

Introduction to the Special Issue: Proceedings for the 2020 Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference**Ruth Ayoola-Adeniyi, Angelina Heer, Alicia F. Noreiga¹**

The 9th annual Atlantic Education Graduate Student Conference (AEGSC) was held in partnership with the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) on June 20th, 2020. Graduate students from the Faculty of Education at the University of New Brunswick (UNB), coordinated the virtual conference. As UNB graduate students, we recognize and respectfully acknowledge that the land which we gather is located on the unsundered and unceded traditional lands of Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) and Mi'kmaq Peoples. This territory is covered by the "Treaties of Peace and Friendship" which the Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet), Mi'kmaq, and Passamaquoddy Peoples first signed with the British Crown in 1725. The treaties did not deal with the surrender of lands and resources but recognized Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet), Mi'kmaq, and Passamaquoddy title over the lands and established the rules for what was to be an ongoing relationship between nations. UNB's graduate students are privileged to be living and studying on traditional lands and recognize that all AEGSC's attendees benefit from the generosity of the keepers of the land which they occupy (Downey, Gallagher & Noreiga, 2020; Thorpe, 2018).

The AEGSC provides a wide range of benefits for graduate students and emerging scholars, ranging from creating networking opportunities to enhancing experiences in presenting research. AEGSC, and the proceedings that follow, are designed by and for graduate students and creates a space for graduate students to share their research in a supportive environment. *Antistasis*, the journal that publishes AEGSC's proceedings, is perhaps the only education journal situated in Canada that provides students and education scholars with a forum to explore a broad range of educational issues and research situated, connected to, and appreciative of Atlantic Canada (Downey et al., 2020). The 2020 AEGSC proceedings showcase both research and theoretical literature, composed by students of varying backgrounds and fields of interest. The texts describe both traditional and contemporary methodologies mainly geared toward analyzing social-justice issues.

The theme of this year's proceedings is "Entanglements of Learning." This theme was chosen with the intent of creating a generative space for student educators to reflect on the complexities of education and their linkages to our evolving world. Classrooms, communities, and public and private spaces all interrelate (Harris, 2021). We choose to call these connections *entanglements*. We exist in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) world (Shields, 2018) where pedagogies that were once considered unchanging are now more often described as fluid. In this rapidly changing 21st century, educators and education researchers must extend learning beyond the confines of the classroom and understand the numerous ways both education and community coalesce. They must embrace the entanglements that links pedagogies to practice,

¹ Authorship is listed in alphabetical order. No hierarchical positioning is intended to be interpreted from the order of authorship. All authors share responsibility for the contents of the material herewithin.

education to culture, and technology to learning. Education is complex, non-linear, and heterogenous. Understanding these complexities as entanglements, through our theme, we hope to encourage graduate students to participate in the (re)design of innovative learning environments in ways that reflect shared epistemologies and accommodate increasing levels of complexity and diversity.

COVID-19 is one of the greatest challenges national education systems ever faced (Daniel, 2020). Many institutions ceased face-to-face instructions for most of their students, requiring students and educators to switch, overnight, to online teaching and virtual education. According to UNESCO, on 1 April 2020, schools and higher education institutions were closed in 185 countries, affecting 1,542,412,000 learners, which constituted 89.4% of total enrolled learners (cited in Daniel, 2020). As universities shift to online and remote course delivery modes, student researchers also needed to modify research methods to alternate modes of non-physical and technological approaches. Due to COVID-19 impacts, the AEGSC 2020 took place online in an asynchronous format. Graduate students showed their innovativeness as they created digital versions of their presentations hosted on the conference's website (<http://aegsc.educ.unb.ca>). Although most of the reported studies that formed this year's proceedings were not conducted during the pandemic, authors would have been grappling with the pandemic's effects as they composed their proceedings. As such, reflections on COVID-19 may have influenced their expressions on the complexities of education and the need for equally complex education research and delivery methods.

This year's proceedings reflect a wide range of disciplines and methodologies and covers research in Atlantic Canada and beyond. Through rigorous and comprehensive peer review and copyediting processes, this year's proceedings promise to display exemplary scholarly works that reflect high levels of research and authorship among emerging scholars. The articles in this issue are arranged according to the topics discussed in each paper to create a series of articles structured in a manner that allows one topic to relate to the other.

We begin this year's proceedings with Allen Chase's "Dominant Society, Education, and Neoliberalism in the Age of COVID-19." Here, Chase reflects on the interconnected ideas of freedom, democracy, and capitalism and his role as an educator in the process. Through the structuralist critical theory framework, Chase questions how we all might be complicit in replicating the status quo where few people or a central government holds the power that impacts the future of many. Further, he notes that while states continue to exert influence on the racialized and minority communities, some educational institutions in the early days of the pandemic were replicating this dominance through technology and virtual learnings, at the detriments of their low-income students. Despite the challenges of dealing with the global pandemic, Chase remains optimistic about the critical factor of education as a viable force for challenging the international state of affairs in our communities.

