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Canada's Education System: Policies & Challenges During the COVID-19 Pandemic. An Interview With Dr. Charles Ungerleider

Saman Arfaie, Peter Glinos and Faraz Honarvar

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Article abstract

This work is a scholarly interview conducted with Dr. Charles Ungerleider on the effects of COVID-19 in Canada. The discussion explores the various aspects of the pandemic's impact on Canadian education, such as: the effects of school closures; Canada's lack of a federal ministry of education; the burnout faced by educators resulting from the sudden shift to online education; the obstacles in educating international students; the reduction of experiential learning in post-secondary schools; the media's portrayal and politicization of pandemic school closures; the forced integration of virtual learning technology; the disproportionately deleterious repercussions of the pandemic education on the marginalized; and the need for schools in creating social cohesion.

Canada's Education System: Policies & Challenges During the COVID-19 Pandemic. An Interview With Dr. Charles Ungerleider

Saman Arfaie
McGill University

Peter Glinos
Queen's University

Faraz Honarvar
Queen's University

Abstract

This work is a scholarly interview conducted with Dr. Charles Ungerleider on the effects of COVID-19 in Canada. The discussion explores the various aspects of the pandemic's impact on Canadian education, such as: the effects of school closures; Canada's lack of a federal ministry of education; the burnout faced by educators resulting from the sudden shift to online education; the obstacles in educating international students; the reduction of experiential learning in post-secondary schools; the media's portrayal and politicization of pandemic school closures; the forced integration of virtual learning technology; the disproportionately deleterious repercussions of the pandemic education on the marginalized; and the need for schools in creating social cohesion.

Dr. Charles Ungerleider is a professor emeritus of the Department of Educational Studies in the Faculty of Education of the University of British Columbia (UBC) and serves as the director of research and managing partner of Directions Evidence and Policy Research Group. He is the author of *Failing Our Kids: How We Are Ruining Our Public Schools* (2004) and has published numerous book chapters and peer-reviewed papers. He has taught about the principles of teaching, the sociology of education, the

social and organizational context of Canadian education, and educational governance and politics in Canada. Charles Ungerleider has previously served as the associate dean for teacher education in the Faculty of Education at UBC, deputy minister of education for the province of British Columbia, and director of research and knowledge mobilization for the Canadian Council on Learning. Presently, Charles Ungerleider has joined as a key Canadian member of the Worldwide Commission to Educate All Kids (Post-Pandemic). He regularly writes about the state of education in Canada on his blog (https://oneducationcanada.blogspot.com/).

Methodology

The methodology of this work follows an exploratory research interview. To start, the coauthors of this work surveyed the scholarly literature on COVID-19 in Canada and its relationship to education. This literature was then coded for patterns and themes. Questions were then constructed out of these themes and posed to the interviewee in a structured interview. The interviewee was given the questions ahead of time in order to allow for ample time to prepare thoughtful responses. To help contextualize the interview, the coauthors supplied additional annotations about the broader historical scope of the pandemic in Canada.

School Closures

We begin our discussion with the consequential topic of school closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Globally, countries adopted various policies to contain the pandemic within their respective regions, and school closures were implemented as one of the most common strategies.[1] Although few would have argued against school closures when little was known about the severity of the virus, it became clear several months into the pandemic that many were dissatisfied, frustrated, and anxious with the continuation of these closures.[2]

Chief amongst the public's worries was the fear that children were not receiving the quality education they deserved, falling behind in their studies and thereby their future.[3] A further look into the data would indicate that, statistically, those with a lower level of education have lower lifespans.[4] Moreover, the ongoing isolation students felt from not interacting and playing with other students could prove detrimental to students' physical and mental well-being.

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[1] "Education: From Disruption to Recovery," UNESCO, August 5, 2021, https://en.unesco.org /covid19/educationresponse#schoolclosures.

[2] Chris Herhalt, "CP24," *CP24*, February 24, 2021, https://www.cp24.com/news/students-report-more-anxiety-teachers-say-covid-19-safety-protocols-lacking-at-tdsb-survey-1.5321868.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Patrick M. Krueger et al., "Mortality Attributable to Low Levels of Education in the United States," *PLOS ONE* 10, no. 7 (August 2015): 2, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0131809.

The negative impacts of school closures affected marginalized populations the most, whether it be those with a lower socio-economic status or children with special needs.[5] Considerably, school closures contributed further to the widening equity gap when it came to a child's education, resulting in a bleaker future for many.

This conversation is devoted to the dilemma of navigating through a pandemic while ensuring continuous education for Canadian students. Which policies would have worked best? Should the schools have remained open all along? Or should public safety have taken precedence? Granted that COVID-19 will surely not be the last pandemic governments will have to deal with, a discourse pertaining to school closures is essential in making sound policy decisions in the future.

PG: **Dr. Ungerleider, as you know, school closures have been one of the controversial issues here in Canada.[6] On the one hand, there is a desire to stop the spread of the virus and on the other this skepticism towards the efficacy of these measures,[7] and the toll that is going to have on students.[8] In September 2020, B.C. announced that it would become the first province to reopen elementary and high schools on a part-time basis by accommodating smaller class sizes.[9] This decision received a mixed response from the public and student families. In retrospect, and after eight months, do you think the rationale behind the decision was sound?**

CU: I do. Although this was initially unpopular with teachers and some parents, parents [who were] frontline workers welcomed it.[10] Many parents whose children have disabilities received one-on-one or small group support. They welcome that, because

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[5] Rishika Wadehra, "Ontario's Plan for Education Hurts the Most Marginalized Students," The Monitor, June 25, 2021, https://monitormag.ca/articles/ontarios-plan-for-education-hurts-the-most-marginalized-students.

[6] Anthony Furey, "Ontario Parent Started a Legal Challenge against School Closures" (Toronto Sun, April 12, 2021), https://torontosun.com/news/provincial/this-ontario-parent-started-a-legal-challenge-against-school-closures;CBC News, "Peel Region SHUTTERS Schools for 2 Weeks, Moving to Remote Learning Amid Surge IN COVID-19 Cases | CBC News," CBC News (CBC/Radio Canada, April 6, 2021), https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/peel-region-closes-schools-covid-19-1.5975923.

[7] Michael Silverman, Robert Sibbald, and Saverio Stranges, "Ethics of Covid-19-Related School Closures," Canadian Journal of Public Health 111, no. 4 (2020): pp. 462-465, https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-020-00396-1, Page 463; "Coronavirus: Ontario's Top Doctor Defends Messaging, Says Not a Lot of Transmission in SCHOOLS: Watch News Videos Online," Global News, October 9, 2020, https://globalnews.ca/video/7389235/coronavirus-ontarios-top-doctor-defends-messaging-says-not-a-lot-of-transmission-in-schools.

[8] Andy Eyles, Stephen Gibbons, and Piero Monteburo, "Covid-19 School Shutdowns: What Will They Do to Our Children's Education?" Centre for Economic Performance, 2020, 2-3.

[9] Michelle Ghoussoub, "Students Are Heading Back to Class in September. Here's What That Could Look Like," CBC News (CBC/Radio Canada, August 18, 2020), https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/students-are-heading-back-to-class-in-september-here-s-what-that-could-look-like-1.5669096.

[10] Rumneek Johal, "Ministry of Education Responds to Petition against Reopening BC Schools," Ministry of Education responds to petition against reopening BC schools (Daily Hive, May 19, 2020), https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/ministry-of-education-responds-petition.

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they found it difficult to cope with the challenges their students face daily. They need that expertise and relief. Parents of youngsters for whom English was not a first language welcomed it because it meant that they h5ad the opportunity to practice English daily. I do know in some places where they closed schools, ELL students, in fact, regressed. I was talking to a woman, and she was telling me she was an intercultural worker in a major school board in Canada. And she was saying that in their jurisdiction, because schools have been closed, parents were really worried about their newcomer kids, whose English was improving on a regular basis. And then, because of the gap in schooling, their English regressed. They [resorted to] their home language because they lost their English practice routine.

