relationality* to guide my response(s) to students. I have rejected following the course of anonymity and personal detachment from the other reflected-on, pre-scripted, template-style responses. I invoke Buber's (1959) "I and thou": "I-thou… Primary words don't signify things but are intimate relations… The primary word 'I-Thou' can only be spoken with the whole being…" (p. 3). I am aware that the *I-thou* binding defines my positioning as a cohort advisor. Even at this very early stage of the correspondence, I give a hint in my response that I would like to know more about their background, as illustrated in the following sample e-mail message:

> Dear A,
>
> Thank you for your interest in our program. It seems you have a wealth of experience in early childhood education with your 10 years as a kindergarten teacher, and that your undergraduate background is relevant for the MEd program. Yes, our program is offered entirely online. I am happy to connect and talk more about your interests in our program. At the same time, we will be holding an online information session soon. Would you like to attend?
>
> [Note: At the time of this email, I used Skype to communicate with some applicants preferring video calls. Also, at the time of this email, video calls were only available for registered students; later on, I used Zoom].

Efforts to sustain relationality are offered through online information sessions for prospective applicants, like "A", and for orientation sessions for students admitted to the program. Webinar formats have been introduced as institutional preferences for information and orientation sessions; however, within the context of orientation, I experience webinar formats as perpetuating distance: *I* and *thou,* not *I-thou* (Buber,1959). My preference for the structure of such sessions continues to be through an open conference (non-webinar) format that allows for personal introductions and information exchange (voice and/or text). Rather than muting participants, I invite them to speak. Here is where the exchange of information begins: Our primary endeavor is to introduce applicants to what the program entails; however, I also want to learn who these potential applicants are—their backgrounds, interests, and concerns. Their queries and experiences shape our sessions together. No two sessions end up being identical. I realize that I want to learn more about students' own experiences. Though coming from diverse backgrounds, the prospective students share a common interest in learning about the particular topic of the online MEd program information session, similar to what Wenger (1998) termed "communities of practice." The process of reciprocal exchange that guides the information and orientation sessions promotes awareness of the diverse communities of practice that may surface for applicants and new students as they are introduced to one another. In addition to making a space to connect, conversations are acts of reciprocal exchange that allow for faculty and staff to share the program's background and for students to bring in their stories, their voices, and what they envision—their dreams.

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The Systemic Bases of Diversity and Inequality

I have come to understand how acts of resistance may begin for me from the early stages of the application and selection process. In this graduate program, admission criteria allow some flexibility when it comes to the strict parameters of standardized text about dates, GPA points, and other requirements. The university's objective is to make this program attractive and feasible for applicants with undergraduate backgrounds that may be non-traditional and not necessarily meet the required specific combination of qualifications (type of degree, GPA minimum, and professional experience). Faculty involved with the admission process are invited to reflect on the narratives in messages received from applicants with these non-traditional backgrounds, giving careful attention to their unique context, characteristics, and needs. I pay close attention to such narratives. The message below is from an applicant who describes their journey into, and expression of commitment to, early childhood education:

> Hello Mari,
>
> Thank you for your response. I'll be completing my program this December. If all goes well, I could perhaps take a few extra ECE courses at the school during the next semester. I've attached my resume and unofficial transcript for you to look at. Once again, I'd love to apply for the program and this stems from my love of working with children. Three years ago I hadn't considered just how greatly I'd want to continue my career in the field I had already found myself in as an ECA. As such, I'd love for my graduate education to centre around my passion of early childhood education. (M.U., personal/email communication, Oct. 29, 2021)

A second message, presented below, is from an applicant who had not yet completed their undergraduate bachelor's degree, which is one of the program's academic requirements (a 4-year Bachelor of Education (BEd) or Bachelor of Arts (BA)). Hence, this student's application required a 'special case' examination:

> Good evening, Mari.
>
> I have most of my application complete for the Fall . . .MEd in ECE program.
>
> I have a very different academic background. I am currently on Education Leave from [name of Agency] until May 2018, where I have been employed as the Indigenous ECE Post-secondary Coordinator for the seven-plus years.
>
> I am currently enrolled in [name of University] completing my undergraduate degree in BPA-Human Services I will graduate in June 2018.
>
> I have submitted a PLAR- Prior learning assessment and recognition and was awarded 27 credits for the learning that I have demonstrated. This was a massive undertaking, [in] comparison to a personal learning thesis. I have attached the portfolio assessment for you to review and uploaded the evaluation to my application. I have received transfer credits for my two-year ECE diploma into my undergraduate degree as well.
>
> I have also attached my degree work sheet to allow for clarity to the transfer and PLAR credits.
>
> I am currently completing five courses and will be taking another five classes next semester. My marks are not all uploaded or entered at this point.

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> I wanted to connect with you and provide you with this background information. I recognize I will be considered a special case for review. Please let me know if there is any additional information you may need.
>
> Kind regards,
>
> [signed]
>
> L.
>
> (email communication, L.H., December 12, 2017)

As I re-read these messages, both sent by BIPOC (black/indigenous/people of colour) applicants, I recall Annette Henry's (2015) article "'We especially welcome applications from members of visible minority groups: Reflections on race, gender and life at three universities." Henry (2015) cleverly uncovered the sequence of disparities and uneven processes of hiring minority faculty from non-White, non-European backgrounds. As this author shares, the invitation, stated in all calls for faculty applicants, aimed to diversify the highly white faculty bodies in Canadian post-secondary institutions. Eight years since Henry's (2015) publication, efforts to minimize academic hiring disparities are ongoing. An example that illustrates the difficulties still encountered in reaching faculty diversification is the document titled "Task Force on Race, Indigeneity and Social Justice's Final Report" (The University of British Columbia, 2022). The report calls for major systemic and structural changes to be reflected in accessibility, funding, and program completion options for students. The current structure of the university, the report continues, still mimics a post-colonial model of education based on hierarchical values of power and achievement. Initiatives already in place to hire diverse faculty and staff representing various intersectionalities of race, gender, sexual orientation, social, and ethno-cultural backgrounds are simply not enough, the report offers, to attain the levels of systemic and structural change required to create inclusivity for faculty, staff, and students. I pause here to reflect on the meaning of these statements within the context of the application process and those faculty members who have been selected to be part of the admission committee to review the files from minority applicants. I wonder how these selected faculty members balance the admission requirements set forth by the university with the need to champion better representation across the applicant pool with regard to intersectionality.

