

Examining an Institutionalized Sociocultural Model of Canadian Education

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Abstract: Education is addressed as one of the primary domains for the acculturation of newcomer children to Canada. The author provides the results of a comprehensive literature review outlining an Institutionalized Sociocultural Model (ISCM) of education in Western Canada from the existing literature. The review utilizes The theory of Sociocultural Models (Chirkov, 2020) to identify the components of this model. This application identifies the Canadian ISCM of education in Saskatchewan as based on foundational principles of Egalitarianism and Multiculturalism, with a distinct student-centered focus seen through teaching and learning. This institutionalized model forms a crucial starting point for understanding the cultural differences and challenges that newcomer students to Canada face because their existing encultured homegrown education models may differ from the Canadian host model encountered. A structured understanding of the Canadian ISCM of education helps to facilitate acculturation in the Canadian school environment.

Keywords: Theory of Sociocultural Models, Canadian Education, Institutionalized Model of Education, Acculturation, Teaching, Learning

An Institutionalized Sociocultural Model of Canadian Education

According to Statistics Canada, in the 2019-2020 school year, over 2.3 million students were enrolled in Canadian public elementary and secondary school programs (Statistics Canada, 2021). A reported 43,120 immigrants came to Saskatchewan between 2016 and 2021, with 11,805 of this total being children under the age of 15 (Statistics Canada, 2023). According to TSCM (Chirkov, 2022), immigrant children and their families face an acculturation gap in the education domain when they arrive in Canada. The home sociocultural model of education does not necessarily match the host Canadian sociocultural model. The first step in the acculturation process involves understanding the model of public education implemented within the Canadian¹ context. Hence a comprehensive literature review (CLR) was conducted. The model of public education examined in this article is the institutionalized form of education represented through policy documents and government directives on how to run and support students' public education.

I use the Theory of Sociocultural Models (TSCM) (Chirkov, 2020) applied to the domain of education to analyze the literature. The review determines the Institutionalized Sociocultural Model of Education (ISCM) in the Saskatchewanian Canadian context from the publicly accessible literature. The ISCM comprises three sub-models: (a) the foundational model of education; (b) the sociocultural Model (SCM) of teaching; (c) the SCM of learning. The foundational model encompasses the primary principles and philosophy of education that directs the SCMs of teaching and learning. The SCMs of teaching and learning is framed through the goals, practices, and regulations of teachers' and students' activities.

Determining the ISCM of education in the new educational context is imperative for newcomer children to decipher how the system works and to determine the differences between teaching and learning from their old schooling if they are to succeed in this new education model.

Comprehensive Literature Review

A Comprehensive Literature Review (CLR) is a summary of previous research on a topic that surveys scholarly articles, books, and other sources relevant to a particular area of research. This research utilizes the guidelines presented by Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016) to organize, conduct, and complete the review and comprises three phases: data searching, data coding and analysis, and data synthesis.