So, I think all things considered, in B.C., keeping schools open worked. I believe it was a good (but difficult) decision. If you recall, British Columbia did a trial run in June 2020 about reopening, and they did open schools in May and June, to see how things would go before opening, again in September.[11] This approach was clever to see how things would work out and, overall, a good call.

Federal Department

Our attention now focuses on Canada's lack of a federal department of education and how such a department could have guided Canada's decentralized education system during the pandemic. Constitutionally speaking, education lies within the jurisdiction of the provinces, enabling each to legislate their own policies in accordance with Section 93 of the 1867 British North America Act.[12] While this allows provinces to tailor a custom set of policies for their students, the lack of homogeneity could lead to less efficiency, dubious decision-making, and confusion, especially in the middle of a pandemic.

Historically, the establishment of a federal ministry of education has been a point of debate within the House of Commons. After a careful study of the debate at the national level, researcher Lorna R. Mclean concluded:

> Parliamentary members and educational and public associations relied heavily on notions of patriotism, progress, and nationalism to legitimise claims for national educational objectives, while opponents frequently cited constitutional, cultural, and regional differences in rebutting their arguments.[13]

On the one hand, proponents cite the need to "Canadianize" members of society to manufacture social cohesion, whilst on the other hand opponents—particularly Quebeckers—have cited the need to preserve their cultural identities.[14]

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[11] Justine Hunter, "B.C. Schools to Reopen in June on Part-Time, Optional Basis," The Globe and Mail, May 16, 2020, https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-bc-schools-to-reopen-in-june-on-part-time-optional-basis/.

[12] Ki Su Kim (St. John's, September 30, 1991).

[13] Lorna R. McLean, "Education, Identity, and Citizenship in Early Modern Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2007): 11, https://doi.org/10.3138/jcs.41.1.5.

[14] Ibid. 6, 10-11

Here, our interviewees discuss why and how a Canadian federal department of education can be useful. They also elaborate on how to avoid some of the pitfalls of having such a Federal department.

SA: Dr. Ungerleider, prior to the pandemic, you advocated for a federal department of education.[15] What impact do you believe such a department would have had on our ability to navigate through the crisis?

CU: Well, long before the present crisis, I argued that there needs to be more cooperation among jurisdictions in Canada, and there should be a federal department of education.[16] I know why there is not one. It is largely because education is associated with nation-building, and that is, from the point of view of Quebecois, anathema. This is because they are worried that the nation that will get built is essentially the English nation and not the French nation.[17] That is the reason why we have no federal department of education. We do have a federal department of health, and it is covered in the same part of the BNA Act as education, so we could have a federal department of education.[18] If we had a federal department, what could it do? Well, it could conduct research that would be beneficial across the country and strengthen institutions. For example, it could use its leadership position to convene meetings and groups, do analyses of how we can strengthen the system and make transitions from one jurisdiction to another more seamless for students.

Now, the government of Canada is doing that, from a labor mobility standpoint, but is not doing it from an educational standpoint. And to be honest, the government of Canada does meddle in education—I use the word meddle because that is from the point of view of the provinces; it is not my point of view—and the provinces welcome it when it works to their advantage. The Official Languages and Education Act, for example, and the funds for that, comes to the provinces [from the Federal government]. It is filtered through the Council of Ministers of Education Canada before it gets to the provinces, but give me a break![19] It is federal money in education and welcomed by the provinces when it comes. I think we must get over this division. I do think we have to give reassurance to Quebec that what develops shall not engulf them and anglicize their culture, but we need a body that coordinates education across the country. [. . .] We

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[15] Charles S. Ungerleider, *Failing Our Kids: How We Are Ruining Our Public Schools* (Brantford,, Ont.: Resource Services Library, 2007): 277-283.

[16] Ibid. 277-283

[17] Lorna R. McLean, "Education, Identity, and Citizenship in Early Modern Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 41, no. 1 (2007): 11, https://doi.org/10.3138/jcs.41.1.5.

[18] By the "BNA Act," Dr. Ungerleider is referring to the British North American which is a foundational piece of legislation leading to the establishment of modern Canada.

[19] The government's Action Plan for Official Languages-2018-2023 specifically mentions investing 31.29 billion dollars in the "recruitment of teachers for French immersion schools." Canadian Heritage, "Government of Canada," Action Plan for Official Languages – 2018-2023: Investing in Our Future - Canada.ca (Gouvernement du Canada, April 20, 2018), https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/official-languages-bilingualism/official-languages-action-plan/2018-2023.html.

would not have a post-secondary education system in Canada if it was not for the government of Canada. It would be—pretty much—completely private. Until [the federal government] got into the game, in the 50s and 60s, you had institutions going off in all different directions, and they would not have fared as well today, because of the support, financial support that they received from the government of Canada.[20]

School Culture

In this section, we move from the macrocosm to the microcosm of education. Schools are more than institutions of learning; they are a constitutive fiber of our social fabric. The educational theorist, Professor Urie Bronfenbrenner, describes school culture as a "mesosystem:" an ecosystem of mutual support between the school and smaller institutions, like the family. He hypothesized:

> The developmental potential of a setting is increased as a function of the number of supportive links existing between that setting and other settings (such as home and family). Thus, the least favorable condition for development is one in which supplementary links are either unsupported or completely absent when the mesosystem is weakly linked. **[21]**

In other words, this mesosystem between teachers, students, and families creates an environment that fosters student learning. [22] In contrast, the disintegration of this system, i.e. the severing of those supportive relationships, isolates students who rely on this network.

In the effort to fight the spread of COVID-19, provinces across Canada initiated a policy of school closures and transitioned to online learning. This physical distancing strained the network between educators, students, and their families, described by Bronfenbrenner. For example, before the pandemic, one of the largest groups reporting on suspected cases of child abuse and neglect were school personnel.[23] Meanwhile, school closures over the course of the pandemic have been correlated with decreases in reporting, indicating that a pillar of child abuse prevention was jeopardized by the closing of schools.[24]

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[20] According to Statistics Canada, "Government funding is the largest source or revenue" for universities and degree-granting colleges.

[21] Urie Bronfenbrenner, in The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981), 209-216.

[22] Sue Roffey, "Emotional Literacy and the Ecology of Wellbeing," Educational and Child Psychology 25, no. 2 (2008): pp. 29-39, 30; B. K. Redquest et al., "Exploring the Experiences of Siblings of Adults With Intellectual/Developmental DISABILITIES during THE COVID-19 Pandemic," Journal of Intellectual Disability Research 65, no. 1 (2020): 7, https://doi.org/10.1111/jir.12793.

[23] Barbara Fallon et al., "Ontario Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect - 2018" (Toronto, ON: Child Welfare Research Portal, 2020), 29, https://cwrp.ca/sites/default/files/publications/Ontario%20Incidence%20Study%20of%20Reported%20Child%20Abuse%20and%20Neglect%202018.pdf.

[24] E. Jason Baron, Ezra G. Goldstein, and Cullen Wallace, "Suffering in Silence: How Covid-19 School Closures Inhibit the Reporting of Child Maltreatment," *SSRN Electronic Journal* (2020): 8-9, https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3601399.

Dr. Ungerleider and the authors of this paper discuss consequences of this transition in terms of the effect it has had on Canadian students, particularly at-risk students who benefited from the social programs nested within the education system.

FH: Moving on from the macrocosm to the microcosm of education, the educational theorist, Urie Bronfenbrenner, describes school culture as an educational ecosystem. Teachers, students, and their families are nested in the mutual support they provide to one another. COVID-19 has exerted a great deal of pressure on this symbiotic system of mutual support. In your experience as a scholar and as a parent, can you please lend some insights about the importance of this support system?