In keeping with Chases' focus on democracy and capitalism, Alicia Noreiga's "An Intersectional Approach to Exploring Rural Education in Trinidad and Tobago" highlights dominant practices

that, she posits, have historically disadvantaged Trinidad and Tobago's rural communities. Noreiga explores four theoretical underpinnings—theories of rurality, island theory, colonization theory, and critical theory—to create a cohesive epistemological understanding of educational issues that often disregard rural communities' development. Noreiga uses this bricolage approach to analyse the ways theories intersect in relation to the country's rural education, and by extension rural community development. She puts forward compelling arguments to justify her belief that rural education challenges in Trinidad and Tobago are not limited to rural-urban issues but are combinations of several phenomena, such as being part of an island, located in rural areas, dealing with postcolonial factors, and being victims of oppression.

Further examining colonialist dominant ideologies, Alicia Noreiga and Shernel Justin's article entitled "A Duo-ethnography of Black International University Students in Canada" highlights the authors' personal experiences on how their race and immigration status influences their education experiences in Canada. In this article, the authors chronicled their educational migration's intriguing stories and reflect on how their racial background consciousnesses further aggravated their struggles as international students. For the authors, the common themes emerging from their stories were the feelings of isolation, loneliness, and social identity crisis as they continue to navigate their academic journey. The authors call for intentionality in providing continuing support and promoting equity for Black international students enrolled in Canadian universities.

Also employing an auto ethnographic approach to understanding racial dominance and the effects of colonization, Katie Hamill brings attention to the importance of researcher positionality in the article "Collage: A Participatory Visual Methodology for Reflexive Research." As a settler conducting research on human rights education, Hamill recognizes that research is occurring while living on traditional unsurrendered and unceded traditional lands of Wolastoqiyik (Maliseet) and Mi'kmaq Peoples. Using a participatory visual methodology, Hamill walks the reader through a visual analysis of two collages that were produced from recycled materials. Hamill situates her white-settler privilege while conducting research on stolen land and provides an example of how a researcher can engage in reflexive praxis throughout the entire research process from data collection to data analysis.

In keeping with the indigenous focus, in the article "Literacy Instruction in Nunavut," Katharine Bartlett summarizes the initial findings of a doctoral research study. The purpose of the study is to collect and examine stories shared by Inuit and non-Inuit educators across Nunavut about the new literacy framework that was adopted by the Nunavut Department of Education in 2014. Bartlett briefly describes the chosen data collection and process, and the emerging themes that relate to successful practices and resourceful strategies that educators in Nunavut have had to use to overcome challenges of the literacy framework. In conclusion, the author discusses the next steps in the research process, and the beginning of data analysis while adhering to grounded theory methodology and Inuit societal values. Bartlett's contribution to this year's proceedings has the potential to strengthen the ongoing implementation of the Nunavut literacy framework and inform future initiatives.

Lisa Michaud's "Oral Proficiency: The Communicative Competence of Early French Immersion Students" also examines language in education. Michaud's article features the results from one aspect of a broader research focusing on French immersion student performance. Employing a comparative discourse analysis of six oral interviews retrieved from the New Brunswick Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (NB EECD), Michaud examines the question: What linguistic evidence can be identified in the oral interviews to explain early French immersion (EFI) students' attained language proficiency placement in relation to the performance criteria as identified in the OPI scale? Michaud utilizes Celce-Murica's (2007) model of communicative competence as the theoretical framework to analyse six sample of oral interviews. The arguments and results highlighted in Michaud's paper can contribute to knowledge in the field of bilingual education in a New Brunswick context and support future EFI students in their attainment of an Advanced level of oral proficiency.

Finally, in attaining physical and mental wellbeing during these unprecedented times, Michelle Greenwell's article entitled "Optimization of Self-Care and Empowerment Awareness through Muscle Monitoring, Movement Understanding, and BioEnergetic Wellness Tools" follows. Here Greenwell focuses on understanding the shift in awareness and empowerment from experience with muscle monitoring, whole-body movement, and selected bioenergetic wellness tools offered within a movement program. Greenwell's interest in wellness stems from an innate professional drive to ensure students understand how their body functions and how students and their bodies deal with challenges movements pose. Through conversation and the use of retrospective interviews, participants' stories helped recount their experiences of using the BioEnergetic Wellness technique while providing a shared understanding needed to evaluate the program's effectiveness.

Conclusion

The year 2020 was impacted by several significant global events. From the outbreak of the novel coronavirus to the killing of George Floyd, the world has caused a shift in how educational institutions and stakeholders are re-imagining their learning spaces to support social, cultural, and practical evolutions. Researchers are beginning to reflect on how some socio-cultural issues shape how they think and do their research. The articles presented here suggest such reflections. This is the first year AEGSC has worked in partnership with CCPA to foster a greater collaboration with counselling student educators both in research and practice. The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) is the national professional body for counsellors. Throughout the conference and the proceedings that follow, we consider the CCPA Code of Ethics' recognition of scholarly research as critical for counselling/therapy as it contributes to advancing evidence-informed practice (CCPA, 2020) along with UNB's Faculty of Education's dedication to learning experiences that encourage critical inquiry, equity, social justice and participatory citizenship by supporting teaching, research, scholarship, creative activity and service that strengthen education and enrich community life (UNB, 2021). We look forward to continuing to build this relationship with our counselling educators.

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