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(See the back cover for a description.)

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Marion Terry, Ph.D.

Welcome to the thirtieth issue of the *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, devoted to rural, northern, and Aboriginal education. Our authors for volume 14, issue 1, are current and past BU Faculty of Education graduate students. I thank these educators for sharing their work. Together, they have produced a collection of articles that reflect their experiences as educators in Manitoba.

- T. Scott Dempster's refereed article connects students' understanding of mathematics in Manitoba to factors related to quality of instruction and math anxiety.
- Brent Barsewski's refereed article discusses blended learning as a complicated educational initiative during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Robin LeBlanc's refereed article recommends ways to mitigate the negative effects of large class sizes on teachers and students.
- Trisha Wilson's refereed article holds educators, parents, and the community responsible for helping students who struggle with anxiety and depression.
- Shannon Riccio's refereed article explains how early interventions and behaviour therapy can address feeding problems in students on the autism spectrum.
- Chantalle Crepeele's refereed article examines current factors and potential solutions associated with student learning gaps.
- Kelsey Kroeker's refereed article challenges educators to remove bullying, name-calling, and aggressive behaviours from outdoor recess areas of the schoolyard.

Also included in this issue is our "Celebration of Scholarship," to honour graduate students who completed their M.Ed. degrees with theses in 2020.

As well, this issue features a "Focus on Faculty" research report by 7 members of Brandon University's Status of Women Review Committee research team.

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Addressing Concerns Related to Low Student Understanding in Mathematics in Manitoba

T. Scott Dempster

Abstract

Students in Manitoba have demonstrated a lower-than-average understanding of mathematics concepts. Two areas that contribute to this level of understanding are quality of instruction and math anxiety in students and teachers. Quality of instruction can be addressed through the intentional design of lessons around quality, deeper thinking tasks. Building academically safe classrooms can improve math anxiety in students. Math anxiety in teachers can be addressed by providing professional development for teachers and appropriate coursework for pre-service teachers, thus also improving the quality of instruction. Focus on these two areas of concern could have positive benefits for increasing students' understanding of mathematics in Manitoba.

Students in Manitoba have demonstrated a lower-than-average understanding in mathematics concepts when compared to their peers in other provinces, as reported on the PCAP assessment in 2016 (Ballantyne, 2019) and provincial math assessment scores in the 2017/2018 school year (Government of Manitoba, n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c.). It is not possible for students to gain a deep understanding of concepts through low-quality instruction (Krall, 2018). Furthermore, math anxiety in students leads to lower performance during math class, and in teachers leads to lower quality instruction (Ganley et al., 2019). Quality of instruction and math anxiety will have to be addressed in Manitoba in order to understand and mitigate low understanding of mathematics concepts.

Problems Related to Low Student Understanding in Mathematics

Two areas that contribute to lower understanding in mathematics in general are quality of instruction and math anxiety. Students are often asked to memorize rote facts and procedures, and are not exposed to deeper level thinking. Alternatively, they are asked to focus on surface level questions, stalling student learning.

The second factor is that many students, and teachers, experience math anxiety. Math anxiety in students inhibits their ability to learn concepts, and math anxiety in teachers negatively affects instruction (Ganley et al., 2019). Quality of instruction and math anxiety in Manitoba classrooms negatively impact student experiences in mathematics classrooms, fostering fixed mindsets and negative mathematical identities (Boaler, 2019). This leads to low student understanding of concepts.

Quality of Instruction

It is nearly impossible for students to gain a deep understanding of concepts when they are presented with only low-quality rote tasks and questions. Furthermore, when students are not presented with the opportunities to see math as a creative discipline, their thinking around math concepts suffers (Krall, 2018). Teachers' understanding of the depth of questions they ask is highly skewed. In a recent study, it was found that teachers highly under-reported surface level (Depth of Knowledge 1) questions, and over-reported deeper level (Depth of Knowledge 4) questions in math classes (Barikmo, 2021). Instruction that focusses on Depth of Knowledge 1 tasks does not help students to learn concepts deeply, which helps them to compress newfound

knowledge, making it easier to retrieve when needed for future problems (Boaler, 2019). When teachers' level of questioning is deeper, their quality of instruction will also be deeper, focusing on more than procedures alone.