"Too Many Special Cases"

During the admissions process, the selection committee is guided by the caution to avoid accepting "too many special cases stemming from admissions." In this case, special cases refer to students who have received one of their undergraduate degrees in an institution with academic credentials not recognized by this institution for credit transfer or validation, or (as in L.H.'s case) who have completed undergraduate credits through various programs that require validation by the university. Having more than two or three special cases does not sit well with university admissions.

Such a situation leads me to ponder this contradiction between the university's aim to "attract" BIPOC and other visible minority students and the strict limits regarding criteria for, and number of, special cases. The presence of the reductionist clause of "special cases" stalls applications from those who face life challenges (Shankar et al., 2013) that are not always faced by other students. Personally, I resist these institutional warnings. The success rate of "special case" students graduating from our program, some of them continuing into−and

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completing−doctoral programs, reveals another storyline behind the cautious and exclusionary internal messages of the university.

A first step toward equitable access to university programs is to examine special case clauses like these ones. They preserve a system that favours privilege and maintains exclusion. The language in the clause reproduces cycles of privilege and exclusion, benefiting only those with privilege and punishing those who are already marginalized. Graduate students enrolled in professional, part-time programs often do not qualify for financial assistance, which tends to be reserved for those enrolled in full-time programs. I cannot ignore the description of the MEd program as a "professional" program. The term "professional" speaks of qualified and paid. Assuming educators, as professionals, have enough earning power that they do not require financial assistance (and are therefore not provided with such opportunities) presents a not-so-subtle way for institutions like universities to perpetuate a system of oppression. *I* (can pay) and *thou* (cannot). Students who are professionals do pay their tuition out of their salary and are then often expected to attain their master's degree within the stipulated calendar period. Yet, this is not the reality for many ECE students who earn one of the lowest starting salary ranges among professionals in Canada (Friendly et al., 2020). Low salaries for early childhood educators are an issue that has remained unchanged even though this was declared an issue of women's equality during the global pandemic (Berger, 2021). The ECE master's program does not take into account the needs of an increasingly large proportion of students coming into the program from non-traditional educational backgrounds who require financial assistance. Students with non-traditional backgrounds refer to those who, as in L.H.'s case (with her previous ECE certification and Prior Learning Assessment Recognition process), required a laddering component throughout their undergraduate years to complete a four-year-equivalent bachelor's degree, as the university admission criteria stipulate.

In addition to minority and/or immigrant student groups experiencing inequities, perhaps the most difficult situation that can trigger a student's withdrawal from their program (once accepted) relates to financial difficulties (largely due to forgone wages and/or financial costs). This finding was reported in a study examining graduate student attrition in Canada and the US, where DeClou (2016) cites Raftery and Hout's (1993) notion of "maximum inequality," referring to how "privilege groups maintain higher education when lower levels of education have been saturated" (p. 177). In other words, it is precisely students coming from non-privileged groups who do not complete their programs. In my experience as a cohort advisor, the majority of students in the ECE cohort have been female, reflecting current and past trends in the early childhood education and care (ECEC) field (Sakai et al., 2014). In keeping this research in mind, I remain astutely aware of how female students who do not have a spousal or family safety net are at increased vulnerability in relation to abandoning their program and/or delaying their graduation. This information guides my interactions with students when they introduce the discussion of discontinuing their studies, as described later in this essay.

Individual *and* Collective

Not acknowledging the needs of students coming from similar laddering experiences (from undergraduate to diploma to graduate programs) represents a stark contrast with university mottos like "tuum est" or "it is yours" (and "it is up to you," using the singular "you" pronoun in Latin). With this motto, a university is placing the onus of achievement and success on individual students, as if the students were detached from the very communities and structures that have nurtured and provided them with support to achieve completion at each stage of their programs and that continue

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to sustain students through their own formal and informal networks. The emphasis on "tuum" brings to my mind Buber's (1959) 'I and thou' warning of non-relational structures of engagement perpetuating othering and mimicking post-colonial hierarchies, as per findings in the final report from the Task Force on Race, Indigeneity and Social Justice (The University of British Columbia, 2022) mentioned earlier on in this essay. I resist the pressure to engage in othering.