CU: Well, the support system has been instrumental in holding things together during COVID, but I find it interesting you quoted Bronfenbrenner. Long before Urie Bronfenbrenner's discussion of the ecological approach, Emile Durkheim talked about organic and mechanical solidarity.[25] You also had Ferdinand Tönnies—German sociologist—talking about nuances between communities and societies.[26] Both were making distinctions between community and society. In communities, there are close relationships—people know one another on a face-to-face basis—and bonds are much stronger than they are in societies where people have more anonymity, i.e., they do not know each other, live at a greater social distance from one another. This is the longstanding notion that Bronfenbrenner was building on.[27]

Elementary schools are weathering the storm of COVID slightly better than secondary schools for exactly that reason. Elementary schools are smaller, more closely knit, and people share more commonalities with one another than that of secondary schools. It is easier for smaller schools and communities to mobilize resources than it is for a school in a larger area. [They do this] by using their resources prudently and being very resourceful themselves. I read about numerous elementary schools that put together food baskets and delivered them to the parents of the kids in their school. Then you have something like the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). They provide a million meals a day and have continued doing so throughout COVID.[28] That is quite an amazing accomplishment. Pre-COVID, many Canadian

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[25] Emile Durkheim, "Mechanical Solidarity, or Solidarity by Similarities," in *Division of Labour in Society* (Macmillan, 1984), 31, 68-69; Sister Mechtraud , "Durkheim's Concept of Solidarity," *Philippine Sociological Review* 3, no. 3 (1995): 24, https://doi.org/https://www.jstor.org/stable/41853340.

[26] "Thus many differences between [community and society] become apparent. In the most universal sense we could speak of a Community that is inclusive of all mankind, such as the Church claims to be. But ordinary human 'Society' we understand simply as individuals living alongside but independently of one another." Tönnies Ferdinand and Harris José, "Book One: A General Classification of Key Ideas," in *Community and Civil Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 18-20.

[27] Urie Bronfenbrenner, in *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1981).

[28] "Almost a Year into The Pandemic, LAUSD Says It Has Served 100 MILLION Grab-and-Go Meals," NBC Los Angeles (NBC Southern California, February 1, 2021), https://www.nbclosangeles.com

schools provided breakfast programs, lunch for kids, and appropriate clothing for cold climates.[29] This has continued during COVID even more so.

Let us return to the provision of breakfast programs, lunch programs, and food baskets. In a country as wealthy as Canada, this should not happen. What I am saying is that people should have better standards of living than they do now. They should not be living in poverty. They should not need somebody to deliver a food basket. If we had a higher minimum wage, better housing, and equal pay for equal value, we would then have fewer vulnerable children whose conditions were exacerbated because of something catastrophic. These would be a potent social policy response to prevent or reduce the vulnerability of children in schools.

Principal And Teacher Burnout

Competent school principals and teachers have a direct impact on student success. Principals have the vital role of ensuring their school is meeting the overall standard of education, and teachers search for and conduct meaningful educational experiences that are conducive to student learning.

Pre-pandemic literature indicates that Canadian principals and vice principals were at serious risk in terms of their well-being.[30] This is part of a larger international trend of principals experiencing greater stress due to increased responsibilities, workload, and frustrations with the school system. Moreover, during the pandemic, principals had to keep pace with ongoing developments, connect with government support services, report Child Welfare concerns, and ensure safe learning environments.[31]

For teachers, a landmark study published in 2016 by Maslach and Leite and their findings noted that exhaustion, cynicism, and perceived lack of accomplishment are the three progressive stages of teacher burnout.[32] Building on this idea, a more recent study focused on teachers working during the first wave of the pandemic. The findings indicated increases in exhaustion and cynicism, but also an increased sense of

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/news/coronavirus/coronavirus-resources/pandemic-coronavirus-covid-19-lausd-grab-go-meals-students-schools/2515540/.

[29] *COVID-19 Forces Cuts to School Meal Programs across Canada*, *YouTube* (CBC News, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XY00WSoPggA.

[30] Fei Wang, Katina Pollock, and David Cameron Hauseman, "Ontario Principles and Vice Principal's Well-Being and Coping Strategies in the Context of Work Intensification," in *Perspectives on Flourishing in Schools* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, an imprint of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2018): 287-290.

[31] *Jason* Marshall, Darcia Roache, and Rasheda Moody Marshall, "Crisis Leadership: A Critical Examination of Educational Leadership in Higher Education in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic.," *Journal of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management* 48, no. 3 (2020): 32; Katina Pollock, "School Leaders' Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Two-Pronged Approach," *Journal of the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management* 48, no. 3 (2020): 39-41.

[32] Christina Maslach and Michael P. Leiter, "Understanding the Burnout Experience: Recent Research and Its Implications for Psychiatry," *World Psychiatry* 15, no. 2 (2016): 103, https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.20311; David D'Layne West, "An Analysis of Principal Burnout and Job-Person Fit AMONG Elementary, Middle, and High School Principals in Alabama" (dissertation, Liberty University, 2018): 42.

teacher's accomplishment. This last factor may have been preventing burnout.[33] As the pandemic progressed, however, more concerns were voiced surrounding teacher burnout.[34]

This section asks Dr. Ungerleider how our education system can ensure principals and teachers do not burnout amidst their newly added roles in the middle of a global pandemic.

PG: With your extensive engagement and academic expertise in school leadership, we are interested if you could please comment on the principals' ability to keep pace with the ongoing pandemic developments.

CU: Being a school principal is a tough job, second only to teaching. Principals provide an important connection between students, school staff, parents, and superordinate bodies like school boards and sometimes ministries of education. They are often the link between the school and community organizations for the support of youngsters. These include [the Ministry of Children and Youth Services], social service agencies, people who are responsible for Crown wards, and a whole host of community connections depending upon the school and the community. Therefore, being a principal is not a position you should accept if you cannot handle multiple tasks and the anxieties that come with them. COVID certainly exacerbated those anxieties.[35] School principals played the pivotal role in a school board for ensuring whatever plan the board had authorized. They were the person responsible for carrying it out, not only with respect to instruction, but confirming that the custodial staff were attending to the safety factors. If they could keep the windows open, if they happened to have a school where the ventilation was poor, all those responsibilities rested on the shoulders of the principals. When I think about this, and this has been a theme in my thinking, I hope school boards and senior staff identify the lessons learned from handling the pandemic.

SA: Do you think concerns surrounding teacher burnout are justified? What factors do you think might increase its occurrence?

CU: Well, it would be presumptuous of me to say that the teachers' concerns about the conditions they find themselves in are not valid, or that they are real concerns only because teachers live with them day-by-day. I am not in their shoes, so I think there is

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[33] Laura Sokal, Lesley Eblie Trudel, and Jeff Babb, "Canadian Teachers' Attitudes toward Change, Efficacy, and Burnout during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *International Journal of Educational Research Open* 1 (2020), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2020.100016.

[34] Inori Roy, "The Epidemic of Teacher Burnout," The Walrus, December 14, 2020, https://thewalrus .ca/the-epidemic-of-teacher-burnout/.

[35] Annette Rosemarie Walker, "The Impact of Principals' Work on Their Well-Being," *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, July 29, 2019, pp. 57-63, 59; Sabre Cherkowski, Benjamin Kutsyuruba, and Keith Walker, "Positive Leadership: Animating Purpose, Presence, Passion and Play for Flourishing in Schools," *Journal of Educational Administration* 58, no. 4 (2020): 403, https://doi.org/10.1108/jea-04-2019-0076.

legitimacy to these concerns. Was there some politics associated with that? Of course, there was. But mainly it was legitimate concerns about the welfare of youngsters, their own welfare, how to cope with kids—with some doing blended learning, and others doing non-blended learning—things they had never been asked to do in the past. Again, COVID exacerbates the conditions under which teachers face challenges each day.[36]

What conditions will help prevent teacher burnout? During COVID, providing safer conditions under which teachers were working was a big factor. We saw the tension begin to diminish when teachers began receiving vaccines. A huge burden was placed on teachers to cope with online or blended learning. If there had been better planning in advance of COVID, that might have been more manageable. If one wants to enable teachers to do a better job, improve conditions for kids, reduce burnout, then it is best to reduce the teachers contact time with students from what it is to about 80%, and provide them the remaining 20% to work with their colleagues and for marking, planning, etc.[37] These conditions would drastically improve working conditions and reduce such burdens. However, that is expensive because by saying that, I just raised the cost of teacher salaries by essentially 20%. One of the places where we have seen improvement for teachers is in union or employer-provided employee-assistance programs. They are now more sophisticated than they were 20-25 years ago and are better supporting teachers who are experiencing the kind of stressors described earlier, and helping them overcome them, whether it is external—i.e. COVID—or their home conditions—i.e. role conflict as a teacher who is also a parent. So, those are some of the ways that we can diminish burnout.