Quality of instruction is negatively affected by rote and procedural questioning and tasks. Students learn that math is about following instructions and rules, which places more emphasis on being fast and smart than on learning a deep understanding of concepts (Boaler & Williams, 2015). However, students learn best through non-traditional methods that encourage student discourse and collaboration in order to make sense of concepts and procedures, discovering the understanding behind them instead of memorizing (Ballantyne, 2019). Successful students learn to use multiple pathways in their brain, making sense of the math presented to them, looking for patterns, relationships, and connections. On the contrary, struggling students do not learn to use number sense, and instead focus on fixed procedures they may not yet understand (Boaler, 2019). Focusing on rote procedures and basic facts in isolation limits students in their learning of mathematics concepts. This leads students to believe they are not good at math, forming a negative mathematical identity, and preventing them further from making sense of concepts.

Math Anxiety

Math anxiety can occur when students do not see themselves as successful in math, which further leads to low performance and understanding. When students do not feel successful, they begin to develop a fixed mindset that they are not capable in math or are not a math person (Boaler, 2019). Furthermore, teachers with math anxiety tend to shy away from math in their teaching or teach concepts on a surface level that focuses on performing procedures over conceptual understanding (Ganley et al., 2019).

Math anxiety can be found in children as young as five years old (Tomasetto et al., 2021). This anxiety can lead to students being unable to access the information they do know, such as basic math facts, and inhibits the learning of new information because they are not able to access the working memory in their brains (Boaler & Williams, 2015). If nothing changes, students continue through school with this anxiety and develop a fixed mindset that they are not good at math. These students do not see themselves as successful, which correlates with their achievement in math and leads to math anxiety and avoidance (Boaler & Foster, 2021). Addressing math anxiety in students could have profound implications for student understanding in math because students would have an unlimited mindset about math and their abilities in math.

Teachers who experience math anxiety spend less time planning and teaching math (Ganley et al., 2019). When they do teach math, they plan lessons that are more teacher centred and focused on procedural understanding of surface level skills instead of deep, conceptual understanding (Ganley et al., 2019). These experiences tell students that math is a procedural discipline, as opposed to a creative discipline requiring deep critical thinking (Krall, 2018). Therefore, math anxiety experienced by teachers contributes to surface level lessons and questioning in math classrooms, not providing students with the opportunity to learn math at a deep level.

Solutions to Address Low Student Understanding in Mathematics

Addressing the areas of low-quality instruction and math anxiety in our classrooms will provide students in Manitoba the opportunity to increase their understanding of mathematics concepts and build positive mathematical mindsets. Lessons, tasks, and activities should be designed in ways that promote discussion and deep understanding of concepts. At the same time, there is a need to address math anxiety and build academically safe classrooms wherein all students feel safe to contribute their thinking. Further, math anxiety of practising teachers and pre-service teachers must be addressed to build their confidence and skills in teaching math. Addressing the quality of instruction and math anxiety in Manitoba is critical to responding to low student understanding in math.

Quality of Instruction

Shifting instruction from rote, procedural lessons to lessons focused around conceptual understanding and connections emphasizes student thinking. To do this, teachers need to make visible the knowledge that students contribute to lessons and allow students to struggle productively with problems (Liljedahl, 2021). Highlighting student thinking creates an environment wherein teachers are not the only source of knowledge in the classroom, helping students to see themselves as contributors. Shifting to student-centred instruction encourages students to make sense of the concepts, which should be the focus of each math lesson (Small & Duff, 2018). Students retain their newfound knowledge and skills better when given the opportunity to learn through high-level tasks as opposed to low-level rote procedural tasks, because they are thinking more deeply about concepts (Krall, 2018). Therefore, students need to be asked to make sense of quality tasks and problems, and to struggle with their ideas in order to develop a deep understanding of the concepts learned. Shifting from *teaching procedures* to *teaching through problem solving* puts the onus on students to make sense of concepts.

In order to improve student understanding, teachers must facilitate learning opportunities by designing lessons around quality tasks that focus on learning concepts on a deep level as opposed to only at a surface level (Smith et al., 2020). Quality tasks create interest for students, requiring them to think deeply and pushing them to extend ideas beyond the superficial thinking involved in traditional lessons and activities. Once students are engaged in concepts, they can be expected to think deeply about the ideas they are learning (Small & Duff, 2018). Designing lessons around quality tasks engages students and encourages them to want to know the math needed to solve problems. Quality tasks spark curiosity and engagement among students. They have multiple access points for all students to enter and require deep understanding of mathematical content. Quality tasks can be used to by teachers to connect and extend understanding and encourage creativity in finding solutions (Krall, 2018). An example of quality tasks is asking students to find all of the possible perimeters of a rectangle with a given area. This requires students to find multiple solutions, as opposed to a surface level type task such as solving for the perimeter and area of a single rectangle given the length and width. Students engaging with quality tasks find themselves connecting their understanding of concepts and skills because they are thinking about how they can best solve a problem or complete a task. Teachers can focus students toward understanding due to the engagement of students and their need to understand concepts in order to be successful in solving problems.

