

Editorial

Educational Research, Policy, and Collaboration for the Future of Public Education

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As we write this editorial in December 2022, a season of celebration, reflection, and renewal, we are struck by how each article in this winter issue offers something to celebrate about Canadian public schools, while simultaneously urging us to reflect on what needs to be changed and improved. Cutting-edge research in this issue offers much to educators, leaders, and policy makers for planning ahead. Specifically, covering the period of the last two decades, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the research in this collection illuminates learning opportunities, experiences, and outcomes across primary and secondary schools in Canada and the provincial-level policies that determine and/or shape them. The specific topics include high school completion patterns, the effects of summer learning programs, the experiences of physically-distanced learning during the pandemic, cross-country policy responses to the pandemic, and the future of robotics-incorporated education. In this editorial, we discuss the significance of each of these studies, while emphasizing that more research is needed on issues impacting under-represented groups, especially research undertaken by, with, and for Indigenous and Black people and communities.

Robson, Malette, Anisef, Maier, and Brown investigate persistent questions about why some students complete high school while others do not. By drawing on data from two Grade 9 cohorts (2006 and 2011) from the Toronto District School Board, their research contributes to understanding the patterns of high school completion in Canada's largest city and draws on demographic data (gender, race, parental education, and household income) and school-related predictors, such as academic achievement, special

education needs, Grade 9 absenteeism, and suspensions. A key contribution of their research is thus not only how these different factors explain high school completion but also how their impact has changed over time. They identify the progress that has been made among Black students and provide insights into new lines of research and policy directions that can be taken up in the future.

The extent to which summer breaks impact student academic skills and achievement has been a subject of concern and debate for some time in Canada and elsewhere. Davies, Aurini, and Hillier provide new evidence and understandings based on their unique mixed-methods study of summer programs for students in Grades 1 to 3 in Ontario from 2010 to 2015. Notably, these programs were implemented largely in schools that were identified as achieving below the average compared to the rest of Ontario. Based on large-scale administrative data (over 10,000 students) and interviews with over 200 teachers and parents, they assess the extent to which summer programs have provided opportunities and other benefits. The authors further note that the lessons learned from implementing summer learning programs could be used to inform post-COVID-19 learning recovery strategies.

Indeed, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is still being felt across the Canadian education landscape. The research by Carpentier, Sauvageau, and Roy is timely in assessing the impact of the pandemic on primary school students' perceptions of their classrooms as a socio-pedagogical environment. The authors note that examining the context of a socially distanced classroom is particularly important because the primary school years are typically characterized by closeness and direct interaction with peers and the teacher in the daily practice of learning. As such, in the fall of 2020, when direct contact between researchers and participants was restricted, they employed a survey method to get responses from 1,002 students (aged six to 12). Their findings indicate that young students experienced and reacted to the stress caused by the pandemic in various ways, offering timely insights into what needs to be done in the aftermath, and in response to the ongoing effects of the pandemic, to strengthen the relational, pedagogical, security, justice, and belonging climate in classrooms.

Volante, Lara, Klinger, and Siegel examine the COVID-19 pandemic responses from all 10 Canadian provinces. They assess the responses using a Triarchic Model of Academic Resilience, which includes academic performance, physical well-being, and mental health. They argue that it is important to conceptualize schooling as something

broader than academic achievement by including non-cognitive domains of education, including food security, daily exercise, and supporting wellness, especially amid the uncertainty and precarity of a global pandemic. The authors identify some major strengths of policy responses to the COVID-19 pandemic thus far; however, they urge each province to pay greater attention to making resources and supports available for physical and mental well-being. Also, further assessment of the differential effects of the pandemic across communities is called for so that equity-driven support can be provided.

Looking further into the future, Stokes, Aurini, Rizk, Gorbet, and McLevey examine the promise of using robotics in K-12 classrooms. Indeed, with the rise of new technologies in all facets of our world, it is important to consider relevant ways that educators can approach teaching Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics in our changing times. Drawing on a mixed-methods approach comprising surveys and interviews from nine school boards in Ontario, this study provides insights into what elementary school teachers and students see as current challenges and future potential about the broader adoption of robotics. Indeed, it would be critical for future research to further examine how resources for technology-enriched education, including iPads, robots, professional development, infrastructure, specialized teachers, and staff, are distributed across public schools in times of austerity, fundraising inequalities, and inequitable educational opportunities for students in under-represented communities.

Together, the research encapsulated in this issue points to critical relationships among research, practice, and policy. To strengthen this relationship, researchers call for not only more nuanced data to be collected but also greater data accessibility for researchers who are serving the public interest. Indeed, more race-based data are needed to address historical, social, and racial inequities in Canadian schools. To better understand the schooling patterns of under-represented groups such as Indigenous students, who are often excluded from analysis due to their small numbers, other types of research need to supplement existing research, including qualitative research. Also, parental education levels need to be identified along with the origins of their credentials to take into consideration the different cultural capital associated with education so that the variable would be more meaningfully captured in the context of Canada. In looking to the future, more collaboration and partnership among school divisions, education ministries, academic researchers, and communities could be mutually beneficial in providing more comprehensively-informed research that is able to meaningfully inform policy and practice. Stronger

collaboration would make a significant difference in identifying systemic barriers and could better inform future education and policy making aimed at compensating for the historical and lasting effects of unfairness, injustice, and violence emerging from capitalism, colonialism, and neoliberalism.

In closing, we hope that this issue provides timely, critical, and socially relevant research that can inform practice and policy in the next few years and beyond. In this spirit, we look forward to receiving more submissions in the new year that offer new insights and evidence that strengthens public education systems, especially by better serving under-represented groups and communities, in Canada and worldwide.