Data Search

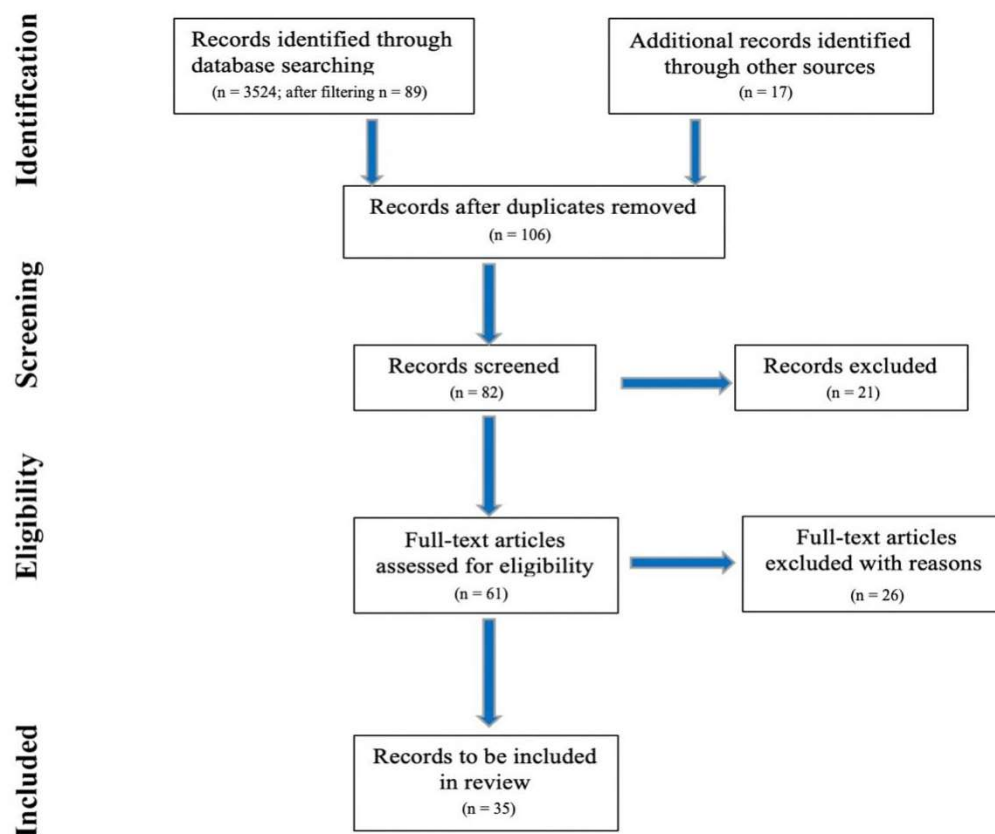
¹ The term **Canadian** context refers to Canada's geographical region; in the literature, it is referenced as covering both Western and North America.

The key search words used in conducting this literature review relate to the geographical context under investigation, as well as the following components: philosophy, goals, practices, and regulations. These search words, as defined by the TSCM to education, were applied to five online databases: PsycInfo; Scopus; ERIC (Educational Resources Information Center); CBCA (Canadian Business and Current Affairs Database); and Anthropology Plus. I narrowed the foci of my searches through limiting the publication years to 2000-2021, restricting the publication language to English, and only considering peer-reviewed articles. Two rounds of literature searching occurred to maximize the coverage of the studies. A total of 108 searches yielded 3524 possible articles. These articles were filtered with consideration of the relevance to my study by examining titles and abstracts, resulting in 89 articles identified for closer examination.

Pearling (Cooke et al., 2012) was used to identify other sources relevant to the topic. According to Cooke et al. (2012), pearling involves examining the reference lists of relevant articles and searching for articles that may have been missed by the database searches. By doing this, it is possible to identify sources that otherwise would have been excluded from the review. In pearling, relevant articles are gleaned from reference lists in only one iteration. The pearling process identified 17 additional resources, resulting in a total of 106 resources identified for further in-depth analysis. Following a detailed eligibility analysis, a total of 71 resources were removed based on reasons of irrelevance to the topic and full-text inaccessibility, resulting in 35 resources remaining for inclusion in this review. Figure 1 details the process of article inclusion/exclusion using a flow chart.

Figure 1

Literature Search Process



Note: The flow of information through the different phases of the review.

Data Coding and Analysis. In phase two, the 35 studies selected for inclusion were referenced and catalogued using a standard template for: (a) publication source (i.e., authors, title, journal name, year of publication); (b) type of methods used (qualitative, quantitative, mixed); (c) results; (d) limitations; and (e) additional information. The text criteria were identified as either ‘key’ or ‘secondary’ in relevance to the specific theory-driven themes and were coded for relevance to a foundational model of education, a SCM of teaching, and a SCM of learning. The study data set included a final sample of 35 studies derived from 18 journals, two conference proceedings, seven documents, and one book. Three journals contributed more than one study (e.g., six studies came from the **Canadian Journal of Education**).

The samples’ descriptive characteristics included: 17 empirical studies and 18 reviews; notably, 15 studies were identified as key studies and 20 studies were identified as secondary. In this group, there are 24 qualitative studies, eight quantitative studies, and three mixed-methods studies. Of the 35 studies, 20 studies were specific to the Canadian context and six of them emphasized Saskatchewan in particular. Sixteen of the studies are related to the SCM of teaching, 10 studies relate to the SCM of learning, and nine studies overlap in relevance to both teaching and learning. The theory-driven themes have the following characteristics:

- Thirteen studies relate to philosophy (seven of these relate to teaching and six relate to learning).
- Seven studies relate to practices (three of these relate to teaching, three relate to learning, and one study overlaps).
- Six studies relate to goals (two of these relate to teaching and four relate to both teaching and learning).
- Five studies relate to regulations (four of these relate to teaching and one relates to learning).
- Four studies overlap in a combination of themes that relate to both teaching and learning.