Focusing questions, intentionally designed around student thinking, helps students to think critically about concepts. On the other hand, funneling questions guide students to a specific method for answering a problem, which is usually the teacher's way of thinking (Herbal-Eisenmann & Breyfogle, 2005). Teachers can improve their questioning techniques by listening to their students for their understanding of concepts rather than listening only for misconceptions or solutions (Krall, 2018). Being intentional about the types of questions asked during a lesson can create a learning experience for students whereby they are guided to think about the concepts being learned, and their understanding of those concepts. This will encourage students to move beyond using step-by-step procedures in isolation with little meaning understood.

A lesson should be designed with an appropriate learning goal that is explicit to what students are expected to learn instead of what they are supposed to do. Teachers can reflect on their lesson(s) by considering each student's ability to access tasks, and how a task will encourage students not only to think, but also to reason with the concepts. Once teachers have a quality learning goal, they can begin to select an appropriate task (Smith et al., 2020). Good tasks for problem solving have students become stuck, think, and try sometimes multiple strategies before they find the necessary knowledge to solve the problem (Lilidajhl, 2021). It is through these tasks that students build on their previous knowledge to form new and deep

understandings of concepts learned, and to connect ideas across curricula.

Selecting quality tasks is a critical component of lesson design, but there needs to be a framework to foster the appropriate conditions for students to discuss the concepts they are learning. Smith and Stein (2011) designed the five practices model for facilitating a math lesson to move toward a student-centred model of instruction. The components of the five practices model are anticipating a lesson, monitoring student responses to the lesson, selecting and sequencing student solutions, and finally connecting student solutions when consolidating the lesson. This framework assists teachers in guiding students toward a defined learning goal while encouraging student collaboration and discourse. Students are afforded more independence in their learning, and the teacher can focus attention on those students and groups who need it most (Liljedahl, 2021). Students can grapple with problems, try, fail, and eventually discover new understandings and connections to solve the problem. Teachers can conclude a lesson by connecting student thinking to key mathematical ideas and generalizations in order to develop deep conceptual understandings (Smith & Stein, 2011). Structuring lessons by using the five practices model provides teachers with the necessary lesson structure while considering the importance of student-centred learning in math.

Math Anxiety

Changing lesson design and facilitation to a focus on deep thinking around mathematical concepts will also help with addressing math anxiety. Teaching through problem solving shows students that the teacher believes in them and their mathematical abilities (Small & Duff, 2018). For our students to feel valued and be successful, they need to see their teachers having confidence in them. Part of this confidence is not solving a problem for the student, but instead asking questions to focus their thinking on the key concepts being learned (Herbal-Eisenmann & Breyfogle, 2005). Presenting students with quality problems, and allowing them to solve the problems without funneling them toward a solution, will build their confidence to do well in math because they will come to know that the teacher believes in them.

Furthermore, fostering academically safe classrooms will show students that their thinking is valued, and in turn they are valued. It is imperative that teachers be aware of the messages they send students with their actions, because these actions can be powerful predictors of students' feeling of safety in math (Krall, 2018). Teachers can build academically safe classrooms by encouraging and celebrating students when they show authentic math behaviours in school. Highlighting specific mathematical behaviours publicly shows students that their thinking as mathematicians is valued. However, this praise needs to be authentic for it to be received well by students (Krall, 2018)**.** When praise is authentic and about the math students were using, teachers can build students' positive mathematical identities. Over time, students will feel safe to contribute their thinking in math class because they will have an environment wherein it is safe to do so.