International Students

A demographic that was heavily impacted by the global pandemic was the international student community. Many students who were scheduled to arrive in Canada before the school start date had to delay their arrival indefinitely due to entrance restrictions into the country. Moreover, since the cost of studying abroad is expensive, fueled by the instability that arose in the income of many families, the number of international students coming to Canada substantially decreased.[38]

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[36] Orla Doyle,"Covid-19: Exacerbating Educational Inequalities?," PublicPolicy.ie (Public Policy, Independent Thinking on Public Decisions , April 9, 2020): 3, https://publicpolicy.ie/papers/covid-19-exacerbating-educational-inequalities/.

[37] Dr. Ungerleider's words reflect the findings of John Hattie and his team. "Collective Teacher Efficacy" was ranked first in reforms for improving student achievement.

John Hattie, *Hattie Ranking: 252 Influences And Effect Sizes Related To Student Achievement* (Visible Learning , 2018), https://visible-learning.org/hattie-ranking-influences-effect-sizes-learning-achievement/.

[38] "Financial Information of Universities for the 2018/2019 School Year and Projected Impact of Covid–19 for 2020/2021," Statistics Canada (Government of Canada, October 8, 2020), https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/201008/dq201008b-eng.htm.

International students play a key role in funding the Canadian education system.[39] For instance, we have reports from 2018/2019 claiming more than a third of post-secondary education tuition, from 147 public universities, comes from international student fees.[40] Similarly, we have mentioned some public schoolboards in B.C., which generates vital revenue by accepting international students. For example, Coquitlam receives 10% of its budget from international fees.[41]

In terms of GDP contributions to Canada, in 2018, the combined direct and indirect contribution of all student expenditures was $19.7 billion, when taking into account the sectors directly impacted by international student spending as well as the many other industries in the supply chain of those impacted. Concerning employment, more than 218,577 jobs were tied to international students.[42]

It is during a state of emergency, such as a pandemic, whereby heavily relying on international student fees as an income becomes questionable. In this section, we converse about the dangers of relying on this type of income, and what, if anything, can be done about it.

FA: In the past, you stressed that incomes from international students are unstable sources of revenue.[43] In what ways has the pandemic affected these funds? And how will this impact international students, domestic learners, and the Canadian economy at home?

CU: Post-secondary and K-12 institutions have taken a major hit because the international fee-paying students are no longer paying.[44] They are no longer here to pay school boards, homestays, apartments, etc.[45] As a result, there was a loss to the economy in the communities, such as Coquitlam, West Vancouver, Vancouver, Surrey, etc.[46] Prior to COVID, a large number of school boards throughout Canada decided that

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[39] David Firang, "The Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on International Students in Canada," *International Social Work* 63, no. 6 (2020): 820, https://doi.org/10.1177/0020872820940030.

[40] "Financial Information of Universities for the 2018/2019 School Year and Projected Impact of Covid–19 for 2020/2021," Statistics Canada (Government of Canada, October 8, 2020), https://www150 .statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/201008/dq201008b-eng.htm.

[41] Charles Ungerleider, "On Education Canada," *On Education Canada* (blog) (Charles Ungerleider, Professor Emeritus, The University of British Columbia, April 22, 2020), https://oneducationcanada .blogspot.com/2020/04/international-education-before-and.html.

[42] (Ottawa, December 15, 2020).

[43] Charles Ungerleider, "On Education Canada," *On Education Canada* (blog) (Charles Ungerleider, Professor Emeritus, The University of British Columbia, April 22, 2020), https://oneducationcanada .blogspot.com/2020/04/international-education-before-and.html.

[44] Vicky Fragasso-Marquis, "Canadian Universities Could Lose Millions, Possibly Billions Due to Coronavirus: StatCan "(Global News, October 11, 2020), https://globalnews.ca/news/7392195 /coronavirus-universities-statistics-canada/.

[45] Sadiya Ansari, "Can Canada's Universities Survive COVID?," Macleans.ca, September 18, 2020, https://www.macleans.ca/education/can-canadas-universities-survive-covid/.

[46] Joel Ballard, "International Students Once Pumped Millions into B.C. Schools, but Revenue Has Collapsed during Pandemic | CBC News," CBC news (CBC/Radio Canada, April 21, 2021),

they would primarily bring in international students for the purpose of generating revenue.[47] Sure, adding international students adds to the mix of diversity, but the financial revenues provided to these institutions is a big factor for school boards. I think it was imprudent because school boards do not manage risks well. They do not assess the risk of what would happen, say if they lost 17% of revenue—as was the case with the operating budget in West Vancouver, British Columbia—that came from international fee-paying students.

In truth, there is never enough money, so the mentality of post-secondary systems and K-12 school boards is to calculate how much money each student brings into their system. Fewer international students translate to having less resources.

Post-Secondary Students

The transition to online education added new twists and turns for post-secondary students. The closure of colleges and academic institutions across Canada translated to a delay in the delivery of some classes, or complete cancellation in the cases of others. One of the struggles students faced, in addition to the difficulties associated with the transition to an online medium, stemmed from an uncertainty about their future prospects and the potential financial losses. This section is dedicated to these complications and how the course of the pandemic influenced them.

In Canada, those who attain higher education tend to have higher earnings and greater household economic security.[48] While the sole purpose of obtaining an education is not solely future financial prosperity, the pandemic's disruption of post-secondary education threatened the social mobility of prospective students.

PG: Statistics Canada predicted that by 2025, 2020 post-secondary graduates could lose up to $25,000.[49] What, if any, were the other challenges that post-secondary students in Canada have been facing during the pandemic?

CU: Well, I think both K-12 students and post-secondary students have faced the challenge of online learning. I call it a failed experiment and an unmitigated disaster for most students. If you are not a student with discipline, online learning is very, very difficult, if not impossible. Many will suffer. Although some, such as my colleague, Robert Bernard of Concordia, would argue that the quality of instruction is equal. He

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https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/international-students-once-pumped-millions-into-b-c-schools-but-revenue-collapsed-during-pandemic-1.5995324.

[47] Larry Kuehn and Jolanta Vaitekonytè, "International Students-Tuition Revenue-and INEQUITY-Continues to Grow" (British Columbia Teacher's Federation , January 2019), https://bctf.ca/publications/ResearchReports.aspx?id=50830.

[48] "Income Composition in Canada," Income Composition in Canada § (2011): 9.

[49] Marc Frenette, Derek Messacar, and Tomasz Handler, "To What Extent Might COVID-19 Affect the Earnings of the Class of 2020?," Statistics Canada (Government of Canada, July 28, 2020), https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00063-eng.htm.

also argues that the quality of online learning is equivalent to face-to-face learning.[50] I do not think it works well during COVID. There will be consequences of this massive shift to online learning for both post-secondary and K-12 students, disrupting not only the learning sphere, but also the social dimension of learning and student mental health. For those post-secondary students who are enrolled in a hands-on program, where there is a practicum, they are going to be hit much harder because they miss face-to-face practice under the guidance of a mentor compared to students in arts and sciences without practicums.

SA: In addition, post-secondary students in practicum-focused programs are facing obstacles in acquiring the hands-on learning they need, thereby requiring special attention.[51] Considering that a primary aim of the education system is preparation of students for the workforce, do these findings weaken the value of the higher education system?

CU: I do not think so. It will not weaken the value of post-secondary education. Although, I think that many students will pay a price for it because they have not had the "full-meal deal" during [their] preparation, it will be harder for them. In a competitive economic market—if I were reviewing transcripts and documents for employing teachers—and I have an applicant that had a face-to-face practicum versus another with an online practicum, with all other areas being equal, I would choose the former applicant. My colleague at UBC, Alison Taylor, studies apprenticeship and its impact. I am sure she will be writing about the dynamic changes, and how that carries into the workforce.

