Relational Practice, Critical Courage, and the Work of Teaching Otherwise

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The Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education is pleased to highlight the work of emerging scholars whose contributions to this issue reflect a shared commitment to strengthening education in Canada. Bringing together research articles, literature reviews, position papers, and book reviews, this collection seeks to contribute to the ongoing improvement of educational systems by advancing inclusive pedagogies and thoughtful educational practice.

The articles in this issue of the Canadian Journal for New Scholars in Education (CJNSE) collectively foreground education as a deeply relational endeavour, shaped by questions of power, language, care, and responsibility. Across early childhood, K–12, community education, and teacher preparation, contributors examine how educators, researchers, and institutions navigate complex learning environments while responding to diverse student needs and sociopolitical contexts. Rather than treating pedagogy as a set of neutral techniques, the authors in this issue attend closely to the ethical and relational dimensions of educational practice, emphasizing how connection, trust, and reflexivity shape meaningful learning experiences.

A shared thread running through this collection is the tension between dominant educational structures and the possibilities that emerge when educators teach *otherwise*. Several articles highlight how entrenched norms, including oppressive language practices, colonial epistemologies, digital inequities, and cultures of surveillance, constrain both teaching and learning. At the same time, contributors offer grounded pathways forward through practices such as reflexive educator-researcher positioning, human-rights based approaches to inclusion, ecojustice frameworks, decolonial pedagogies, and relationship-centred teaching across in-person and digital spaces. Together, these works underscore how intentional relational practice and critical courage are central to fostering equitable, inclusive, and responsive educational environments in a rapidly shifting social and educational landscape.

In This Issue

This Fall 2025 issue includes 12 articles:

Robyn Ashley, Jessie-Lee D. McIsaac, Rebecca Feicht, Michelle Stone, and Christine McLean contributed a qualitative study entitled *Engaging in Reflexivity as an Educator-Researcher to Strengthen Relationships in an Outdoor Early Childhood Education Environment*. Through a reflexive thematic analysis of a researcher journal, the study examines how an educator-researcher navigates insider-outsider positionality while building relationships with educators and children in an outdoor early childhood education setting. Findings indicate that prior experience in early childhood education supports authentic connection and trust, while embracing a dual educator-researcher role deepens relational understanding and interpretation. The authors highlight reflexive journaling as a valuable methodological practice for strengthening relational ethics and positional awareness in early childhood research.

Heather Turnbull contributed a qualitative multiple case study entitled *Navigating Connection: Exploring How Ontario Elementary Teachers Cultivate Relationships in Synchronous Grade 7 and 8 Online Classrooms*. Drawing on semi-structured interviews with five Ontario teachers, the study examines how educators build rapport and foster connection in non-emergency synchronous online learning environments. Thematic analysis revealed four key themes: developing intentional connections, building digital communities, teacher authenticity, and online learning as a safe space. The findings highlight the relational and pedagogical strategies teachers use to navigate technology,

support diverse student needs, and create inclusive, equitable online classrooms, offering insights for the continued development of synchronous elementary online education in Ontario.

Natasha Faroogh contributed a conceptual and policy-focused paper entitled *Why Are Teachers in Ontario Afraid to Talk About Palestinian Rights and Freedoms?* Drawing on curriculum analysis, policy review, media discourse, and educators' shared experiences, Faroogh examines how anti-Palestinian racism, surveillance, and the conflation of anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism shape teachers' sense of safety and autonomy in Ontario schools. The paper argues that the adoption of the IHRA working definition of anti-Semitism, alongside broader structures of whiteness and institutional risk management, has contributed to a climate of fear that discourages educators from addressing Palestinian rights and freedoms. Faroogh concludes by calling for policy reform, targeted professional learning on anti-Palestinian racism, and greater institutional protections to ensure that educators and students can engage critically with human rights issues in schools.

Jasmin Lundy contributed a conceptual paper entitled *Curriculum Enacted as the Aesthetic in British Columbia: Where Are We Now? Where Can We Go? And How Might We Get There?* Drawing on curriculum theory and Maxine Greene's work on aesthetic education, Lundy examines the possibilities for enacting aesthetic pedagogy within British Columbia's K–12 public education system. The paper explores how BC's competency-based curriculum creates space for aesthetic approaches while also attending to the material realities of teachers' training, workload, and working conditions. Lundy argues that meaningful pedagogical shifts toward aesthetic education require not only curricular flexibility but also sustained institutional support, including targeted teacher education and improved working conditions, to enable teachers to engage in this work thoughtfully and sustainably.