For teachers to show their students that they believe in them, the teachers also need to believe in their own abilities in math. Professional development could help to increase teachers' confidence in their ability to do and teach math, effectively lowering anxiety for teaching math (Ballantyne, 2019). Professional development for practising teachers can be done through in-person training or by using technology to increase teacher knowledge for instructional decision making and to augment general knowledge for teaching math (Heck et al., 2019). To reduce math anxiety in pre-service teachers, universities can expose them to teaching by problem solving, creating thinking classrooms, and using the five practices model (Young & Dyess, 2021). Furthermore, professional development sessions and courses around developing a growth mindset for practising and pre-service teachers can lead to decreased math anxiety (Young & Dyess, 2021). Teachers who receive sustained professional development feel more prepared to teach in the areas they received the training in (Heck et al., 2019). Providing teachers with this professional development and coursework could help to lower the math

anxiety of teachers and increase the quality of instruction. Increasing awareness around math anxiety in teachers will help to put in place interventions such as increased professional development and coursework around high-quality teaching practices.

Conclusion

Two areas contributing to students in Manitoba having a lower-than-average understanding in mathematics concepts are quality of instruction and math anxiety. Quality of instruction can be addressed by designing lessons around quality tasks that promote thinking on the part of the students. Designing lessons by using the five practices model helps teachers shift to more student-centred lessons. Math anxiety in students can be addressed by building academically safe classrooms wherein all students feel that their thinking is valued. Math anxiety in teachers can be addressed through professional development for practising teachers and coursework for pre-service teachers. Addressing these two areas could assist Manitoba schools to respond to low performance in math and to increase understanding of concepts.

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Blended Learning: The Balancing Act

Brent Barsewsky

Abstract

Blended learning (a combination of in-class and online learning) is growing as a popular form of education, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this style of education presents many issues for educators and students, related to teacher preparation, mental health, and technological expectations. Although these issues are frustrating at times, there are various ways to work around them. By finding solutions to these issues, educators will cultivate stronger learning experiences for students in the future. Blended learning promises to remain a part of society, and we must learn how to balance it in our lives.

March 2020 marked a jump into uncertainty in the world of education. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments and teachers were looking for innovative ways to continue educating students successfully. School closures and variable attendance, both stemming from uncontrollable factors, forced education to shift to embrace online platforms. It was during this time of great uncertainty that most schools shifted to the blended learning model to meet the needs of students both at home and at school. Blended learning involves in-class learning along with online components as well. It became clear that success in blended learning would require a balancing act for the teachers as well as students (McKenna et al., 2019). Many issues arose during blended learning implementation, and solutions needed to be found for it to be successful. Three of these issues were teacher preparation, mental health, and technological expectations. By understanding these various issues, and posing solutions, educators can move forward and incorporate blended learning effectively in the future.

Teacher Preparation

One of the major hurdles to executing blended learning was the lack of preparation regarding instructional strategies provided to educators so as to make this shift in a short period. This presented a challenge to teachers because, in addition to their regular duties, they also had to adapt to implementing said strategies as they encountered various issues (Barnwell, 2020). Teachers also needed to understand a wide variety of platforms to create a collaborative online community that would facilitate student learning (Vaughan et al., 2019). Collaboration would be essential in these matters, and schools needed to be clear on what their specific definition of blended learning entailed. Due to differing views or definitions of what blended learning required, many organizations failed to achieve one of the most important aspects of successful implementation, which is to be clear in their expectations for both teachers and learners (McKenna et al., 2019). Additionally, educators who found themselves teaching various subject areas, such as ESL, needed to have not only a solid understanding of their content area, but also a strong understanding of technology and language barriers with their students (Xu et al., 2020). Though many teachers successfully adapted to the implementation of instructional strategies throughout the pandemic, this was still a major cause for concern for Manitoba's educators.

Three solutions for issues in teacher preparation include building comfort in content area, professional development opportunities, and clear messaging from administrators. The first solution to solve the issue of teacher preparation is building comfort in teachers' content area. Teachers need the knowledge to create resources that will support them to be successful in designing assessments for their students, regardless of the delivery model (Panisoara et al., 2020). If teachers are not comfortable in their abilities, or knowledge on a subject, they will not produce quality learning opportunities for their students. Though it is clear that teachers must

have a level of subject matter knowledge (SMK) to effectively teach a course, it is becoming more evident that teachers need to master the content they are expecting their students to learn, and to diversify their explanations and learning strategies (Nixon et al., 2019). Comfort and knowledge in the teacher's subject area will ensure that when an opportunity for blended learning arises, teachers are not having to expend additional energy on learning materials, but instead can focus their efforts on preparing to use the online platform. This mastery of knowledge can come from additional coursework, mentor-teachers, or professional development opportunities.