Media

Media's role cannot be understated enough as a vessel for disseminating science to society at large. Research shows that the media played a large part in shaping the public's perception and attitude towards the pandemic, which in turn motivated their psychological and behavioural responses.[52] For instance, depending on the

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[50] Robert M. Bernard et al., "How Does Distance Education Compare with Classroom Instruction? A Meta-Analysis of the Empirical Literature," *Review of Educational Research* 74, no. 3 (2004): 404-405, https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543074003379.

[51] April Doreleyers and Tamara Knighton, "COVID-19 Pandemic: Academic Impacts on Postsecondary Students in Canada," COVID-19 Pandemic: Academic impacts on postsecondary students in Canada (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, May 14, 2020), https://www150.statcan .gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00015-eng.htm; Mary Ellen Goldhamer et al., "Can Covid Catalyze an Educational Transformation? Competency-Based Advancement in a Crisis," *New England Journal of Medicine* 383, no. 11 (October 2020): 1004-1005, https://doi.org/10.1056/nejmp2018570, Sir John Daniel, "Education and the COVID-19 Pandemic," *PROSPECTS* 49, no. 1-2 (2020): 92-93, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11125-020-09464-3.

[52] Mélissa Généreux et al., "Communication Strategies and Media Discourses in the Age of COVID-19: An Urgent Need for Action," *Health Promotion International* 36, no. 4 (September 2020): 1180, https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaa136.

presentation of what is portrayed as a significant threat, the public's widespread fear of infections was influenced by the interaction of media with social factors.[53] In turn, this triggers our subconscious memories and the psychological fear of potential threats posed by the pandemic.[54] Moreover, the media shapes the social construction of risks.[55] If unregulated, the consequences of this social communication failure are stark: covert racism against people of East Asian origin through contact avoidance, widened knowledge gap amongst citizens, and increased prevalence of anti-vaxxer movements.[56]

Social media adds another layer of complexity to this discourse.[57] One of the perils associated with social media usage concerns infodemics, where amongst the plenitude of information, there would be a mixture of rumors, misinformation, and myths. Infodemics negatively affect the public's perception on topics ranging from mechanisms of viral transmission and vaccination to the body's immune response. Overall, these contribute to the fragmentation of the social response.[58] Moreover, disinfodemics cause the population to become disempowered through losing access to trustworthy sources, thereby thwarting informed decision-making along the way. In the words of WHO Director General, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, "We are not just fighting an epidemic; we are fighting an infodemic."[59] As a result, the responsibility of public health authorities and their interplay with the media becomes more accentuated concerning the discussion and handling of COVID-19 information.

FH: In your previous work, you write "governments and media frame the information they present in accordance with their ideological inclinations, particularly regarding education."[60] You then go on to speak about the politician's

[53] G. Pappas et al., "Psychosocial Consequences of Infectious Diseases," *Clinical Microbiology and Infection* 15, no. 8 (2009): pp. 743-747, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-0691.2009.02947.x, 774.

[54] Ibid., 746.

[55] Mélissa Généreux et al., "Communication Strategies and Media Discourses in the Age of COVID-19: An Urgent Need for Action," *Health Promotion International* 36, no. 4 (September 2020): 1180, https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaa136.

[56] Helier Cheung, Zhaoyin Feng , and Boer Deng, "Coronavirus: What Attacks on Asians Reveal About American Identity," BBC News (BBC, May 27, 2020), https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-52714804; Staci L Benoit and Rachel F. Mauldin, "The 'Anti-Vax' Movement: A Quantitative Report on Vaccine Beliefs and Knowledge Across Social Media," *BMC Public Health* 21, no. 1 (2021): 2, https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-12114-8.

[57] Mélissa Généreux et al., "Communication Strategies and Media Discourses in the Age of COVID-19: An Urgent Need for Action," *Health Promotion International* 36, no. 4 (September 2020): pp. 1179, https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daaa136.

[58] Matteo Cinelli et al., "The COVID-19 Social Media Infodemic," *Scientific Reports* 10, no. 1 (June 2020), https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-020-73510-5, 1.

[59] John Zarocostas, "How to Fight an Infodemic," *The Lancet* 395, no. 10225 (2020): 676, https://doi.org/10.1016/s0140-6736(20)30461-x.

[60] Charles Ungerleider, "Government, Neo-Liberal Media, and Education in Canada," *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue Canadienne De L'éducation* 29, no. 1 (January 2006): 71, https://doi.org/10.2307/20054147.

and media's ability to "mine the vein of anxiety [regarding] education."[61] As someone who has researched the intersection between media, politics, and education: what is your take on how the media have been portraying education during the pandemic? Also, how do you see this influencing the politics surrounding education?

CU: That is a complex question. The vehicle the media uses to present any story is through conflict: the Manichaean struggle between essentially Good and Evil. Can we overcome inflation? Can we overcome COVID-19? Here, the villain is COVID-19 and we are the heroes in the story. This is done to maintain the reader's interest. For example, consider an editorial headline from the Miami Herald: "Don't let COVID kids, who are already on shaky ground, fall further behind in school."[62] Media—and especially media aimed at audiences in the United States—have become much more polarized and niche-oriented.[63] And as a result of tweets, Facebook stories, amongst others, the differences the media has drawn out in their narrative of conflict have proliferated.[64] To the extent that conflict creates anxiety, social media has helped to exacerbate that conflict, but that conflict has always been there.

　　Governments respond to the media. Every morning, in almost every jurisdiction that I am familiar with, the previous day's media releases are aggregated and circulated. From those media, briefing notes are prepared for the Minister or other political figure. The shape of those notes for ministers is influenced by the government's current policy stance on whatever that issue is. That set of notes will not only influence what politicians say to the media, but how the media portrays what governments say will influence policy. During COVID, smart governments allowed health experts and health officers to take the lead. I say smart for a couple of reasons: one is that most politicians do not have the expertise to speak to most COVID-related issues, except when a question is about the government's response to the issue. The second reason is that allowing the experts to respond provides some distance between the politician, the audience, and the issue (in this case COVID). It takes the edge off things to have that buffer. We have seen some jurisdictions do it more successfully than others. Where I live, in British Columbia, people talk about how Dr. Bonnie Henry is a rock star because as a medical health

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[61] Ibid, Page 73.

[62] "Editorial: Don't Let 'COVID Kids,' Already on a Shaky Ground, Fall Further behind in School" (The Miami Herald, May 10, 2021), https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/us/editorial-dont-let-covid-kids-already-on-a-shaky-ground-fall-further-behind-in-school/ar-BB1gyPbr.

[63] Anne E Wilson, Victoria A Parker, and Matthew Feinberg, "Polarization in the Contemporary Political and Media Landscape," *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 34 (2020): 227, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2020.07.005.

[64] Christopher A. Bail et al., "Exposure to Opposing Views on Social Media Can Increase Political Polarization," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 115, no. 37 (2018): 9216-9217, https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1804840115.

officer she is relaxed and reassuring when speaking to the media.[65] Smart governments do that and stay out of the way as much as they can.

Technology

The COVID-19 pandemic has occurred at a time when a large part of the world is equipped with high-speed internet access. Soon after the pandemic began, the virtual world became the modus operandi to help maintain the population's duties, rhythms, and sense of routine. Uneven access to online technologies translates to not every student having access to the necessary equipment to resume their studies from home. Furthermore, the isolation that would ensue from online learning as opposed to being physically surrounded by other peers proved harmful to the mental health of many students.[66] Compounding these challenges, it was unclear how effective online learning would be in relation to that of in-person learning.

Prior to the start of the pandemic, a controversy flared up in Ontario over the usage of technology in schools. Premier Doug Ford's administration pushed for mandatory e-learning, requiring students to earn at least one credit via an online course.[67] Teacher unions and student groups argued against said reform. For example, the Ontario Student Trustees Association referenced their 2017 teen survey. In this survey, when participants were asked to rate the extent to which online classes provided comparable quality learning capabilities as in-person classes from 1 to 5, 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "exactly the same," less than 24.6% of students answered with a rating of 4 or a 5.[68] Ironically, with the arrival of the pandemic, the education system had to adjust to online learning, ready or not. The pandemic was therefore, in a way, a silver lining for Ford's plans to cement an e-learning component to education in Ontario. However, it is unclear how successful Canadian provincial governments such as the Ford government have been in facilitating an effective and useful transition to online learning. Below, our interviewees share their thoughts on this matter.