Drawing on relational principles sustaining a feminist ethics of care (Langford & Richardson, 2020), I have strived to walk alongside students, as a collective, as we begin this journey. The aim is to make it a journey where we can establish relationships of trust that provide the basis for sharing information. From day one, I embrace the practice of walking alongside students, a practice not supported at post-secondary institutions for fear of student-faculty over-dependence, as if "handholding" a small child. Instead, as I previously introduced, I interpret handholding as care*ful* listening to students. It is handholding that embraces *complete* care (Langford & Richardson, 2020). I borrow phrasing from Langford and Richardson's (2020) study about an ethics of care in practice based on observations of interactions between early childhood educators and preschool-aged children. These authors offer that "careful listening to children's needs, ideas, interests, concerns, and goals communicated in multiple ways without judging, classifying, or fitting them to match preconceptions of the child is paramount" (Noddings, 2013, as cited in Langford & Richardson, 2020, p. 36). In my active listening to, and corresponding with, students to find out more about their backgrounds, their interests, and their challenges, I adopt what Langford and Richardson (2020) identify as complete care: "In other words, care is completed when we know more about how children feel and experience their care and respond to it in varying ways…" (pp. 36–37). My goal is to match the ethic of care that ECE students are required to use in their professional interactions with the people they serve, in this case, children. My goal is not to treat the people I serve— in this case, ECE students— like they are children, but rather, to steep the entire profession, including children, their families, educators, and coordinators, in the same ethic.

Listening Intently to Students

I revisit the "tuum est" quote, an affirmation of the endorsement of values of trust, authenticity, and vulnerability that sustain the master's program, while I reflect on the communication that I (and others) sustain with students. I evoke Tim Ingold's (2016) sort-of-appearing-and-disappearing "threads" as he describes the interwoven connections of elements, experiences and actions that sustain life. In his attempt to provide clarity to the different types of expression in relationships, Ingold refers to traces, rejecting linear metaphors of relationships (one-way, or even two-ways): "Threads have a way of turning into traces, and vice versa. Moreover, whenever threads turn into traces, surfaces are formed, and whenever traces turn into threads, they are dissolved" (p. 2). Undertaking a graduate program where graduate students embrace togetherness while pursuing their individual pathways requires ongoing, reciprocal exchanges between faculty and students, and among students themselves. For reciprocal exchanges to be enacted in academia, the ongoing faculty-student exchanges of (mostly written) feedback benefit from the values of trust, authenticity, and vulnerability. In her writing blog, Lisa Munro (2015) writes: "It is ok to feel vulnerable, scared, angry or hurt when receiving feedback. It is ok to validate our feelings. We do ourselves no favour when we try to tell ourselves that we should not feel a certain way" (as cited in Belcher, 2019, p. 207). With these thoughts in mind about validating one's own vulnerabilities, I created a course blog for my students to share excerpts of their writing and for them to run their ideas by cohort mates during the beginning stages of their capstone graduating

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e-portfolio project (taking place at the end of their second academic year; see Figure 1 for illustration of blog home page). The idea of writing a blog that would capture this final stage of the students' programs came about from a previous graduate course where cohort students shared, on discussion posts, their insights and connections, which were grounded in theory and research and illustrated through professional experience examples. As in previous courses, engaging with students by responding and posing more questions/or queries led to an expansion of our conversation and served as an example of theory-to-practice connections, which is discussed in the next section.

Figure 1

E-Portfolio Blog - Home Page (Excerpt)
Maze by R. Mareschal. Image by M. Pighini (2019). Image reproduced with consent

Home
Welcome All to your ECED XXX graduating e-portfolio blog! In this blog we will post yours/our collaborative work towards the completion of your final course in your MED in Early Childhood Education. We have this blog so that you have a chance to share ideas around how to create and develop your graduating e-portfolio as it "sinks in," and expand, together with your partners, in your pairs/mini-groups. For this blog to be useful to each one of you and us, the expectation is that there will be updates with posts from rotating representatives of every pair/small group of students every two -three weeks for Term 1.

The Power of the Cohort

Munro's (2015) words (as cited in Belcher, 2019) resonate with me as I recall one of the graduate students' (T.I.) blog post in response to the topic of global discourses in ECE at the end of the cohorts' first academic year. In beginning her post, T.I. shared her perspective as an Indigenous educator, openly revealing her struggles with issues of identity and culture:

> Wondering to myself, which is the right way to say things? Is my thinking right or wrong? I realized, that my mind and way of thinking have become so colonized that as an adult I am worried about having my own opinion. A secret fear of being wrong and not in line with the standards set out for me. "[F]orms of colonialism are harder to see, and so, they

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> are insidious because they penetrate and impact every part of the lives of those colonised" (Martin, 2018, p. 80). My colonial way of thinking explained to me. (T.I., January 2022)

T.I.'s authenticity and vulnerability are striking. As an Indigenous graduate student, her writing, inspired by readings from Mahon (2016) and Martin (2018), reveals that coming to terms with her own entanglement with colonial ways of thinking is beyond difficult and incredibly hurtful:

> The entire world has become colonized and accepting of the European criteria for success. We are all striving to meet the global "truths" towards milestones, standards and bench marks for children in the early years. (T.I., January 2022)

As an educator, T.I.'s realization about how she has accepted universal truths, with assigned values and labels about development, competencies, and parenting, brings forward harsh self-questioning: "When did we accept these standards set out for ECD as the goals for each child to achieve?" (T.I., January 2022). And yet, as personal and as difficult as it is, this conversation among T.I., the cohort students, and me as instructor/advisor is animated, honest, and keeps the topic alive for modules to come in the course, as illustrated in T.I.'s final statement:

> As an Educator the one constant that remains is, each child is different in the way they acquire knowledge. Child development is not linear, the disadvantaged parents and children of our communities should be given equal opportunities to be successful contributing members of society. Success for each child could mean different things… (T.I., January,2022)

These excerpts speak to this student's approach to finding her own identity as she shares with the collective. I reflect on how students like T.I. are on their individual journeys following their successful acceptance and entry into the program. Soon after, perhaps a semester or two into the program, these students may confront personal, financial, and professional realities as well as other day-to-day barriers that may prevent them from thriving in graduate school. Online courses do allow for students in any location with access to Wi-Fi to be part of this program; yet home and work conditions and geographical locations are as diverse as the students in this program. For many in Canada, geographical distances and harsh climate conditions in the fall and winter semesters interfere with daily commutes to and from work, or routinely leave ECE students exhausted, limiting their time and energy to connect online. Access to the Internet or Wi-Fi is often only available while at their work location after hours, with some students having unreliable Internet access from home, often relying on using their own data plans almost exclusively.