Another solution that will assist teachers in their preparation for blended learning is an increase in professional development relating both to content areas and technology. Efficacy in blended learning requires a different skillset than in-person learning. However, these skills can be taught, especially those pertaining to technology. When it comes to technology, educators need to be trained properly in best practice, because this preparation will be the only way to create comfortable online learning experiences for both educators and their students (Egan & Crotty, 2020). Topics such as using computer programs, computer literacy, and digital citizenship are all relevant issues that teachers need to be familiar with and ready to incorporate when the opportunity for blended learning arises.

In addition to familiarity with technology, teachers would also benefit from clear messaging from their school administrators regarding which online platforms will be used. Using multiple platforms not only adds stress to educators, but also overwhelms students (Barnwell, 2020). In Mountain View School Division, grades 6-12 were required to use Microsoft Teams early in the technological transition. Teachers had to familiarize themselves with this app, and determine how best to engage their students online. Though Mountain View has returned to in-person learning, many teachers have continued to use Microsoft Teams, not only to retain their own knowledge, but also to continue to communicate with students, in case of a switch back to blended learning. The world of technology is ever changing, and it is imperative that educators are informed.

Mental Health

With the increased level of expectation, in addition to the constant state of worry that COVID-19 necessitated, mental health issues in relation to education became more prominent throughout blended learning. A lack of socialization, increased workloads, or simply the isolation of quarantine, plagued students and educators alike. Restrictions on physical distancing and limited social gatherings left a lasting impact on individuals, because they lacked basic human connection (Manitoba, 2021). Through experiences with blended learning, it became clear that mental health must be taken care of before meaningful education can take place during this time of unknowns (Barnwell, 2020). If educators failed to attain the care they needed during this time, the quality of education suffered. Further resources were required to equip educators and students with the skills, and the opportunities, to learn and speak about mental health during this crisis.

Some ways to address issues with mental health and blended learning during COVID-19 are focusing on relationships with students, relationships with coworkers, and feeling supported by administrators. To begin to solve the mental health issues that arise with blended learning, it is critical to prioritize relationships. Of all of the relationships, those between educators and their students are arguably the most important. Blended learning presents a unique challenge, because it removes the face-to-face environment that teachers and students have grown accustomed to. Evidence has shown that if teachers are experiencing mental health issues, such as teacher burnout, their students' academic success may be hindered (Panisoara et al., 2020). To avoid these issues, teachers can work to build relationships with their students through blended learning, by attempting to maintain classroom routines and opportunities for students and their teachers to get to know each other (Schoology, 2020). Providing students

with a safe place to communicate and interact on online platforms gives relationships the opportunity to flourish (Egan & Crotty, 2020). This sense of normalcy will not only put students at ease, but also help to reduce emotional stress for teachers as well.

Relationships with coworkers is another important solution to focus on in regards to mental health during blended learning. Studies have shown that reduced levels of human interaction have contributed to teacher burnout during the COVID-19 pandemic (Panisoara et al., 2020). To remedy this issue, school teams can incorporate icebreakers and other activities that promote communal engagement, while still adhering to social-distancing policies. This can take place during school hours or can include socializing outside school. Even taking the time to schedule group meetings for teachers to interact is important online and offline (Zadok-Gurman et al., 2021). Teachers need the opportunity to realize that they are not alone in their feelings, frustrations, and mental health issues. This realization greatly reduces the chances of teacher burnout (Burke, 2017).

Lastly, to avoid mental health issues during blended learning, teachers need to feel supported by their school administrators. When addressing school environment, teachers are less likely to experience feelings of teacher burnout when they have a positive relationship with their administrative team (Panisoara et al., 2020). This relationship can flourish from regular check-ins, demonstrations of trust and loyalty, and a commitment to creating a school environment that values its educators. Especially in times of uncertainty, such as blended learning, teachers need to feel that their administrators would back them on any potential issues that could arise.

Technology

To implement blended learning and meet the technological expectations set by the provincial government, schools needed to prepare students with an understanding of how to use technology, and to guarantee access to a technological device at their home (McKenna et al., 2019). In Manitoba, government expectations often changed, and at times even communicating these changes to students and their families became difficult. It was expected that educators would jump from blended learning to full remote or in-class at any time that the pandemic required it (Manitoba, 2021). In rural communities, having adequate funds to supply technology to students was incredibly challenging. Financial privations affected funding not only for schools, but for local families as well. Families were lucky to receive one device to share, and because different ages required different online platforms, this issue quickly became frustrating. Moreover, even if families had access to a device, many did not have adequate internet access to complete online tasks. This internet access was all in addition to the basic need of merely keeping students engaged in learning and communicating with others (Barnwell, 2020). Though there was a great deal of adversity throughout the pandemic, access to technology was arguably the most frustrating, because it was a key component to student success outside the classroom.