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[65] Tom Bradley, "What Investors Can Learn from B.C.'S SUPERSTAR Provincial Health Officer," SaltWire, May 8, 2020, https://www.saltwire.com/prince-edward-island/business/perspectives-on-business/what-investors-can-learn-from-bcs-superstar-provincial-health-officer-447435/; "'Incredibly Thoughtful, Compassionate': B.C.'S DR. Bonnie Henry Resolves to 'Break' COVID-19," Parksville Qualicum Beach News (The Canadian Press, March 8, 2020), https://www.pqbnews.com/news/incredibly-thoughtful-compassionate-b-c-s-dr-bonnie-henry-resolves-to-break-covid-19/.

[66] Tracy Vaillancourt et al., "COVID-19 School Closures and Social Isolation in Children and Youth: Prioritizing Relationships in Education," *FACETS* 6 (January 2021): 1795, https://doi.org/10.1139/facets-2021-0080.

[67] Kristin Rushowy, "Mandatory E-Learning Announced by Ford Government Comes Under Fire From NDP," thestar.com, March 25, 2019, https://www.thestar.com/politics/provincial/2019/03/25/mandatory-e-learning-announced-by-ford-government-comes-under-fire-from-ndp.html.

[68] "A Turning Point for Education: The Student Platform "(Toronto , ON: Ontario Student Trustees' Association, 2018): 19.

PG: Technology has been critical to coping with the pandemic.[69] The transition to online learning has proven challenging with respect to staff training and student access to resources.[70] Did Canada adequately transition to an online learning model? What were some of the successes and failures of this transition?

CU: As I remarked earlier, the transition to online learning was largely an unmitigated disaster and a failed natural experiment. No one considered the online experiences as a substitute for face-to-face instruction or contact between students and teachers. One of the unintended but real consequences of online learning was to exacerbate the inequalities that face-to-face schooling attempts to eliminate.[71]

Even in homes with equipment and internet, there was competition between parents, who needed the equipment and bandwidth for working at home, and their children, who needed them for school. Families with the luxury of time were better able to monitor and assist their children. The differences amongst all students intensified. Of course, these were not the only differences in the environments in which students were expected to learn online. Many students do not have a quiet space at home and/or parents who can help them when they struggle with a task. There are students who are on their own because their parents must work outside the home.

Teachers struggled. Many had little or no experience with online learning, video-conferencing equipment, and the content management systems that school boards made available, but for which there was little training.[72] Undeterred, many resorted to other

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[69] Marshall, Jason, Darcia Roache, and Rasheda Moody-Marshall. "Crisis leadership: A critical examination of educational leadership in higher education in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management)* 48, no. 3 (2020): 31-33.

[70] Ibid. pp. 31-33

Marc Frenette Frenette, Kristyn Frank, and Zechuan Deng, "School Closures and the Online Preparedness of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic," School Closures and the Online Preparedness of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Statistics Canada, April 15, 2020), https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED605398.pdf, 2-5; Pollock, Katina. "School Leaders' Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Two-Pronged Approach." *International Studies in Educational Administration* 48, no. 3 (2020): 41-43.

[71] April Doreleyers and Tamara Knighton, "COVID-19 Pandemic: Academic Impacts on Postsecondary Students in Canada," COVID-19 Pandemic: Academic impacts on postsecondary students in Canada (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, May 14, 2020), https://www150.statcan .gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00015-eng.htm, 2-5. ; Catherine Haeck and Pierre Lefebvre, "Pandemic School Closures May Increase Inequality in Test Scores," *Canadian Public Policy* 46, no. S1 (January 2020), 1-4, https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2020-055.

; Katherine Wall and Tamara Knighton, "COVID-19 Pandemic: Financial Impacts on Postsecondary Students in Canada," COVID-19 Pandemic: Financial impacts on postsecondary students in Canada (Government of Canada, Statistics Canada, May 15, 2020), https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00016-eng.htm, 2-6.; Marshall, Jason, Darcia Roache, and Rasheda Moody-Marshall. "Crisis leadership: A critical examination of educational leadership in higher education in the midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic." *International Studies in Educational Administration (Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration & Management)* 48, no. 3 (2020): 31-32.

[72] Pollock, Katina. "School Leaders' Work During the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Two-Pronged Approach." *International Studies in Educational Administration* 48, no. 3 (2020): 41.

online resources for help and one another for support.[73] But most teachers were on their own in terms of what and how they planned for, and made use of, online 'learning.'

Marginalized Students

The devastating impact of the pandemic has been observed amongst various marginalized groups, particularly racialized and low-income students. Perceived increases in harassment and attacks towards racialized groups surged in Canada, disproportionately East Asian populations on the false association that COVID-19 emerged from Wuhan, China.[74] In Vancouver alone, the police department reported a 717% increase in anti-Asian hate incidents and crimes.[75] The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health warned that the stigmatisation of the virus not only increased the risk of mental health problems for Asian Canadians, but also for Canadians at large. They cited concerns that further stigmatisation of the virus discouraged Canadians from reporting their illness, putting lives at risk as a result.[76]

Beyond the stigmatization, racialized populations such as Black and Indigenous Canadians in urban centres were more likely to catch the virus than their demographic counterparts. For instance, data from August 2020 indicated that while comprising only 9% of the Toronto population, Black Canadians represented 21% of the COVID-19 cases.[77] Moreover, the most recent data on confirmed COVID-19 positive Indigenous cases has been reported at 27,725 with 1,274 hospitalizations.[78]

Low-income families were also placed in a precarious position in regard to their education as a result of the pandemic. As education shifted to online learning, student success became more closely tied to working technology and internet access. Children whose families struggled to provide them with sufficient bandwidth, internet access,

[73] Cher Hill et al., "What Kind of Educator Does the World Need Today? REIMAGINING Teacher Education IN Post-Pandemic Canada," *Journal of Education for Teaching* 46, no. 4 (2020): pp. 565-575, https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1797439, 571-574; Wahab Ali, "Online and Remote Learning in Higher Education INSTITUTES: A Necessity in Light of Covid-19 Pandemic," *Higher Education Studies* 10, no. 3 (2020): 17-18, https://doi.org/10.5539/hes.v10n3p16.

[74] Stephanie Liu, "Reports of Anti-Asian Hate Crimes Are Surging in Canada during the COVID-19 Pandemic," *CTV News*, March 18, 2021, https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/reports-of-anti-asian-hate-crimes-are-surging-in-canada-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-1.5351481.

[75] Vancouver Police Department, "Vancouver Police Department 2020 Year in Review," 2020, https://vpd.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/vpd-annual-report-2020.pdf, 9.

[76] CAMH. "Stigma and Prejudice." camh.ca, 2020. https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19/stigma-and-prejudice.

[77] Jessica Cheung, "Black People and Other People of COLOUR Make up 83% of Reported COVID-19 Cases in Toronto | CBC News," CBC News (CBC/Radio Canada, August 2, 2020), https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/toronto-covid-19-data-1.5669091.

[78] As of 1/12/2002, the number is now 59,793 positive cases and 2,490 hospitalizations. Government of Canada; Indigenous Services Canada, "COVID-19 Vaccines and Indigenous Peoples," Government of Canada; Indigenous Services Canada (Statistics Canada, August 18, 2021), https://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1606941379837/1606941507767.

adequate number of devices, or a stable home life were more likely to acquire gaps in their learning.[79]

SA: Given that racialized groups comprise a large number of essential workers, with lower paying jobs, is it more likely that marginalized children would experience higher risks of greater stress and risks?