E-mail messages announcing a student's withdrawal from their program are received usually once every semester from students in every cohort. For those who were already registered, these messages are usually preceded by an unexpected drop in the student's online participation in their current course and/or a sudden change in the quality of their reflective posts. This information about either reduced online participation or a sudden drop in the quality of their reflective posts is sometimes brought to my attention by one of the instructors in the program. In my role as an advisor, I aim to keep a delicate balance: I must listen to the student's situation and pay attention to their request, offering alternative approaches and understandings. I strive to be clear on expectations and possibilities that fall within what the university can offer in terms of supports for students who may end up needing extensions, for example, while making sure the student is connected to the program assistant for all their logistic and administrative inquiries. Above all, I engage in conversations with students so that they can make their own decision, including when, indeed, they must leave or postpone their program. Referring to her own journey of completing

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doctoral work, Unangax̂ scholar, writer, educator, and researcher Eve Tuck (2015) reflected on the support and respect from her mentor for the decisions she had made about her own program. Tuck recalled how her mentor was respectful enough to invite her to not give up on her program. At the same time, Tuck noted, her mentor avoided applying any pressure for her to stay. (The conversational thread about Tuck's work continues later in this essay).

Gaining an understanding of students' conditions and the challenges they face has led me to look closely and intently at their unique backgrounds. I pay attention to their individual situations, moving from a culture of "customer care" that predominates in the ECEC world (Taggart, 2016, p. 11) to a culture of compassionate care. Taggart refers to pre-service and emerging educators as being immersed in a culture of customer care that places value on professional skills acquired while promoting care as a slogan, not as a value. Instead, Taggart proposes a culture of compassion that is attachment-based, relational, and not necessarily linked to sentiments of suffering or vulnerability. Taggart asserts that this culture of compassion, which fosters secure attachments, could be brought into the ECEC field as a way to promote "ethical" and not just "skilled" professionals (p. 13).

Striving for a culture of compassion has led me to be intentional in trying to understand students' individual approaches to learning and their impetus and thirst for discovery. At the same time, I aim to understand and recognize the fragility of their circumstances when adverse events deflate them, leading them to consider dropping their program and leaving their dream behind (DeClou, 2016, p. 5). Inspired by Freire's principles of compassionate pedagogy, Taggart (2016) insists that, rather than dwelling on pity and fragility, instructors should invite students to reflect on their own possibilities, examine their vulnerabilities, and hold on to, instead of leaving behind, their dream if conditions can allow for it.

How, then, I wonder, do I draw from students' strengths? In pondering the type of message I could offer that would instill this desire to hold on to their dream, I engage in conversations with students, which might open with questions such as: "What do you think you bring to this program?"; "What does this program mean for you?"; "Why is it important?"; or, "What would it mean for you if you had to leave the program?" These questions bring a different perspective to the conversation, one that is relational, and one where the *I*-and-*thou* become closer, not detached and not othering.

Belongingness and Reciprocity

I welcome ideas of belongingness and reciprocity to guide the communication, interactions, and program support for the ECE graduate cohorts. Belongingness and reciprocity are tenets of the BC Early Learning Framework (E.L.F.) (Government of BC, 2019, p. 67) that are inspired by the First Nations' Principles of Learning (as cited in Government of BC., 2019, p. 43), and that contrast individualistic models of teaching/learning which aim at an academic finish line. These notions align with forest ecologist Simard's (2021) findings about the interconnectivity among tree roots and fungi of a myriad species —the mycorrhizal networks. Looking beneath the ground, Simard (2021) reveals how these networks not only nurture each other but they are also inter-dependent on one another to grow. For instance, a "mother tree" shares seedlings with nutrients of carbon, water, and nitrogen, yet clear-cut logging practices have ignored this fine web that keeps forests alive, Simard vehemently alerts in her book. The practice of clear-cutting deeply reverberates with students who cannot hold on to their mycorrhizal networks and are forced to abandon the program.

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The notion of the mother-tree, and the web created under the surface that sustains many, evokes instead the possibility of a program that nurtures and, when needed, handholds.

Walking *with* Students

Each year, a program ends for one cohort and a new cohort is announced. I rejoice with students' successes when they enter their culminating year and outline their graduating portfolio projects. I welcome with excitement the announcement of the next information session for students beginning in the fall. The continuous flow of the program—its sustainability, in fact—depends on the success of students graduating and graduating on time. It also depends on reaching the required number of newly accepted applicants coming in for the upcoming calendar year. This flow evokes Simard's (2021) description of the forest's healthy growth which needs an ongoing exchange of nutrients, nitrogen, and carbon. Like a healthy forest, the handholding experienced throughout the program is one of exchange.

Closure and New Beginnings

During the final year of their MEd program, ECE graduate students articulate their capstone projects under the advisory of two co-instructors— an experience I was privileged to share with a lead faculty member in my dual role of advisor/course instructor. A model of careful, caring pedagogy continues to manifest as an act of resistance to the pressures of post-secondary education. My co-instructor in the graduating capstone project course and I require tight collaborative practices throughout the process of reviewing graduate students' proposals while reading, listening, and supporting the advancement of their projects. We have often reflected on how, beyond a strict relationship as colleagues, our collegial relationship has evolved into a deep friendship, a "sororal" relationship where *I*-and-*thou* have fused.