Creating affordable laptop loan programs and providing Wi-Fi hot spots for student use are essential to blended learning success. When planning how to solve issues with technology during blended learning, it is important to consider students from low-income families and technology in rural areas. Government decisions may be out of educational control, but in terms of technology issues regarding blended learning, there are many solutions schools can pursue. The first of these is access to technology. Students and parents from low-income houses have not had the same access to technology, and therefore cannot expect to get the same education from teachers (Lake & Makori, 2020). School systems can solve this issue by providing technological devices to students coming from a low socio-economic background. Studies have shown that lending mobile devices such as laptops would be beneficial to families that could not afford it (Lake & Makori, 2020). This type of program was implemented at the Dauphin Regional Comprehensive Secondary School during the pandemic, and it was very well utilized. Not only

did many families sign up, but through surveys parents expressed that this program reduced the financial burden that blended learning would have otherwise incurred on their household.

In addition to providing technology to the students, rural areas have to deal with the growing concern of having limited to no internet access. Without internet access, the technology provided to the students would be useless, because they would not be able to access online classrooms or assignments. To combat this problem, schools could offer Wi-Fi hotspots that students would be able to access close to their rural areas (Lake & Makori, 2020). Schools could open up their Wi-Fi in the surrounding area of the building so that students with no internet access would be able to come to the parking lot, or nearby parks, and work on assignments for their classes. This way, they would be able to interact with their teachers and peers, and not fall behind in their assignments. It may be difficult to reach all unique student populations (Lake & Makori, 2020), but free Wi-Fi access may provide the majority of students the opportunity to continue their education during difficult times.

Conclusion

Blended learning has become the face of the future, and has been viewed as the new model of education (Um et al., 2021). However, no matter how effectively a new form can be implemented, there will always be areas in need of improvement. Three issues that needed to be addressed during the pandemic were teacher preparation, mental health, and technological expectations. Fortunately, all of these issues have tangible solutions. Teacher preparation is solved through incorporating more resources, increasing familiarity and comfort with technology, and providing teachers and support staff with clear directions set by administrators. Mental health issues can be improved by strengthening relationships and by building trust with school administrators. Technological expectations can be resolved by creating technology loan programs, and by increasing Wi-Fi hot spots for student use. These solutions will address the problems with blended learning, and allow this educational model to become a beneficial option for teachers in the future. With all of this in mind, one must remember that the incorporation of blended learning requires a balancing act. When balancing personal needs and professional needs, blended learning can become the future of education.

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Class Size: Overcoming the Effects on Teachers and Students

Robin LeBlanc

Abstract

A significant amount of research has been devoted to class size, in relation to student achievement. Success in the classroom is not only about increases in attainment. Fulfilment, and well-being, for teachers and students alike, is a more complete evaluation of improved achievement. The cost of reducing class sizes seems to be prohibitive, so teachers have adopted numerous strategies to cope with the increased numbers of students and their diversity. Teachers use educational assistants, resource teachers, specialized liaison assistants, and modern technology adapted for the classroom. Current research suggests that the use of subdued lighting and music can increase student focus. Innovative storage systems reduce congestion. Successful teachers use a combination of these strategies to reduce their own stress and to contribute to the overall achievement of all students in the classroom.

Over many decades, researchers have endeavoured to determine what the optimum class size is for student and teacher success. More recent studies agree that this cannot be measured only in student attainment, but also in developing lifelong strategies for learners and lowering stress levels in educators. Because the cost of reducing class sizes is significant, teachers are adopting varying strategies to assist their work and enable their students to cope with the challenges of larger numbers of students in the classroom. Teachers are also having to adapt lesson plans and classroom management plans to meet a more diverse number of student needs. Overcoming physical constraints with innovative lesson plans, and taking advantage of school and classroom supports, are key to achieving harmony in the classroom. Teachers are also controlling their physical environments to provide a calm and relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, which results in increased focus and improvement of student attainment and teacher satisfaction.