CU: Well, in a society where there is persistent systemic racism and discrimination, is it any surprise that these youngsters are going to feel the brunt of COVID more than privileged students?[80] I mean, yes. They are going to suffer much more greatly, and they have suffered much more greatly even in the absence of COVID.[81]

The reason we have a government, in part, is to shield people from the negative impact of events such as COVID. When people who through no fault of their own are victimized by circumstances unforeseen to them, governments should step in. You have got to step up to the plate to ensure distributional equity among groups, so that groups are no longer marginalized. Governments have to change their baked-in ways of behaving that constitute the systemic discrimination many marginalized groups experience in Canada. [. . .]

Take the notion of school readiness. We have talked about whether kids are ready for school, which is kind of a weird notion. That assumes what happens in school is fixed, and you must get yourself to that point to benefit from schooling. Well, we could think of that very differently. Instead, we could think about whether schools are ready for the diversity of kids that come to it. Some kids may not know their colours, numbers, seriation, and so forth, but they know other things. It is not as if they come to school

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[79] Orla Doyle ,"Covid-19: Exacerbating Educational Inequalities?," PublicPolicy.ie (Public Policy, Independent Thinking on Public Decisions , April 9, 2020): 3, https://publicpolicy.ie/papers/covid-19-exacerbating-educational-inequalities/.

[80] CBC The National, "Montreal's Poorest and Predominantly Black Neighbourhoods Hit Hardest BY COVID-19," YouTube (YouTube, June 12, 2020), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q_FC z2xuu1g&ab_channel=CBCNews%3ATheNational.

[81] In late May 2021, over the course of the pandemic, the remains of 215 children were found buried at a former residential school for Indigenous in Kamloops B.C. This tragic discovery serves as a reminder of the suffering faced by Indigenous communities and their struggles with the Canadian school system for both life and identity. This history has contributed to the lower attendance, enrollment, and graduation of Indigenous students in Canada. In addition, Peel District School Board released a report asserting the presence of systemic racism following a committee investigation.

Ena Chadha, Suzanne Herbert, and Shawn Richard, "A Review of the Peel District School Board," A Review of the Peel District School Board § (2020), pp. 1-45, http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/new/review-peel-district-school-board-report-en.pdf, 1-7; John G. Richards, Aidan R. Vining, and David L. Weimer, "Aboriginal Performance on Standardized Tests: Evidence and Analysis From Provincial Schools in British Columbia," *Policy Studies Journal* 38, no. 1 (2010): 47-67, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1541-0072.2009.00344.x, Page 49. ; Lorenzo Cherubini, "Education in the Post-Pandemic Era: Indigenous Children and Youth," *International Indigenous Policy Journal* 11, no. 3 (July 2020): 1-11, https://doi .org/10.18584/iipj.2020.11.3.10679, 1; "Remains of 215 Children Found Buried at Former B.C. Residential School, First Nation Says," CBCnews (CBC/Radio Canada, May 29, 2021), https://www .cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/tk-eml%C3%BAps-te-secw%C3%A9pemc-215-children-former-kamloops-indian-residential-school-1.6043778.

without any knowledge. What if we took a strengths-based approach, building on what the kids bring with them, and then filling in the gaps between what they know and what they do not know? [82] Also, in the process we enable other kids to learn about the strengths that their peers have. Thereby, they would have a better appreciation of those kids, and would not stigmatize them because they might not know their colours, numbers, or whatever. This is only one of the many features of schooling that need to be changed.

FH: During the pandemic, inequity gaps widened, particularly amongst poor, rural, and racialized groups.[83] With home learning, parents from lower socioeconomic status may not be able to supervise and support their children's academic progress to the same extent as those from higher socioeconomic strata.[84] Moreover, a recent study estimated that school closures may lead to a 30% increase in the achievement gap between students in the same classroom.[85] How do you anticipate these findings impact their future learning? Are these damages repairable? How easy will it be to reintegrate these students back into schools post-pandemic? What strategies should we implement?

CU: My earlier comment about teachers signals that I have great confidence in them, including their ability to catch students up. It's no longer the case that we offer an education to students as we once did 25 or more years ago. We used to say, "Here's the education. Take it or leave it."[86] That is clearly not the pattern today. Teachers try to figure out where the students are and bring the students to where they're supposed to be.[87][. . .]

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[82] The historical shift in the conception of "school readiness" described by Dr. Ungerleider is traced out by Pia Rebello Britto in more detail in his work for UNICEF: "School Readiness: A Conceptual Framework," Education Section (UNICEF, April 2012): 6, https://sites.unicef.org/earlychildhood/files /Child2Child_ConceptualFramework_FINAL(1).pdf.

[83] Orla Doyle, "Covid-19: Exacerbating Educational Inequalities?," PublicPolicy.ie (Public Policy, Independent Thinking on Public Decisions , April 9, 2020): 1-2, 6-7, https://publicpolicy.ie/papers/covid-19-exacerbating-educational-inequalities/.

Marc Frenette Frenette, Kristyn Frank, and Zechuan Deng, "School Closures and the Online Preparedness of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic," School Closures and the Online Preparedness of Children during the COVID-19 Pandemic (Statistics Canada, April 15, 2020): 2-5 https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED605398.pdf.

[84] Michael Silverman, Robert Sibbald, and Saverio Stranges, "Ethics of Covid-19-Related School Closures," *Canadian Journal of Public Health* 111, no. 4 (2020): 463, https://doi.org/10.17269 /s41997-020-00396-1.

[85] Catherine Haeck and Pierre Lefebvre, "Pandemic School Closures May Increase Inequality in Test Scores," *Canadian Public Policy* 46, no. S1 (January 2020): 84, https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2020-055.

[86] Claudia Emes and Martha Cleveland-Innes, "A Journey Toward LEARNER-CENTERED CURRICULUM," *Canadian Journal of Higher Education* 33, no. 3 (2003): 47-69, https://doi.org /10.47678/cjhe.v33i3.183440, 50-51; Lewington, Jennifer. "Liberated Spaces: Purposeful School Design Says Goodbye to Cells and Bells." *Education Canada* 52, no. 5 (2012): 2.

[87] "Culturally Responsive Pedagogy," Culturally Responsive Pedagogy § (n.d.), 5, http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/cbs_responsivepedagogy.pdf,

Some systems have chosen to offer summer programs that will enable students to catch up. In addition, some are offering a kind of credit recovery approach,[88] which means "I will give you credit for the work you have done, and [assign] the work you have not done. And as soon as you do that work, you will get the full credit." They have been doing that over the course of the summer. [. . .]

All those things–I think–will help kids catch up. I am worried about those kids, but as far as those I am most worried about, [they are] the kids who are not accounted for. It is going to take a lot of cooperation among many systems: education, social welfare, Family Services, justice, health, and housing to find those students and to address the reasons why they are not in school. [. . .]

Canadian Multiculturalism

Our final section dives into the intersection of Canadian multiculturalism, education, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In the national debates of the 1960s, the ideas nested within John Murray Gibbon's 1938 book *Canadian Mosaic* took flight. Chief amongst these ideas was the rejection of USA-styled assimilation. Rejecting this 'melting pot' model, policy makers began to favour the idea of a cultural mosaic where newcomers were encouraged to keep the cultural practises of their homeland. A little over 50 years ago, Prime Minister Pierre Eliot Trudeau announced "a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework," making Canada the first nation to do so at the federal level.[89]

Historically, Canadian education has been the crucible of assimilation. The most evident and poignant example of this has been the residential school system for Indigenous children. Under this system, Christian communities sponsored by the government stripped Indigenous children of their language, religion, and culture. The children were instead housed in substandard conditions, many of whom were taken from their homes and abused by their educators.[90]

In addition to making education a provincial affair, policies have been implemented within the provinces as well to offset the assimilative forces of state education. For example, in the anglophone province of Ontario, there are four distinct public-school boards divided along religious and linguistic lines: English public, French public, English Catholic, and the French Catholic school board. Furthermore, teachers are trained to

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[88] "Continuity of Learning," Continuity of Learning § (2020), https://www.gov.nt.ca/covid-19/en/resources-type/learning-resources, 1-2, 8-9. ; Sarmishta Subramanian, "The Lost Year in Education ," *The Lost Year*, July 2021, https://www.macleans.ca/longforms/covid-19-pandemic-disrupted-schooling-impact/.; "Summer Credit Recovery Program," Summer Credit Recovery Program (Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, 2021); https://ocdsb.ca/continuing_education/summer_school_programs/summer_credit_recovery_program.