A joint vision of shared guidance and listening to students' voices keeps us, as co-instructors, honest, 'at bay' from any temptation to, for example, let personal preferences about our own choices of references to be cited or to sway their own selections, while still providing scholarly guidance. We look for content in the projects that requires further elucidation, and which invites students to challenge their assumptions, beliefs, and practices. Similar to Aristotle's peripatetic approach to the exchange of ideas between disciples and their mentor while walking in the public space of the Lyceum, we walk *with* students. Walking *with* defines the entire "handholding" experience from admission to graduation. It serves as a metaphor for knowledge sharing, for ideas in motion, and for making their experiences open, shared, and public. We choose to keep walking with students as we listen intently to the creation and compilation of their portfolio capstone projects. The students share the projects and their journeys with each other and, eventually, with anyone else who cares to learn about their representations of their graduate program. The projects revolve around a metaphor which they select to represent a central idea that connects students' academic work and educational experiences throughout their MEd program.

In her online e-portfolio graduating project, A.K. chose the metaphor, "a willow in the wind" which mirrors her own journey of strength and overcoming challenges throughout her program:

> A willow tree in the wind is a metaphor that speaks to my journey throughout my Master of Education degree, though this metaphor can also be related to a child's educational journey within the early childhood years. Within this metaphor, I believe that relationships symbolize the roots that we rely upon throughout our educational journeys – without strong

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> relationships, or without strong roots, we cannot have a strong trunk or a strong foundation. (A.K., 2021)

"A willow in the wind" is the language A.K. used to reveal her shifting educational beliefs and practices, as she left behind the behavioural perspectives formed in her undergraduate background and rooted in psychology. Elaborating on her newly gained understanding of holistic education, rooted in strong evolving relationships, A.K. described her philosophy of ECE as "…the interconnection of each part of a child's life, including their mental health, physical health, spiritual health, emotional health, and intellectual health" (A.K.).

As another example, poetic metaphors like the crescent moon, inspired by personal rituals of creative work, guided L.H.'s e-portfolio capstone project, which she titled "Beneath the Crescent Moon. Place, Time and Knowledge: Reconciliation Through Indigenous Pedagogy in Early Learning" (L.H., 2021). L.H. describes the chosen metaphor:

> My inspiration for the graduating project comes from a personal ritual of mine, journaling and reflecting practice connected to the new moon's energy. It represents new beginnings. The start of a new lunar cycle has been a time to revisit my goals, reflect, and create new projects. The new moon ritual is connected to my deep creative work that allows for a fresh start, a new beginning beneath the crescent moon. (L.H., 2021)

L.H. acknowledges her "being in between" through her own transitions in place and time, just like the phases of the moon.

Similarly, the physics concept of diffraction grounded V.R.'s e-portfolio capstone project, which was titled "Diffraction in Practice - Waves of Interference in Early Childhood Education":

> A nudge in thinking creates a ripple and then a wave: A wave that in turn might overlap with another wave, perhaps with one that originated in some other place and time, in some other reality, created by some other meeting of minds or energies or materials, infinitely reconfiguring what is real and what is true. (V.R., 2022)

V.R. spoke to her "…interest in patterns of interference in early childhood education" from the belief of new waves of thinking that originate through the ripple effect that started with a "nudge in thinking".

These metaphors from student projects stand among many others that are equally deep and inspire meaning. The process of articulating metaphors is one that carries a tension-and-release process, one that demands, yet also grants, time for open conversation in group discussions among students and instructors/advisors or in small or one-on-one, quieter moments, until students reach clarity about where their graduating project is heading towards, shaped—encapsulated—through their well-articulated, goals/guiding questions/pathways. Doing so mirrors earlier program processes previously described in this essay, where handholding refers to walking with students on their journeys of discovery, of choices, of progress, and, when needed, of pause. To this end, Tuck (2015) speaks of the many hands who held her through her journey, who supported her steps, her pauses and, at times, who collectively made it possible for her to stay. This image of handholding, of walking with, that Tuck so eloquently revives, is one that reflects ample space for both students and their program to thrive. If such space is embraced, it holds a promise to stop the *malaise* (Hartman & Darab, 2012) of perpetuating the disconnect between *I and thou* (Buber, 1959)— a disconnect that excludes those who cannot consider applying to the program or cannot anticipate making it *Invictus* to the finish line.

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Beginning and Ending with Peaceful Resistance

I complete my last act of resistance: To walk along with students to the finish line as they present their graduating capstone e-portfolios/projects. Contrasting with the race or competition that I allude to in the introduction of this essay, one that evokes a set course, students instead explore these paths in their own, chosen ways. As illustrated in this essay, students' inspiring metaphors bring to life their individual educators' and learners' journeys toward their own insights, teachings, and learnings, while "meandering"—in Banack and Berger's (2019) words (p.1); that is, re-thinking and revisiting their own scholarly reflections on their MEd program coursework.