Research Findings

Much research has been done to determine the correlation between class size and student attainment (Blatchford & Russell, 2020). Most studies have focussed on reading and math, with varying results. Some studies concluded that smaller class size increased student attainment in students in the lowest levels of achievement (Bosworth, 2014). However, the results recorded were less than significant. Conversely, other studies concluded that higher achieving students benefitted more from a reduced class size (Li & Konstantopoulos, 2017). Researchers did seem to agree that younger students, i.e., those in the first years of formal schooling, did show more marked improvements stemming from a reduction in class size (Li & Konstantopoulos, 2017).

Creating Lifelong Learners

While student attainment cannot be conclusively tied to smaller class sizes, enjoyment of school and creating lifelong learners can be attributed to the atmosphere created in a classroom with fewer students. Improved learning can be attributed to a higher level of engagement and more satisfaction with the school experience (Gorard & See, 2011). Teachers compete every day with video games and social networking platforms for their students' attention. Creating engaging lesson plans and innovative ways to present knowledge is a challenge teachers must rise to. Using the most current technology their school can provide, and online resources

approved by their school resource department, can help them to reach more students and improve engagement. Students develop a positive attitude toward learning when they feel in control of their environment (Gorard & See, 2011). Establishing daily and weekly routines helps students to feel stable and comfortable. Delegating daily activities to students and avoiding micromanaging is a win/win situation. Producing a task chart increases student capability and lightens the load for teachers. Students develop autonomy, and teachers take tedious tasks off their list. Factors that increase student engagement and enjoyment of school foster a love of learning that can follow students throughout their lifetime.

Small classes are less intimidating and encourage all students to have a voice (Gorard & See, 2011). While reducing student numbers in the classroom is not always possible, there are a few strategies that help each student to feel heard and appreciated. Morning check-ins allow teachers to assess each student's daily needs before instructional time begins. Sticking to routines gives students a consistency that is comforting and improves focus (Wannarka, 2016). Defining clear goals and expectations for acceptable behaviour and conduct gives students control of their outcomes. Making a point of giving individual attention to every student on a rotating basis, not just those in the most need, reinforces each student's self-esteem and importance. Keeping lines of communication open with the in-school team and home forges a positive connection with every student. Identifying each student's situation helps teachers understand the children's challenges and create individual strategies for success.

Using Dollars Wisely

Although at least 80% of states in the USA have adopted some sort of classroom cap, the price is extraordinarily high for modest increases in academic attainment (Lynch, 2017). Comparable increases in student attainment have been achieved by employing more experienced teachers (Kedagni et al., 2021). School boards should be concentrating on retaining skilled educators that bring proficiencies to the table. There must be consideration given to the amount of stress that constantly changing processes and ineffective programs put on already overtaxed teachers. When programs do not work efficiently and teachers are required to duplicate work to complete jobs, this puts an extra strain on their already overcommitted time. Employee assistance programs must be made available to reduce stress. Continued provision of professional development courses and materials must remain a high priority (Ekanayake & Wishart, 2015). Teaching resources are constantly evolving and there is always a new way to spend education dollars. Teachers must find inventive ways to use their resources to stretch those dollars. Making use of modern technology to deliver the most up-to-date knowledge to our students is critical (Ekanayake & Wishart, 2015). Therefore, ongoing professional development is essential to make the best use of education dollars.

Adapting for Students at Multiple Levels of Achievement

Today's teachers are faced with hugely divergent levels of student achievement within each grade level classroom, and are required to develop individualized lesson plans for every ability (Blatchford & Russell, 2020). They may be teaching to as many as four grade levels for each subject. Producing highly adaptable lesson plans and using classroom supports, such as educational assistants, will help them to reach students at all levels of achievement. Preparing individualized student plans is time consuming for educators, but ultimately contributes to the success of these students. Once a plan is in place, all educators have a road map to follow for these students. Within the classroom, creating small groups that concentrate increased efforts for weaker students can achieve higher levels of success for some. Routine withdrawals of students for extra instruction outside the classroom will ensure success for others. School resources, such as literacy or math educational assistants and resource teachers, are available to provide increased instruction for struggling students. Making use of more competent students

to support their classmates reinforces the achievers' knowledge while it encourages less successful students to persevere with their studies (Kedagni et al., 2021). Identifying and addressing the needs of students at all levels leads to increased achievement and enjoyment for all. Teachers must use every advantage available to them to overcome the challenge of larger classrooms. Use of classroom educational assistants to connect with more students and support those who need extra instruction is step one. Using resource educational assistants in math, reading or specialized areas, such as Indigenous liaison or school counsellors, creates one-on-one connections between students and staff and increases the students' levels of achievement and sense of well-being (Dong et al., 2021). Learning to share resources between classrooms at the same level supports weaker students who need additional assistance.