Krista L. Bryson, Synthia MacEachern, Terri Jackson, and Cinthya Guzman contributed a literature review entitled *Building Adult Capacity to Support Executive Functioning: A Universal Design for Learning Approach*. Drawing on interdisciplinary research from neuroscience, education, and adult learning, the authors examine how Universal Design for Learning (UDL) can support adults' understanding of executive functioning in neurodiverse populations. The review identifies four key stakeholder groups including neurodiverse adults, parents and caregivers, educators, and pre-service teachers and synthesizes strategies that promote reflection, self-regulation, and skill transfer across each group. Integrating UDL with adult learning theory and Communities of Practice, the authors propose an inclusive, strengths-based framework for capacity building and outline directions for future research and applied community-based initiatives.

Hely Colina contributed a literature review entitled *Vocabulary Learning through Morphology*. Colina synthesizes theoretical and empirical research on the role of morphological instruction in supporting vocabulary development for English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners. The review examines both explicit and implicit instructional approaches, highlighting how morphological awareness can enhance learners' ability to decode, understand, and retain new vocabulary. Colina identifies key challenges related to learner variables and instructional implementation and calls for further research into long-term outcomes and pedagogical strategies that effectively integrate morphological instruction into EAL classrooms.

Jessie Fraser contributed a literature review entitled *Decolonizing Community First Aid Education: Sharing Epistemologies and Pedagogies*. Fraser examines how Canadian community first aid education universalizes Western epistemologies, reinforcing colonial power structures and marginalizing Indigenous ways of knowing. Drawing on Indigenous health philosophies, pedagogical approaches, and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, the review explores the possibilities for ethically integrating Indigenous and Western knowledge systems within community-based first aid programs. Fraser concludes that Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall's Two-Eyed Seeing framework offers a promising pathway for co-creating decolonized, relational, and culturally grounded first aid education in partnership with Indigenous communities.

Bilgi Basak Ozgun contributed a thematic literature analysis entitled *Ecojustice in Pre-Service Teacher Education*. Drawing on recent empirical and conceptual research, Ozgun examines how ecojustice is framed and enacted within pre-service teacher education, with particular attention to the Canadian context. The analysis identifies promising pedagogical approaches such as experiential learning, culturally responsive pedagogy, and the integration of Indigenous knowledge, alongside persistent challenges including fragmented curricula, limited institutional support,

and sociocultural resistance. Ozgun argues that bridging the gap between ecojustice theory and practice requires a cohesive, context-sensitive framework that prepares future educators to engage with the interconnected ecological and social responsibilities of contemporary education.

Talita Primola contributed a literature review entitled *Examining the Role of Emotional Connection between Educators and Immigrant Children in Early Childhood Education*. Grounded in Attachment Theory and the Ethics of Care, Primola synthesizes research examining how emotionally secure and nurturing educator–child relationships support immigrant children's academic development and social-emotional well-being in Canadian preschool contexts. The review highlights the importance of culturally responsive practices, emotional support, and educator training in helping children navigate linguistic and cultural transitions. Primola identifies gaps in the literature related to measuring emotional adaptation and calls for further research into the long-term impacts of emotional connection on immigrant children's educational experiences.

Vedrana Vodopivec contributed a literature-based analysis entitled *Understanding the Digital Divide: Contributing Factors and Their Negative Effects on Rural Students' Academic Performance*. Synthesizing findings from 32 studies, Vodopivec examines how limited access to digital technology and reliable internet in rural communities negatively affects students' academic achievement, participation, and long-term educational outcomes. The analysis identifies key contributing factors to the digital divide, including infrastructure gaps, affordability barriers, and limited digital literacy supports, and highlights how these inequities reinforce broader educational inequalities. Vodopivec calls for coordinated policy responses that strengthen broadband infrastructure, expand digital literacy education, and promote equitable access to digital resources for rural learners.

Nicole Doering contributed a book review of *The Depth Advantage: Deeper Learning in a Distracted World* by John Spencer. Doering examines Spencer's argument that deeper learning requires more than minimizing digital distractions and instead depends on cultivating eight interconnected competencies: focus, mastery, problem-solving, curiosity, self-direction, resilience, collaboration, and communication. The review outlines the book's structure, which blends research, classroom examples, reflective prompts, and practical tools, and highlights its emphasis on supporting student agency and meaningful learning. Doering notes both the strengths of the book as an accessible, practice-oriented resource for educators and the challenges associated with implementing deeper learning approaches within existing school structures and assessment practices.

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