Closing Comments

In this essay, I first drew on a feminist ethics of care and compassion to describe acts of resistance to the current post-secondary *malaise*. I recognize how a feminist ethics of care offered me a way to adopt peaceful resistance while handholding and walking alongside students. Doing so invites me to stay truthful to Kohan's (2021) words in his biography of Paulo Freire: "to educate is an act of love . . . By loving more, you educate more. . ." (p. 67). Feminist perspectives on resistance and handholding are all acts of love, where inter-dependence and relational exchanges supersede the drive for individualistic determination. Here, I revisit Eve Tuck's own grounding and positioning with her firm stance as a newly appointed faculty at the time. I pause on Tuck's insistence to ground her work on decolonizing practices that guide, and will continue to guide, her scholarly and pedagogical work, rather than focusing on confronting neoliberalist ideologies (Tuck, 2015, 2018). I see in students their newly unearthed power that holds the potential for their own resistance against multiple pressures of fast-paced academia through their individual quests and collective work. Such shifts in perspective are likely to lead to transformative practices where both faculty and students may embrace, in Berger's (2015) words, the "…position of narrators and initiators of dialogue and critical reflection…" (p. 4). In the end, students' inspiring capstone e-portfolios/projects affirm resistance to the post-secondary *malaise*.

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A Review of Falkenberg, T. (2024). *Well-Being and Well-Becoming in Schools.*

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Falkenberg's (2024) edited collection makes an important contribution to educational research by bringing together diverse voices from the province of Manitoba, each sharing unique perspectives that contribute to a deeper understanding of well-being and well-becoming in education. Inarguably, there is a vital need for increased attention towards the well-being of young people and educators. Thomas Falkenberg notes that research has "rarely been grounded in an explicit understanding of student well-being as a core-purpose of education" (p. 11). He notes the exception of Nel Noddings (2003), who has argued that "happiness should be an aim of education, and a good education should contribute significantly to personal and collective happiness" (as cited in Falkenberg, p. 11). At the heart of the text, *Well-Being and Well-Becoming* is a sense of caring for the holistic well-being of all learners and educators.

This compelling book offers refreshing insights and perspectives on well-being and well-becoming that are grounded in Indigenous and global philosophies and interdisciplinary educational research. The edited collection consists of four sections that explore research in the following areas: "philosophical foundations; conceptualizing well-being; the school and the social ecology of and for well-being; and curriculum, teaching, and learning for well-being" (p. 12). Across the four sections, the authors provide inspiring insights, from diverse research frameworks and curricular areas, into how well-being and well-becoming contribute to the flourishing of young people and school-based professionals in educational settings and beyond.

The authors invite readers to consider how we may collectively contribute to healthier schools by focusing on transforming classrooms and schools into healthier, joyful, vibrant and hopefully even "wilder" (Watt, p. 255) spaces where all students and educators will flourish as they make meaning in their lives, and feel free to be their authentic selves. In his introductory remarks, Falkenberg poses the following thought-provoking questions: "What do we wish for our children? What do we wish for our neighbours and our communities? What do wish for ourselves?" (p. 3).

I appreciate the way this text begins by acknowledging Indigenous, Anishinaabe teachings related to "*mino-bimaadiziwin,* meaning 'the good life' or 'living in a good way'" (p. 3, see Bell, 2016), citing Anishinaabe scholars Nicole Bell and Michael Hart. The five foundational concepts of *mino-pimatisiwin,* as identified by Michael Hart (2002), include "wholeness, balance, harmony, growth, and healing" (as cited in Falkenberg, p. 3). These Anishinaabe teachings provide guidance for holistic inquiry as the authors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous from Manitoba:

> … inquire into the central importance of a purpose of life and of a purpose for our own lives, of a holistic and relational view of what it means to be human and of life more generally, of core values and principles that guide social and individual living, and of the important role that education plays in all of this. (Falkenberg, p. 4)

The first section of the book features foundational matters, delving into the philosophical frameworks and theories of well-being and how they relate to schools and education. Erik Magnusson and Heather Krepski (Chapter 2) emphasize the "substantive theories of well-being that seek to provide a concrete account of the things that make a person's life go well" (p. 25) while also discussing the challenges of applying these theories in Canadian classrooms and

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elsewhere. The authors note that while using an objective list to track well-being is one of the most common approaches in school settings (with the example of the Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016) due to their "intuitive appeal and practical advantages", there are two main challenges with this approach. The first challenge relates to "the arbitrariness: what rationale can be provided for the particular list of objective goods that a school division or educational authority takes to be constitutive of well-being" (p. 37), while the second challenge is that "students may experience alienation if they are told that, according to a particular objective list measure, their lives are going well when in fact they are subjectively dissatisfied with how their school life is going (or vice versa)" (p. 37).

In Chapter Four, Rebeca Heringer and Thomas Falkenberg argue "that the pursuit of a flourishing life requires an ethic of well-being that brings together both individual well-being and the concern for the well-being of others" (p. 71). The authors propose that an "ethic of hospitality can complement and inform individual well-being in a sustainable way—that is through a sensitive and tactful host who welcomes the unknown Other unconditionally while not neglecting their own well-being" (p. 71). This chapter encourages readers to reflect on relationality and ethics in the classroom context and reminds us that our lives are inextricably connected. Thus, educators have a responsibility towards themselves and to their students and must "be attentive to their own needs and feelings…it is also incumbent upon educators to resist any kind of projection of what students' well-being should look like and to make room for students' emerging responses" (p. 71). When educators are open to the "unpredictability of the encounter of the self and the Other", there lies "the promise of a flourishing life" (p. 71). Drawing on philosophical and psychoanalytical theories, the authors describe how an ethic of hospitality is an ethic of well-being.