Data Synthesis

The data synthesis reflects the pertinent themes extracted through the literature analysis processes. The presentation reflects what an ISCM of education looks like from the literature. The ISCM reflects a foundational model of education and the SCMs of teaching and learning in the Saskatchewan context.

The Foundational Model of Education in Canada

The foundational model of education reflects a core set of ideological principles that shape the approach to education in a specific context. Canada’s foundational model reflects Egalitarianism, the dominant discourses of multiculturalism and pluralism, and individualism’s ideological principles (Abawi et al., 2018; Aragona-Young & Sawyer, 2018; Banks, 2019; Li, 2012; Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, 2016).

From the literature analysis, 13 studies referenced philosophy related to Multiculturalism in the Canadian context. *Multiculturalism* as it relates to education, holds that all students, regardless of their race, culture, social class, language, or other differences, can experience educational equality in schools (Banks, 2019). Pluralism is referenced in connection to multiculturalism and both of these principles logically tie into an Egalitarian doctrine. As such, they consider all people as being equal and deserving of equal rights and opportunities, which is encompassed in the concept of “education for all” seen in Canada’s educational policies (Saskatchewan Teachers’ Federation, 2016, pp. 46–63). The dominant discourses of multiculturalism and pluralism in Canadian education encourage diversity within the educational setting. These discourses welcome newcomer students as valuable additions to Canada’s public school system.

According to Lukes (1973), individualism speaks directly to the development of the individual human being on four dimensions:

1. “The dignity of man” – this is the ultimate moral principle of intrinsic value in human beings (p. 45).
2. Autonomy or self-direction- an individual’s thoughts and actions are his or her own; they are not determined by agencies or causes outside of his or her control. “Autonomy of the self

occurs through critical evaluation and rational reflection. The individual consciously forms intentions and reaches practical decisions in actions when he or she is subjected to pressures and norms at a social level” (p. 52).

3. Privacy - the notion of privacy where the individual is allowed to think whatever he or she chooses in “a sphere of thought and action that should be free from ‘public’ interferences” (p. 62).
4. Self-development –individuation is the “means to cultivating individuality and uniqueness” (p. 63).

This foundational model underpins the Sociocultural Models (SCMs) of teaching and learning in the Canadian context—notably, it dialectically ties them together. These SCMs and their components are presented in the following sections.

A Sociocultural Model of Teaching in Canada

A SCM of teaching in Canada encompasses institutionalized vocabulary, which directs the goals, practices, and regulations of teaching (Chirkov, 2020). This SCM reflects the teachers’ prescribed actions through their pedagogical methods, the attribution of students’ performance (using interpretive lenses), and the teaching regulations in Canada. Sixteen documents directly relate to the SCM of teaching reflected in the goals, practices, and regulations of teaching.

Goals of teaching. The goals of teaching centre around student centered teaching (Canadian Teachers’ Federation, 2011) and nurturing their cognitive development because “Children are still developing and lack a fully developed theory of mind” (Li, 2012, p. 35).

The literature emphasizes that teaching goals in Saskatchewan are organized through an outcome-based system (Saskatchewan Teacher’s Federation, 2016; Spady, 1994). Outcome-based teaching goals redefine teaching as a performance in which teachers act to facilitate knowledge acquisition (content) so that students can achieve the required learning outcomes (competencies) (Spady, 1994). Under this model, the teaching goals are conceptualized through two distinct paradigms: the psychological and the sociological. The psychological paradigm involves the cognitive development of mental processing modalities such as developing inquiry, thinking, identity, independence, and literacies (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010).

In turn, the sociological paradigm is seen in how these cognitive mental processes apply to the sociocultural context they relate to; for example “Developing the cognitive skills needed to become socially responsible” (Spady, 1994, p. 58). Hence, the goal of teaching emphasizes nurturing the cognitive development of learners through outcome-based competencies centered on thought and action, which echoes Li’s (2012) Western mind-oriented model that identifies the goals of teaching as:

1. To cultivate the mind’s understanding of the world: “exposure to a stimulating environment enables the mind to become sharpened to proper use for understanding the world” (p. 85–86), and;
2. To develop one’s ability to become a fully functioning member of society: “important skills include those for a successful career, for one’s self-sufficiency and independence, as well as the knowledge that enables one to solve problems and to take control of one’s life and surroundings” (pp. 85–86).

