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Editorial

‘Urgent Care’ Needed: Healing Colonial Harms and Racism for Education to Thrive

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Colonial harms and racism cause long-term injuries. Unfortunately, they occur and exist in Canadian schools and higher education institutions in multiple forms and in various degrees. They intensify in times of increased international conflict, as we have recently witnessed with the escalating violence and war in the Middle East. Although such regions are geographically distant, Canada, as either a site of further (related) violence or as a place of refuge, is inseparable from these conflicts. At the same time, we must be mindful of the perennial undercurrent of racism that has historically permeated Canadian schooling through its structures, norms, policies, practices, and curriculum. As such, the studies in this winter issue of CJE poignantly identify when, where, how, and which students and staff in Canadian schools experience injuries from racism and colonialism. In doing so, the authors remind us of the collective ideals of education, arguing that to advance along the path toward decolonial practices and humility, educational institutions need to create more inclusive ‘urgent care’ spaces that focus on healing colonial harms and racist aggressions.

The urgency to ‘heal’ the wounds of social and racial exclusion that children experience in the school system is captured in Soudeh Oladi’s study of Muslim mothers about their children’s experiences in Canadian schools. These children’s racial injuries happen on multiple fronts and involve multiple actors, including non-Muslim peers, teachers, and administrators. Oladi details specific incidences and types of racial aggressions and exclusion that these children and their mothers have experienced in the school system in relation to their race, religion, attire, and language. The study points to where and how

Muslim children's needs can be better addressed or served not only by the system but also by staff and peers in Canadian schools. This study is particularly timely given the ongoing war in the Middle East and its effect on Canadian schools.

Oladi's study resonates with how newly arrived refugee students require immediate and critical attention in their post-settlement process, especially in schools. Based on more than 30 studies, Max Antony-Newman and Sarfaroz Niyozov offer a meta-synthesis of the barriers to and facilitators of academic achievement and social inclusion of refugee students in Canadian and American K-12 schools. Their synthesis highlights the unique barriers, including economic poverty, language differences, and social and cultural exclusion, while also noting that refugee students are more likely to achieve academic success when their curriculum and learning materials are culturally relevant rather than standardized (i.e., designed for non-refugee students). In addition, teaching and supporting staff members' attitudes toward refugee students are important, and providing adequate resources to support them is also a must.

With Rhonda C. George's study's, this issue delves into a more deeply seated racism that operates within Canadian schools, focusing on the challenges of anti-Blackness. George examines the experiences of academically high-achieving Black high school students in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and delineates the ways these daily and cumulative experiences negatively affect their learning opportunities and outcomes. In particular, access to various enrichment programs and/or schools can be beyond the reach of Black students. The counternarratives of Black youth participants in George's study revealed some shared, and very poignant, patterns for how educational learning opportunities significantly differ between affluent white-dominant neighbourhood schools and low-income racialized neighbourhood schools. These disparities need to be addressed immediately and with urgency. Socially, too, Black students with multiple intersecting identities frequently face challenges in defining and/or defending who they are as these identities do not fit the dominant stereotypes others have of them. These negotiations also take place in differently designated racialized social spaces in school buildings. Indeed, much of this research resonates with the research by Yoon and her colleagues, which focuses on the inequities of school choice opportunities in Vancouver and Toronto, especially among students who live in racialized neighbourhoods and thus are likely to be racialized (see Yoon, 2017; Yoon et al., 2020; Yoon & Daniels, 2021).

The ‘urgent care’ perhaps needs to start with one of the most fundamental parts of Canadian schools – history textbooks. S. J. Adrienna Joyce and Ehaab D. Abdou argue that shifting away from current discourses, narratives, photographs, images, and associated captions that depict and reproduce white supremacy should be a first step in caring for racialized students. In particular, they point to how non-white or non-Western peoples and cultures are overtly or covertly portrayed as inferior or regressive, which contributes to reproducing stereotypical images of racialized peoples as less sophisticated or oriented towards manual labour. Noting the current activism of toppling colonial statues, the authors engage the metaphor of history textbooks as colonial statues. They argue that these textbooks need to more fully represent the fullness of non-Western countries and peoples and their contributions to disrupt the anti-Black racism manifest in Canadian classrooms. While racism is often attributed to a few individuals and their implicit biases or prejudices, Joyce and Abdou illustrate the ways that anti-Black racism is embedded in the normalized narratives of white supremacy and white heroism in these textbooks. Importantly, the authors note that students need to learn to be part of the shift in deconstructing and reconstituting the textbooks so that they can use their critical thinking skills to challenge dominant discourses outside their schools and classrooms.

Finally, with Lilach Marom’s piece, this issue encourages us to reflect on our practices as academics in higher education. Marom’s call to look at Canada’s higher education system through a critical lens, specifically, as a system in which equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization (EDID) are being negotiated rather than seamless/successful. Marom identifies three layers of relational spaces, where people are somewhat resistant to EDID work, are an ally or a performer, or are actually doing the work collaboratively under the weight of history and the power hierarchy. In these messy spaces, Marom shows how academics, students, staff, and administrators are trying to figure out what EDID means and what they can accomplish. Based on her research and her own engagement with EDID, Marom suggests that if EDID is to make Canadian higher education more inclusive and its institutions more equitable, we must show humility and generosity when conversing with each other, fully acknowledging our epistemic diversity and opposing views.

These studies suggest that educational institutions need to actively organize caring spaces, activities, and curriculum shifts – well beyond multicultural days or celebrations – in order to address and rectify cultural and structural barriers and norms that perpetuate

racism and colonialism in all its forms and degrees. Moreover, we need to do these things urgently. Further, it is important not to lose sight of the growing economic inequalities, as well as funding cuts to education and social programs in recent decades, which have placed greater financial constraints on individuals and the institutions that historically supported those who are most vulnerable. The capitalistic rationality (and neoliberal governmentality) underpinning inequalities in the current Canadian education system should not be overlooked. Educators must continue to demand adequate resources for equity, curriculum reforms, and anti-racism training in schools that can support the care and valuing of all of our children so they can thrive in Canada.

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