In the second section of the book, theories of well-being and well-becoming are conceptualized. For instance, Frank Deer and Jessica Trickey (Chapter 5) provide an overview of Indigenous perspectives of well-being from Indigenous communities around the world, discussing how "Indigenous knowledge, heritage, consciousness, and experience may be understood" by employing the five components of Falkenberg's (2019) WB2 Framework— "agency, opportunities for agency, enjoyment of life, meaningfulness in cultures, and social connections" (pp. 80-81). Importantly, Deer and Trickey note:

> Understanding health and well-being among Indigenous communities involves knowing how their social network involves connections with family, community, land and spirits. Understanding the way Indigenous people feel connected and in harmony requires listening and learning from each community's perceptions of well-being. (p. 93)

These authors highlight the importance of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and how the spirit of reconciliation may "serve as an inspiration for understanding, sharing, and collaborating" (p. 94), especially in relation to well-being. I particularly appreciated reading Deer and Trickey's explanation of how "well-being involves enjoying one's cultural traditions and appreciation of one's cultural community" (p. 82). At a time of reconciliation, this appears to be an important finding to be considered by all involved in education.

Also in this section on conceptualizing well-being, Virginia Tze and Stephanie Brekelmans (Chapter 7) note that while there is an increased focus on well-being of young people in schools, there is also a need to "support the well-being of the school-based professionals who serve these student populations" (p. 120). The authors draw on the definition of well-being from the *American Psychological Association Dictionary of Psychology* (n.d.) as "a state of happiness and mental

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health and outlook, or good quality of life" (as cited in Tze & Brekelmans, p. 120). Building on the work of Ryan and Deci (2011), Tze and Brekelmans' chapter demonstrates the need for school counsellors and school psychologists to feel valued and motivated, thus having "more energy and positive experiences, leading to a greater feeling of competence" (p. 131). The authors note that "school counsellors play an integral role in fostering the well-being of students, but the stresses of their job can take an emotional toll" (p. 125). Therefore, considering the challenges facing school counsellors, such as "job overload" and "professional burnout" (p. 124), this chapter offers valuable insights that consider school-based professionals' overall well-being as well as the importance of self-care.

The third section of the book contextualizes the school and the social ecology of and for well-being. Jeannie Kerr's work (Chapter 9) draws on both Indigenous and Western philosophies and frameworks to discuss social inequities in inner city schools. Kerr's chapter challenges deficit discourses that persist in educational contexts, arguing that educators must understand systemic issues related to colonialism. Importantly, Kerr mentions that "attention to reclaiming Indigenous languages, as well as enriching multilingual experience, is important in supporting the well-being of children and communities" (p. 172). Furthermore, Kerr reminds readers that "in the Manitoba context, school districts, schools, and teachers have a great deal of latitude in choosing classroom resources and curricular materials" (p. 169). As such, the author encourages educators to connect with parents and community to "support reforms in curriculum and pedagogy" (p. 173) and "the wholistic flourishing of students" (p. 173). Importantly, Kerr's chapter highlights the potential of multimodal and trans-language curricular and pedagogical approaches and the need for "well-being and well-becoming to be carefully considered in relation to place, community, and located histories" (p. 172).

Finally, the fourth section of the book focuses on curriculum, teaching, and learning for well-being. The reader is invited to consider possibilities that go beyond simply "covering" the curriculum, to truly enable young people to make meaning as they are invited to explore ideas and concepts and make connections to their own lives. I was fascinated by the way the authors made connections to well-being across curricular areas, specifically with chapters on science curriculum through place-based education and ecojustice, mathematics education, and language arts (English). Notably, within each of these chapters, the authors share the significance of meaning-making for promoting well-being in classrooms.

In his chapter on mathematics education, Falkenberg emphasizes that "schools should provide opportunities to children to develop the capabilities linked to being able to live a flourishing life" (p. 220). Furthermore, Falkenberg offers that "meaning in life is not something like a treasure that we unearth but is rather something that we develop as we interact with the world around us, and that there is an aspect of *learning* involved…" (p. 227). I appreciated Falkenberg's description of how mathematics educators may contribute to students' meaning-making by "facilitating exposure to and awareness of opportunities for developing purpose, value, efficacy and self-worth" (p. 227). A powerful example is how a student may develop a life-long interest in playing chess simply through a conversation with another student.

Michael Link (Chapter 13) observes that "schools have, to varying degrees, uncritically perpetuated the dominant, hierarchical way of relating to each other and to the natural world" (p. 235). By centring eco-justice and place-based pedagogy in the science curriculum, Link asks: "How might schools play a role to prepare students to both fulfil their fundamental human needs and live according to an ethic of sustainability and social justice?" (p. 240). Drawing on

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Falkenberg's WB2-Framework (2019), the author proposes a nature-based framework in which "students are provided opportunities in nature to develop and enact capabilities that have been identified as necessary to meet fundamental human needs, for example, and to ask and voice questions and ideas about what they encounter" (Link, p. 241). Link's chapter inspires educators to consider how to foster well-being of students in meaningful ways through the science curriculum by connecting to the local community.

Jennifer Watt (Chapter 14) provides refreshing and thought-provoking ideas for teaching writing as she encourages teachers to focus on the writers "right in front of them, right in the moment – contributing to the enjoyment, exploring possibilities, and making meaning in students' immediate lives" (p. 258). Watt draws on the work of G. Lynn Nelson (1994), who underscores the intrinsic joy that may be found through writing:

> Here is what I hope you get from this…Ten years from now, I hope you will be sitting up some night at midnight under the light at the kitchen table—writing. Not because you have a paper due the next day or because someone has given you an "assignment"—but because you are hurting or grieving or confused, or because you are collecting some of the small joys of your day. (Nelson, 1994, as cited in Watt, p. 254)

Inspired by Nelson, Watt describes her vision for teaching writing in English language arts classrooms in ways that empower students to experience "increased agency and voice, more joy and spark in what they are doing, a deeper sense of meaning-making, and more authentic connections to themselves and others" (p. 259). Finally, Watt suggests that teachers "can also experience more flourishing in their personal and professional lives if they dedicate time to their writing practices, venturing into the greenbelt or sitting under the midnight table themselves" (p. 267). As such, Watt invites teachers to write and to "become part of the interconnected community of writers—not just a guide at the side, but as another writer right in the messy middle of it all" (p. 267).