In sum, the teacher’s goal is to guide their students towards developing these skills which are needed to become future contributors in society and the workforce.

Teaching practices. Teaching practices describe how the ideas held by the institution regarding teaching are applied in the classroom. Seven studies directly relate to teaching practices in North America. Li (2012) emphasizes that at the heart of formal Western schooling, teaching practices act to nurture cognitive development through “designing activities that require mental effort and individual pursuits” (p.106).

Practices such as problem-solving that require the learner to think, be creative, reason, and analyze problems. For example, in conducting science experiments, students learn to test hypotheses. In math, students are

taught problem-solving skills such as analyzing answers, and implementing the best solutions (Li, 2012). Moreover, Canada's teaching practices encompass a style of citizenship education that promotes being part of the school community and broader society (Anderson, 2017; Bromley, 2011; Evans, 2006; McLean, 2007; Moon, 2017; Osborne, 2000).

In summation, teachers guide their students through teaching practices that emphasize a combination of problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking practices. Utilizing critical pedagogical practices provides opportunities for teachers to nurture cognitive development; in turn, practices like citizenship education create a climate in which all students can feel a sense of belonging to the school community (McMahon, 2003).

Regulations in teaching. Three of the four studies that relate to regulations apply to the SCM of teaching. Walker and Bergmann (2013) examine the Canadian teacher education policy from 2000 to 2010. Teacher education programs have undergone several radical changes over the last 60 years; specifically, there has been a shift to balance the theoretical and practical characterization of professionalization (Walker & Bergmann, 2013). Walker and Bergmann articulate that education in Canada is provincially regulated and that there is no national department of education. However, throughout Canada, there is an expectation that teachers must be well-positioned on the four core competencies of their practice: creativity, critical thinking, computer and digital literacy, and character.

Although teaching qualification requirements may vary, professional licensing is a mandate of the Saskatchewan Teacher's Federation (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2016). Teachers in Canada's public school system must demonstrate professional competencies. These include modelling appropriate behaviours, staying within teacher-student relationship boundaries, and working within the confines of the approved subject content (de Britto, 2018; Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010; Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2016). These guidelines are essential for teachers to maintain their professional standing in their schools regarding knowing the goals, practices, teaching directives, and ethics. Their school principals subjectively review their practice, and school superintendents oversee their employment positions. Teachers must realize that they are accountable for their professional practice, and failure to achieve this standard can result in disciplinary action being taken from their school division and through their professional regulatory body. The onus falls on the teacher to ensure appropriate self-regulation of their behaviours with students; in curriculum content and to remain relevant within their professional teaching guidelines.

A SCM of learning in Canada

A SCM of learning in Canada refers to a learning model that explains what learning is about and describes what is expected to happen on the part of students – it explains how learning should be executed and it considers what processes, triggered by teaching, students will follow to enable them to learn and retain the material. From the literature review, 10 studies specifically relate to learning; two of these studies are related to learning goals, seven are related to learning practices, and one relates to learning regulations.

Learning Outcomes. In Canadian education, the learning expectation is that students will develop cognitive skills. This outcome involves critical thinking, which arises from the Socratic tradition of 'critical thought', a method that enables students to question the world and its practices (Tweed & Lehman, 2002).

The literature positions the learning goals in the Canadian context as learning outcomes (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010; Saskatchewan Learning, 2004; Spady, 1994), which are learning competencies that students demonstrate throughout their learning experiences. These outcomes refer to the ability of students to demonstrate levels of knowledge acquisition that focus on foundational knowledge competency (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 2016). In Saskatchewan's Kindergarten to Grade 12 (K-12) curricula, learning, cross-curricular competencies, and grade-level outcomes are interconnected, so that to successfully complete a grade or a course, students develop a combination of factual, conceptual, procedural, and metacognitive knowledge (Anderson, Krathwohl & Bloom, 2001).

