

# Editorial

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## **Repairing and Reimagining Educational Settings: Addressing the Barriers to Equity in Schools and Society**

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When considering difficult societal issues it is quite common to suggest that those issues can be addressed through schools and developing related educational resources suitable to the task. For example, if social media is providing misinformation that negatively impacts youth, educators can develop curriculum in critical media literacy that supports critical youth engagement. If there is increased violence towards gender diverse community members, educators can develop sexual orientation/gender identity curriculum that educates students on respecting non-binary understandings of gender. What is often missing in these approaches is the notion that schools are not only places where societal inequalities might be addressed, but they are also the places that (re)produce them. In this case, when the inequalities are being (re)produced in the schools, how might we consider repair of educational settings themselves? The notion of repair may suggest that schools as we know them in Canada are repairable – that we can recognize and repair schools and their systems. This is certainly a matter up for some debate. As Vanessa Andreotti (2012) asks in relation to addressing issues of social justice through education: “How can one ethically and professionally address the hegemony, ethnocentrism, ahistoricism, depoliticization, paternalism and deficit theorization of difference that abound in educational

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approaches benevolently concerned with (helping, fixing, defending, educating, assimilating, or giving voice to) the Other” (p. 22). Dr. Andreotti draws attention to the deep, intersecting layers of inequalities within educational systems based in Euro-Western colonialism, and the need to not only reform or repair, but also stretch the limitations in our thinking about education to imagine something *otherwise*. The articles in this issue of the Canadian Journal of Education consider ways we can recognize, reform, repair, and reimagine schools in recognition of the barriers to equalities that schools (re)produce which are increasingly exacerbated at this time in history.

We are grateful that Frank Deer, Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University Manitoba, and Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Education, accepted our invitation to submit an article themed on his own choice. We extended this invitation as we believe that Dr. Deer’s longstanding commitment to philosophical examination of the assumptions within educational settings would provide CJE readers with timely, insightful ideas for reimagining Canadian educational settings. His article *Onkwehón:we Spirituality and the Reconciliatory Journey in Canadian Education* identifies the central role of spirituality within Indigenous worldviews and explores this within important aspirations of reconciliation in schools. Engaging the concept of *Onkwehón:we* in the language of Kanien’kehá as meaning “the original people” (p.593), Deer explores the centrality of spirituality in engaging with Indigenous education. Importantly, he considers how educational settings themselves are poised to learn from these traditions to inform reimagination of their own structures. Centring on the notion of truth in Kanien’kehá as having a “sense of ‘goodness’ situated within it.” (p. 602), he draws attention to the unique ways that reconciliation might be informed by this idea of a goodness through spiritual *Onkwehón:we* understandings. His insights in this article provide a rich and textured consideration of beliefs, traditions, ceremonies and meaningfulness within a broader consideration of reconciliation in and through educational settings.

In their article *Asian Educators Experiencing the Bamboo Ceiling: A Canadian Case Study of Systemic Barriers in Hiring, Advancement, and Promotion* authors Mary Reid, Steven Reid, and Ardavan Eizadirad engage the perspectives and voices of Asian educators in their desires for career advancement. They explore the underrepresentation and limiting experiences of Asian educators in working towards leadership roles in a large district schoolboard in Ontario with a significant number of students identifying as Asian. The authors shed light on the phenomenon within educational settings in terms of hiring, advancement and promotion as aspiring leaders grapple with stereotypes and its

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harmful implications. Surveying 234 aspiring and current Asian educational leaders and interviewing 83 participants from that group, they draw attention to the existence of discriminatory practices that deny opportunities to Asian educators based on problematic stereotypes and the normalization of colonial assumptions of leadership. They find three key themes for Asian educators seeking leadership roles in education: (a) pressure to conform to whiteness to advance their careers, (b) accent and name discrimination, and (c) colonial ideologies that are normalized and embedded in leadership selection processes. Also, of scholarly significance in critical theoretical frameworks, they further develop Asian Crit theory to consider linguistic assumptions as a particular barrier facing Asian educators. Their research provides important considerations for addressing the crucially important concern in education of the lack of representation of non-white educational leaders across school settings. As school boards attempt to ensure divisional and school leadership that reflects the diversity of the students, understanding the barriers that are being experienced by specific cultural groups is exceedingly important in the recognition of different histories and experiences based on race, ethnicity and related colonial histories.

Stacey Wilson-Forsberg, Oliver Masakure, Rosemary Kimani-Dupuis and Suman Mondal provide a thoughtful consideration of the ways that schools create barriers for students in relation to post-secondary opportunities. Their article *Transition to Postsecondary Education of Youth with Refugee Backgrounds from the Horn of Africa in Ontario, Canada* responds to the questions: What are the post-secondary education (PSE) and career plans of youth with refugee backgrounds from the Horn of Africa? What school-level barriers do the youth encounter when preparing for PSE? And what strategies do they employ to attempt to overcome these barriers? Working from Latino/a/x Critical Race Theory, the authors employ a community cultural wealth framework to examine the assets that these students bring from their homes and communities to address systemic barriers in schools. Noting the large-scale resettlement in Canada of refugees from Eritrea, Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, they highlight the pressing need to better understand their educational experiences based in their regional roots in Africa and in relation to Black identities in schools. Their findings indicate barriers stemming from school-based assumptions about low academic aptitude, prioritizing English learning classes over academics, and an English dominant system that is difficult for families and students to navigate. Their findings also indicate the strength of the students within the opaqueness of the workings of educational systems. They find that all “the interviewed youth were able to conceptualize hope and optimism about their future. However, only

a few appeared to know where to get the information and guidance they needed to make that PSE pathway happen (p.643). Centring on the students' agency in this regard, the authors highlight forms of social capital the youth mobilize in pushing a counter narrative of "capability, agency, and resistance" (p. 653).

The final article in this issue examines educational policy responses in relation to the Covid pandemic. In their article *Educational Recovery in the Aftermath of the Pandemic: A Critical Analysis of Recovery Policies across Canada*, Louis Volante, Don A. Klinger and Camila Lara extend their previous examination of educational policy from what they refer to as the disruption phase from January 2020 to December 2021 to the recovery phase of January 2022 to December 2023. Highlighting observations from research revealing continued concerns on the pandemic's impact on "interpersonal skills, academic mindsets, perseverance and metacognitive strategies as well mental health and wellbeing" (p. 675) the authors examine recovery policies through a Triarchic model focused on academic, physical health and well-being, and mental health supports. Examining 46 provincial policy documents in the period identified, they found an uneven process where only Alberta and Manitoba actually addressed all three important dimensions in policy. The authors' "results highlight that k-12 educational policies have likely not been sufficiently resourced to address a number of challenges created by the pandemic" (p. 695) and for the most part policies did not address the circumstances of students that could be already considered disadvantaged within society and school systems. Of significant concern to the authors is the recognition that rising economic challenges will likely result in less funding into educational sectors where it is most needed.

We are excited to share this Autumn issue of CJE. As the academic year starts up once again, we find that this issue suggests ways educational systems can recognize the barriers they are enacting through questioning the entrenched normalized ways of knowing, being and doing that permeate their structures. This issue of CJE is poised to provide critical thought concerning problematic (re)productions of inequalities in educational systems, and generative thought to support educational scholars, leaders and practitioners in both repairing and reimagining educational systems and societies otherwise.

## References

- Andreotti, V. (2012). Education, knowledge and the righting of wrongs. *Other Education: The Journal of Educational Alternatives*, 1(1), 19-31.