In Chapter 15, Falkenberg concludes the book with important questions emerging from the authors' inquiries that may lead to further exploration and research on well-being and schools. Given that the book began with acknowledging Indigenous perspectives on '*mino-pimatisiwin'* (Hart, 2002), I had anticipated that Indigenous philosophies might also be discussed in the conclusion. This is an area that may be further developed for future work on well-being and well-becoming in Canadian and international contexts. Another noted absence is that I would have appreciated the inclusion of author biographies at the end of the book. However, a unique feature of the book, mentioned by the editor, is that the authors agreed to engage in dialogue through a series of podcasts. I was delighted to find the six-episode podcast (Falkenberg, n.d.) and to have the chance to listen to the authors.

In closing, I propose that this book would be of interest to teacher educators, counsellors, curriculum makers, curriculum theorists, and researchers. Additionally, the text will be an appreciated resource for students in undergraduate and graduate education courses. This timely and insightful edited collection offers hope that change within education is both possible and necessary. The authors have provided multiple perspectives for connecting well-being and well-becoming to social and ecological justice by considering broader issues in education and society that must also be examined if we are to collectively move forward towards healthier, and ultimately happier, classrooms and societies.

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Amanda Battistuzzi is a PhD candidate in the Faculty of Education, University of Ottawa, where she also completed a Master of Education, focusing on second language education. She is a proud additional language learner and Core French teacher whose teaching experiences span all elementary level grades. Her doctoral research explores language teacher identity development and second language learning experiences.

Artëm Ingmar Benediktsson holds a PhD in Educational Sciences from the University of Iceland. He is currently a Postdoctoral Researcher at the Faculty of Teacher Education and Pedagogy, Inland Norway University of Applied Sciences. His ongoing research investigates topics such as multicultural education, critical multiculturalism, experiential education, second language education, and culturally sustaining pedagogy at all school levels in Denmark, Iceland, and Norway. His teaching experience at the university level spans courses related to multiculturalism, plurilingualism, and globalisation in educational settings.

Carolyn Clarke, PhD, is an Assistant Professor of Education at St. Francis Xavier University, Antigonish, Nova Scotia, Canada. Throughout a career that spans over 30 years, Carolyn has held various positions in the public school system including classroom teacher, principal, and senior leadership. Her research interests include critical literacy, homework, assessment, the work of female caregivers in supporting their children's education, and students' voices in schools.

Thomas Falkenberg is Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. He is the editor or co-editor of a number of books, including the *Handbook of Canadian Research in Initial Teacher Education* (CATE, 2015) and *Well-Being and Well-Becoming in Schools* (UTP, 2024). He is the current Chair of the Editorial Board of the ESWB Press of the University of Manitoba (www.ESWB-Press.org) and a member of the Research Initiative *Well-Being and Well-Becoming in Schools in Canada* (https://wellbeinginschools.ca). More details about his research and academic background can be gleaned from www.ThomasFalkenberg.ca.

Rebeca Heringer (PhD) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Child and Youth Study at Mount Saint Vincent University. Her main academic teaching and research expertise revolves around (forced) migrations and subsequent exclusions, oppressions, and inequities in education;

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anti-racism and inclusive education; education as/for/through well-being; philosophical foundations of education; and research ethics/anti-oppressive research methodologies.

As a speaker of English, French, Japanese, Spanish and rudimentary Anishinaabemowin, **Mimi Masson** translated her passion for languages and cultures into a career in additional language teaching. She has worked as a teacher, trainer and curriculum developer in Japan and Canada, across K-12 and higher education contexts. Mimi is an Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Education at the *Université de Sherbrooke.* Her research focuses on language teacher identity development via anti-oppressive and antiracist education. She specializes in using critical discourse analysis and arts-based research methodologies.

M. Shaun Murphy, PhD, is based in the Department of Educational Foundations and serves as Associate Dean Undergraduate Programs, Partnerships, and Research in the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. His work examines teacher education, curriculum, narrative inquiry, and the lives of children and youth.

Heather Phipps, PhD, is Associate Professor of Minority Language Education (French) in the Faculty of Education at the University of Regina (Treaty 4) and coordinator of the French *Maîtrise en éducation*. Her research and teaching interests are in languages and literacies, children's literature, plurilingualism, arts education, walking and place-based pedagogies. She is inspired by the potential for joyful and creative pedagogies and research to open possibilities by fostering a deeper understanding of the world and our relationships with one another and with the more-than-human world.

María J. Pighini is a retired faculty member with the University of British Columbia (UBC) Faculty of Education. Dr Pighini served as a cohort advisor in the Master of Education (MEd) program with the online cohorts and as a 12-month lecturer in the Diploma and Certificate programs in Early Childhood Education between 2011 and 2022. Previous experiences include professional work in infant-toddler and early childhood support programs in her home city of Caracas, Venezuela and in Vancouver, BC, Canada, as well as holding a research coordinator position for a large interdisciplinary project based at UBC. Mari's research interests focus on disability and inclusion in early childhood settings, as well as the experiences of families with children with disabilities in urban and rural communities in BC, Canada.

Stavros Georgios Stavrou, PhD, works in the Department of Educational Foundations and the Department of Mathematics & Statistics at the University of Saskatchewan. His work resides in the areas of narrative inquiry, teacher education, anti-racism education, and multilinear algebra.

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