In sum, learning goals are **student-centered** because they focus on the individual student. These goals are distinctly cognitive as they focus on developing thinking and constructing knowledge about how students come to know and understand the world around them. The goals aim to develop the ability to think deeply, contextually, creatively, and critically in various situations – both independently and with others (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 24). In doing so, the aim is for students to progressively develop the cognitive skills needed to analyze and critique objects, events, experiences, ideas, theories, expressions, situations, and other phenomena (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 25).

Learning practices. Learning practices reflect how the ideas about learning are applied by Canadian Public schools. The literature suggests that learning encompasses cognitive practices that require engagement, collaboration, communication, and flexibility (Li, 2012; Parhar & Sensoy, 2011; Sliwka & Yee, 2015). These learning practices emphasize thinking which encompasses a strong cognitive focus - a spectrum of mental processes involved in learning (Sliwka & Yee, 2015, p.181).

There is an expectation that students will become ‘engaged thinkers’ who reason critically and make discoveries; moreover, these students are expected to use technology to learn, innovate, communicate, and discover. In turn, Li’s lexicon study supports the emphasis on cognitive learning practices that use terms highly relevant to the *thinking* category of learning, such as: “critical thinking, reasoning, derivation, inductive, infer, absorbing, challenge, assumptions, contemplating, pondering, enlighten, expanding, internalize, introspection, realize, recognition, self-reflection, discovery, and understanding” (Li, 2012, p.117).

Of central importance is the cognitive practice of *inquiry*. This term emphasizes the cognitive learning activities students must carry out and stresses that it is important for students to discover the unknown and invent the new. In this process, “one seeks to find out about things in the world through various research activities such as gathering data, experimentation, observation, analysis, and concluding” (Li, 2012, p.111). It can be argued that this learning goal is increasingly pertinent in student learning. With the increased use and exposure to social media, students need to learn to be discerning consumers who are critically aware of misinformation.

Li (2012, p.87) uses Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 2001) to explain that learning involves *active engagement* and *personal agency* in addition to cognitive practices. According to Li (2012), active engagement is typified by phrases and words such as: “active learning, acquainting/familiarizing oneself with something, competition, experience, getting the hang of it, hands-on, learn by doing, learning it the hard way, practice, study, training, trial and error, and work” (p.110). Active learning ensures fuller engagement of the mind; this promotes thinking at all levels and forms. Students need to be actively engaged with the learning process, for example, through participating in hands-on activities, both inside and outside the classroom. This perspective is reflected in the results of Sliwka and Yee’s (2015) study on Canadian adolescent learning engagement. This study highlights that engagement happens in three different contexts: academic engagement, social engagement, and cognitive engagement (p.179).

In Canadian schools, *collaboration and communication* also form an integral part of active learning practices because of their interactive social natures. Communication enables students to think, inquire, and engage in their learning. In addition, there is a growing focus on the theme of *flexibility* amongst students’ learning practices in Canada. Flexibility is defined by Sliwka and Yee (2015) as the need to adjust learning practices to accommodate technology usage in Canadian student learning. An example of this is incorporating online learning in the curriculum. Flexibility is demonstrated through the need to meet the challenges of ever-changing student learning needs, adapting to new learning realities, and addressing continuous new challenges in the learning environment (Peterson & McClay, 2012; Sliwka & Yee, 2015).

Regulations in learning. Regulations in learning refers to the rules and directives placed on learners by the institution regarding their behaviours at school in the learning context. The literature emphasizes the importance of behavioural regulations promoting *positive affective behaviours* that benefit student learning Li (2012). These behaviours are referenced as actions promoting school achievement, and are validated through success, fulfillment, happiness, satisfaction, and being excited about learning. Such positive affective

behaviours are sanctioned by the institution and promoted through following the rules and attending classes (Li, 2012; Wong, 2007).

When students do succeed in their learning experiences, they are rewarded for their efforts, and they are acknowledged by the institution by achieving awards, being on the honour roll, and earning scholarships. The emphasis on students being rewarded for positive affective behaviours is framed around the student-centered approach to behavioural regulation. “Ideal learners are self-motivated, agentic, striving, extending, mastering, and responsible. Effective teaching should support intentional, thoughtful, problem-driven, student-centered activity” (Wong, 2007, p.196). In contrast, Li (2012) highlights that *negative affective behaviours* are seen as indicators of problematic self-regulation and students are not rewarded. Students who demonstrate negative affective behaviours may struggle to regulate themselves and don’t fit in (Offord et al., 2000). The literature does not adequately detail problematic self-regulation. Instead, positive affective behaviours are contrast with negative affective behaviours attributed to student boredom or indifference in achievement—no in-depth considerations of why students struggle to self-regulate themselves as a learning difficulty are provided.

