

## **Expanding the Scope of Educational Policy in a Neoliberal Era: Politics, Socio-Economic Policies, and Media**

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# Editorial

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## **Expanding the Scope of Educational Policy in a Neoliberal Era: Politics, Socio-Economic Policies, and Media**

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Educational policy in Canada is commonly considered to be bounded by the concerns of schooling. Jean Anyon's (2005) influential analysis of inequitable educational outcomes in relation to economic policy and change drew needed attention to the embeddedness and complexity of educational policy. Anyon highlighted the need to forefront social (in)equities in relation to educational policy, and in doing so expanded the scope of educational policy to engage social and economic policy and its historical, social and political formation. The articles in this Autumn issue of the *Canadian Journal of Education* (CJE) each take up their analysis of critical educational issues in this spirit.

We are grateful to noted scholar Carl James for accepting our invitation to expand his invited 2023 Plenary Lecture at the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (CSSE) Conference held at York University at the Congress of the Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences (FHSS) for this issue of CJE. James' article *What did the multicultural policies of the last century promise that need to be re-imagined in today's DEDI post-secondary world?* responded to the CSSE conference theme of "Reckonings and Re-Imaginings." His article provides an important analysis of the limitations of decolonization, equity, diversity, and inclusion (DEDI) policies in higher education by first looking at the societal and historical context within which Canadian educational institutions are embedded. Highlighting media representation and Black and Indigenous-led social movements, James draws out the nature of structural barriers, with particular attention to Indigenous and Black experiences, that are deeply connected to

Canadian multiculturalism policy and narratives that serve to “promote silence on race, or that encourage race to be evaded, avoided, and/or ignored” (p. 512) His work suggests post-secondary institutions need to not only expand efforts to increase representation, but importantly to deal more directly with the white supremacist culture of the institutions that have upheld inequitable experiences for racialized faculty, institutional leaders, and students – despite decades of policy to promote equity and access. His timely article is well-positioned to influence current efforts in post-secondary to address DEDI requirements that struggle to be actualized.

In their article *Riding fences: Anticipatory governance, curriculum policy, and teacher subjectivity* authors Morris, Couture and Phelan critically analyze the ways K-12 curriculum policies in Alberta, British Columbia, and Ontario advance “narrowing conceptions of the future” that serve to govern curriculum and contain teacher subjectivity (p. 519). Through the metaphor of a fence, in the ways it seeks to “secure and order a terrain” and ultimately govern “movement and meaning” (p. 519), the authors note the role of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in influencing future-oriented educational policy globally. The authors contend that the OECD ultimately serves to influence the containment of the work and possibilities of teachers across regional contexts in Canada. Identifying the discursive productions of the future in each provincial curriculum, the authors raise concerns over the lack of emphasis on the present. They argue that these curricular imperatives problematically govern teachers and systems to focus on a constructed and imagined future, rather than provide opportunity to generatively and actively engage students, teachers, and systems with the inherent uncertainty of our current times.

Janzen and Heringer similarly take up the concerns of governance and subjectivity, but rather than focus on the teacher, the authors pay particular attention to the student. In their article *Who is the student? A critical analysis of neo-liberal reform legislation*, the authors engage in a Manitoba-based case study to illustrate the ways provincial legislation works to constitute student subjectivity reflective of neo-liberal ideology. The authors provide a critical discourse analysis of proposed legislation (Bill 64) as it relates to the normalization of discourses of austerity that serve to depoliticize government defunding. The authors illustrate the ways that neoliberal ideology influences legislation that produces students as “universal objects... void of social, political, and cultural contexts and influences” (p. 555), who become regulated through compliance mechanisms.

Their article reveals how neoliberal reforms advanced through provincial governments, both right and left wing, are normalized and pervasive in Canada (and elsewhere), and provides important examples of how these discourses have the potential to constrain the subjectivity of students and regulate their bodies.

Gus Riveros' article *The overreliance on portable classrooms in Ontario schools: New evidence for the study of austerity and disinvestment in Canadian public education* highlights the neoliberal austerity-driven policies in public education. In this article, Riveros shares his study investigating the use of portable classrooms in Ontario from 2010 to 2020. While most studies on the use of portables in Canada have been focused on the quality of teaching and learning and connections to school, this article examines the issue ideologically and politically. Analyzing data from the 27 largest school boards in Ontario, Riveros finds that portable classrooms are being used “as long-term solutions to address enrolment pressures in schools” which he finds is predominantly due to disinvestment in public education (p. 570). His study centres the issue of infrastructure planning as a critical concern for educational policy that is entangled in neoliberal political ideology.

Our final article in this issue also takes up the connection between politics and education in Ontario. In their article *Resentment and admiration: Public opinion toward teachers and public sector employees in Ontario*, Erl, McGregor, Lucas and Anderson engage public opinion data in Ontario to reveal connections between teacher perception and provincial voting. The authors examine attitudes towards teachers in comparison to others working in the public sector, and the connection of these attitudes to voter support for political parties. Their article reveals that attitudes towards teachers are more positive than to those working in other public sectors. These more positive attitudes were seen to relate to having personal relationships with teachers, as well as a favourable perception of workload and compensation. Of interest, is that attitudes of resentment and admiration towards teachers were found to be related to political party support – in particular attitudes of resentment were shown to predict support for the PC Party in Ontario. The authors argue that the data reveals that Ontario teachers are a “salient target of resentment in Ontario provincial politics” (p. 601). They note that this finding can have significant implications for educational policy enacted by the governing party, and could inform potential strategies of organizations supporting teachers in promoting their interests and those of their students.

We are excited to share this Autumn issue of CJE. As scholars, we too study the factors outside of schools that impact educational policy, practice, educators, and the experience of students – as well as their families and communities. Educational issues are often examined and researched in the context of schools in ways that isolate the political and societal context in which schools are immersed. The articles in this issue provide needed insight to contextualize university/school-based research and practice, especially in an era of neoliberalism. The articles provide timely and important support to researchers whose work is directed towards understanding long-standing (in)equities and mechanisms of control that are entangled in the work of educational institutions. This issue of CJE also suggest to us the need to more deeply consider the role of media as it relates to influencing discourses and related narratives that can serve to disrupt the prominent normalization of neoliberal agendas. In connecting schools and educational policy to socio-political policy and concerns, the articles in this issue of CJE highlight the complexity of educational concerns and provide opportunities for these concerns to be generatively understood and addressed.

## References

- Anyon, J. (2005). What ‘counts’ as educational policy? Notes toward a new paradigm. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75(1), 65-88.