[89] Miriam Verena Richter, *Creating the National Mosaic: Multiculturalism in Canadian Children's Literature from 1950 to 1994* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011), 37.

[90] "Remains of 215 Children Found Buried at Former B.C. Residential School, First Nation Says," CBCnews (CBC/Radio Canada, May 29, 2021), https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/tk-eml%C3%BAps-te-secw%C3%A9pemc-215-children-former-kamloops-indian-residential-school-1.6043778.

value "culturally responsive pedagogy," which emphasises the need for teachers to honour students' multiple social identities.

But how have the pandemic school closures affected Canada's delicate social tapestry? What role does the education system play in maintaining social stability in such a multicultural nation? Has Canada truly embraced its multicultural mandate, or has public education persisted as the nation's "common school?" In a critical analysis of these complexities, our interviewees cast a skeptical gaze on the idea that Canadian education is truly "non-assimilative," arguing instead that public education continues to function as a "common school;" a process disrupted by the school closures.

PG: Thank you. We have mentioned the names of several philosophers thus far. Another interesting philosopher that I wanted to know your thoughts on, was the progressive American philosopher of education John Dewey. In his work *Democracy and Education*, he praised the space public schools provide for different interactions between societal groups.[91] With this in mind, the pandemic response has restricted the access to this common ground. Do you believe the school lockdowns will be followed by an erosion of social cohesion, particularly in such a multicultural state like Canada? What is the role that public schools play in keeping society on the same page?

CU: That is a big complex question. If you are interested in Dewey, you might look at one of his contemporaries named George S. Counts, who was even stronger than

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[91]"[It] is the office of the school environment to balance the various elements in the social environment, and to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment. Such words as "society" and "community" are likely to be misleading, for they have a tendency to make us think there is a single thing corresponding to the single word. As a matter of fact, a modern society is many societies more or less loosely connected. Each household with its immediate extension of friends makes a society; the village or street group of playmates is a community; each business group, each club, is another. Passing beyond these more intimate groups, there is in a country like our own a variety of races, religious affiliations, economic divisions. Inside the modern city, in spite of its nominal political unity, there are probably more communities, more differing customs, traditions, aspirations, and forms of government or control, than existed in an entire continent at an earlier epoch. (…) In the olden times, the diversity of groups was largely a geographical matter. There were many societies, but each, within its own territory, was comparatively homogeneous. But with the development of commerce, transportation, intercommunication, and emigration, countries like the United States are composed of a combination of different groups with different traditional customs. It is this situation which has, perhaps more than any other one cause, forced the demand for an educational institution which shall provide something like a homogeneous and balanced environment for the young. Only in this way can the centrifugal forces set up by juxtaposition of different groups within one and the same political unit be counteracted. The intermingling in the school of youth of different races, differing religions, and unlike customs creates for all a new and broader environment. Common subject matter accustoms all to a unity of outlook upon a broader horizon than is visible to the members of any group while it is isolated. The assimilative force of the American public school is eloquent testimony to the efficacy of the common and balanced appeal." Dewey, John. "Democracy in education." *The elementary school teacher* 4, no. 4 (1903): 193-204. Chapter 2.

Dewey on the role of school for essentially remaking society with each successive generation.[92]

People learn who they are, to whom they are related, and the power they have from the institutions, symbols, and the myths they are told. Families, of course, are the first influential context for such learning. Peers are influential, increasingly so as youngsters grow older.[93]

The school helps to overcome the tribalism of family life. You know, probably because of biological imperatives, we look after our own more assiduously than we do the children of others. The public school is the place where people overcome the limitations of their parents, including my kids. They overcome my limitations in terms of values, prejudices, attitudes that I communicate to them, and so too do all the other kids as well. Schools are important for instilling in the next generation the things that we share in common.

I would like to think that most of us want Canada to be a more socially cohesive and egalitarian society. We want our children to have a sense of who they are as Canadians based upon our shared values. Furthermore, we want them to live in a society where the similarities among us outweigh the differences, but one in which the differences are respected.

You know, we talked about rights earlier. We talked about the Canadian Constitution. We talked about the shared institutions. It is the school that teaches us what we share with one another, our common values, humanity, respect for persons, and so on.

So, has COVID had an impact? Yes, for sure. Those kids have been driven apart by COVID from one another. They have had to learn online. In the process of doing that, they are using social media much more than they had in the past, if that is even possible! They use a lot of social media; and social media, as you know, drives people apart and does not bring them together as one had hoped. It is important to bring kids back to school and ensure that they develop a common understanding of their humanity, a common understanding of their citizenship, respect for differences, etc. Absolutely.

Is it recoverable? I worry about that. I am not as confident [as I was] 20 years ago. Because you referred to the book, I argue that one of the things we are ruining about our public schools is the erosion of the common school notion.[94] We create a tailored curriculum that is supposedly "personalized."[95] We have niche marketing of boutique

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[92] George S Counts, *Dare to Build the School Build a New Social Order?*, 11th ed. (New York, NY: The John Day Company, 1932), 11-13.

[93] Chen, Xianglei. Students' peer groups in high school: The pattern and relationship to educational outcomes. National Center for Education Statistics, 1997. 2-4.

[94] Charles S. Ungerleider, *Failing Our Kids: How We Are Ruining Our Public Schools* (Brantford,, Ont.: Resource Services Library, 2007), 22-24, 184-184.

[95] Although Ungerleider is referring to the B.C.'s emphasis on the "personalized" nature of its curriculum, similar trends can be seen in Ontario's School Within a School program.

"Curriculum Overview," Building Student Success - B.C. Curriculum (Ministry of Education, 2021), https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/overview. "School within a School," School Within a School, 2021, https://www.tvdsb.ca/en/programs/school-within-a-school.aspx.

programs. All of that drives kids apart, segregates some kids from others.[96] Let us not mince words! We know that some people seek alternatives for their kids because they do not want those kids 'contaminated' through contact with other kids. I know that sounds harsh, but it's true! And it is the common school experience that helps maybe smooth off the rough edges of our prejudices.

If we want a society that is more socially cohesive and more egalitarian—if we want our kids to have a better sense of who they are as Canadians based upon shared values, if we want them to live in a society where the similarities outweigh the differences, but one in which differences are respected—we must restore and strengthen public education. And even if we restore it, we must eliminate some of the differences that we have baked into the system, that I think are fundamentally wrongheaded.

Schooling is less about you or me than it is about us together. Yes, in the process of cultivating me as a human being and you as a human being, we are strengthening the society as a whole. But the reason we have public schools is because public schools are supposed to benefit society. It is a social good, not a private benefit. If it were just a private benefit, we would let people fend for themselves, families fend for themselves. "You educate your kids; I will educate my kids." But it is because we see the social value as Dewey did—bringing you back to Dewey or Count's [idea] of recreating the society in a better way, generation after generation.

[If] we lose that, we will fly apart more than we are already flying apart; those kind of centrifugal—or socio-fugal as I sometimes say—forces at work, spinning people apart, rather than bringing them together. [. . .] So my point is we become more fragmented over time and we are ruining our public schools, the one institution that is capable of bringing us together. It is glue. It is social glue if you will, and an intellectual glue as well. It keeps us from flying apart from one another. [. . .]

If public schools cannot help to create a socially cohesive society, who or what can?

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[96] Streaming is to be phased out over the course of 2021 in Ontario due because of concerns it perpetuated systemic racism. Katherine DeClerq, "Ontario to Begin Phasing out Grade 9 Applied and Academic Streaming in 2021," Toronto (CTV News, July 9, 2020), https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/ontario-to-begin-phasing-out-grade-9-applied-and-academic-streaming-in-2021-1.5017071. ; Henry M Codjoe, "Fighting a 'Public Enemy' of Black Academic ACHIEVEMENT—The Persistence of Racism and the Schooling Experiences of Black Students in Canada," *Race Ethnicity and Education* 4, no. 4 (2001): 364, https://doi.org/10.1080/13613320120096652.