More significant research is needed to understand why behavioural problems arise in students’ behaviour. For example, the likelihood of newcomer students entering the system with a different SCM of learning is probable and needs consideration. Newcomer students may be accustomed to different learning expectations regarding behaviour in the classroom, and they may struggle as they learn how to adjust to the new SCM present. Suppose a newcomer student arrives from a teacher-centric model, where the teacher directs and corrects behaviours through punishment. In that case, the student may need constant direction from the teacher to regulate themselves in this new student-centered model. Further, literature is needed on what negative affective behaviours might mean for neurodivergent students with disabilities and how the system addresses these concerns. It would be helpful to understand how the system activates support services, like educational assistants and school counsellors, to help students improve on their behavioural challenges, especially in a system that advocates student-centeredness.

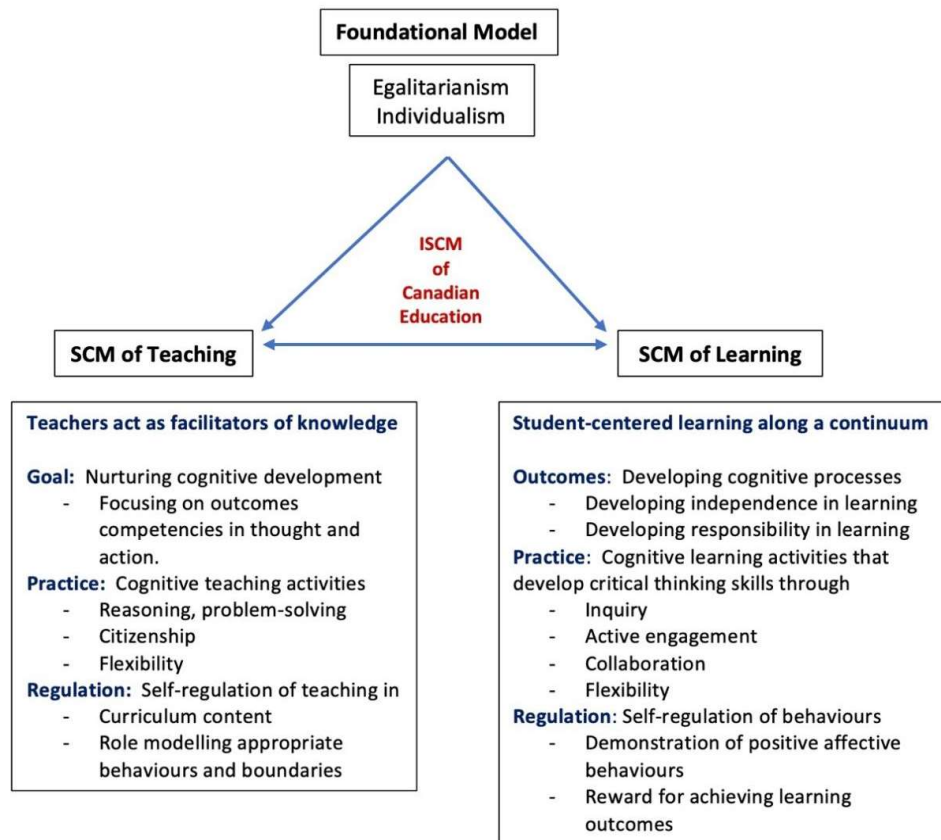
Discussion

The main objective of this study was to explore what a Canadian Institutionalized Sociocultural Model of education (ISCM) looks like in the Saskatchewan public schooling context, from existing literature. Identifying this institutionalized model forms a crucial starting point for newcomer students to understand education in Canada. The ISCM of education they encounter may be very different from the ISCM of education they know and understand. From the structured presentation of this model in this review, cultural differences can be identified when examined against the newcomer’s encultured education model. This model further facilitates educators’ understanding of the institutionalized education model advocated through the identified the core practices and regulations of teaching and learning.

The main challenge was developing the conceptual analysis for applying the TSCM to the education domain, which is its first application. Further, it took considerable time to make sense of the complex nature of the subject matter regarding education, sociocultural models, and psychology. From the reviewed literature, I have created a graphic organizer of this institutionalized model, illustrated in Figure 2 below:

Figure 2

The Institutionalized Sociocultural Model of Canadian Education



Note. The author has inferred this ISCM from the literature.

The ISCM of education hinges on a foundational model based off Egalitarian principles that focus on individualism. This identified foundational model links both the SCMs of teaching and learning; in turn, this is particularly reflected in the Saskatchewan education system:

It is based on a student-centered, broadly based understanding of education that prepares children and youth to become confident, creative, and caring individuals while gaining valuable experience and knowledge to fuel future endeavors. Accessible and equitable for all children and youth, regardless of their circumstances or learning potential. Serves a common good that is beneficial to all of society, not just to the students currently enrolled. (Saskatchewan Teacher’s Federation, 2016, p.3)

The foundational model actively promotes critical thought development; this can empower the individual and it promotes transformative change (Wong, 2007; McMahon, 2003). This ISCM echoes the thoughts of John Dewey (1996) and Paulo Freire (1998) where “Learners, in their interaction with one another and with their teachers, engage in the experience of assuming themselves as historical, social, thinking, communicating, transformative, creative persons” (Freire, 1998, p.45).

The following vital takeaways have emerged from this research regarding the central focus of individualism in Canadian teaching and learning:

1. The model present parallels Li's perspective (2012), which suggests that Western education: (a) cultivates the human mind's understanding of the world; (b) develops one's abilities/skills; and (c) focuses on personal goals.
2. The teacher acts as the facilitator of knowledge. This places the onus of achieving the learning outcome goals on the learner.
3. Learning varies and occurs along a continuum. Students move from meeting expectations at the grade level to excelling in the competencies (i.e., gaining mastery of the knowledge). Achieving learning competencies varies by students. At the elementary level students are not failed but are passed through to the next grade allowing students to grow as they continue to learn and develop in their competencies. As a result, students achieve the competencies set out by the curriculum at their own pace. Instead of failing students by holding them back a grade, students are allowed to grow and develop in their competencies.
4. Sociocultural models are not stand-alone models. Rather, they are deeply connected to the sociocultural context in which they exist and to the people who make up the institution.
5. Flexibility is needed within the Canadian ISCM to accommodate individual learning needs, most specifically in response to the changing usage of technology. This flexibility has had extra considerations because of the recent educational challenges presented by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic that have required greater flexibility to environmental constraints.

An evident limitation of this study pertains to the dearth of existing research that specifically examines an Institutionalized Sociocultural Model of education (ISCM) in the Canadian context. This limitation is understandable because this is the first study to structure such the understanding through the application of the theory of Sociocultural Models (TSCM) to the domain of education.

Conclusion

This comprehensive literature review analyzed 35 resources obtained through a search and screening processes. The resources covered various disciplines, including psychology, education, and educational policy. As such, the literature represented was both complex and broad. The dialectical connection between the identified SCMs of teaching and learning has a definite cognitive or mind-orientated emphasis and is centered around the student. Ke (2013) suggests that learning and teaching combine integrated and individuated constructs in the classroom. In turn, in both SCMs of learning and teaching, this requires collaboration between teachers and students. However, this research supports that learning occurs along a continuum and that achievement depends on the individual. As such, there are no failures, only improvements to be made resulting from the lessons learned (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010; Spady, 1994).

From this review, the identified Canadian ISCM of education aims to produce independent-thinking, self-regulated, autonomous citizens of the educational institution and Canadian society. This model is a student-centered and understanding this educational model can help newcomer students and their families comprehend the Canadian SCM of education in a structured way. Depending on the extent of the identified cultural differences between the home and host SCMs of education, immigrant children may have more significant challenges in their acculturation process than others. Educators might have a child entering from a school system with a similar philosophy, rules and practices as advocated by the SCM in the Canadian context. In this case, fitting in for the child goes smoothly – 'they get it.' However, if the SCM of education is very different, then difficulties could see newcomer students struggling to reach learning outcomes or having trouble regulating their behaviour. Such concerns often lead educators to refer students to educational psychologists for assessment because of these challenges.

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