Controlling Physical Space and Conditions in the Classroom

Physical space alone contributes to the success of students (Blatchford & Russell, 2020). Congestion in the classroom can lead to more behaviour problems and inefficient use of time for teachers to manage these problems (Li & Konstantopoulos, 2017). Setting up and maintaining an organized classroom with no clutter creates stability for students and teachers (Wannarka, 2016). Utilizing space outside the classroom lets teachers spend less time on behavioural management. Outdoor lessons, weather permitting, give students some much needed fresh air and more personal space, leading to less conflict between students. Taking advantage of classroom educational assistants to withdraw smaller groups of students working at a similar level reduces classroom congestion, and gives teachers opportunities to engage with more students one on one. Student engagement, and hence achievement, is related to the proximity of the teacher and positive interactions (Dong et al., 2021). These withdrawal opportunities provide each group with an increase of positive interactions. Teachers may also choose to move classroom activities to larger areas within the school, such as gymnasiums or auditoriums, where students get more physical activity and refresh their minds and bodies for learning. With a larger number of students in the classroom comes a decrease in storage space for both personal, and educational resource materials. Employing space-saving storage units and shelving areas can relieve congestion, and also reduce wasted time searching for needed materials. Taking advantage of all opportunities to reduce congestion leads to a more successful classroom for both teacher and students.

Current research suggests that using softer lighting and low-level background music improves mood and readiness for learning. Overly lit classrooms, especially those using fluorescent lighting, can cause headache and decrease performance (Winterbottom & Wilkins, 2009). Lowering lights and using alternate lighting sources can produce a calming effect and therefore improve the behaviour in the classroom. Background music also has a calming effect on students (White, 2007). Music creates a comfortable atmosphere for students and helps to eliminate distractions. The use of background music also aids in cancelling white noise. The classroom contains dozens of hard surfaces that can produce plenty of harsh sounds. Ambient music can reduce the influence of sharp sounds that are often distracting. Soft surfaces such as carpets, curtains and blinds and acoustic wall panels also dampen loud distractions. Computer programs such as Bouncy Balls or Too Noisy are free to use, and present the class with a visual representation of how much noise is acceptable. Students can be involved in setting the limits, and can see at a glance when the noise level is rising too much. Controlling lighting and noise contribute to a relaxed and calm atmosphere wherein students can find success.

Conclusion

Class size has been the subject of debate and research studies for many years. In recent years, we have begun to concentrate not only on student attainment, but also on lowering stress levels in educators and developing lifelong strategies for learners. Reducing class sizes is not

cost efficient, so teachers are forced to use numerous other strategies to help them, and their students, cope. To meet a more diverse number of student needs, educators are also having to adapt lesson plans and classroom management plans. Physical constraints of larger numbers of students in the classroom can be overcome with innovative lesson plans and utilization of school and classroom supports. Controlling environmental factors such as congestion, lighting, and acoustics also contributes to the calming ambience of the classroom. These are key to achieving harmony in the classroom, leading to the improvement of student attainment and teacher satisfaction.

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The Effects of Anxiety and Depression on a Student's Emotional Growth, and Supports for Parents and Educators

Trisha Wilson

Abstract

Young students' undetected anxiety and depressive symptoms may develop into bigger psychological issues in adulthood. Anxiety and depression are the leading contributors to childhood psychological illness (Finning et al., 2019). Students who are struggling emotionally may have difficulty achieving academic success. Schools and educators play a key role in helping to identify, and provide interventions for, students with anxiety and depression. Numerous programs and strategies are available for educators to use and to offer supports for parents, as well. It is important for educators, parents, and the community to work together to support the well-being of children in order to create a successful future.

Anxiety and depression can affect a child's ability to become a productive and emotionally stable student. Students who internalize their problems are often overlooked and viewed as not needing supports (Neth et al., 2020). This may cause a student's issues to develop into deeper emotional problems. Schools may use daily check-ins, and other programs such as Strong Kids, Response to Intervention (RTI), and hire additional mental health support staff to ensure that students have a safe place to share their emotions. Strong Kids focuses on teaching students coping skills, positive decision making, self-management, and maintaining relationships (Neth et al., 2020). RTI is "an alternative method for determining eligibility for special education and as a rationale for providing early intervention to children at risk for school failure" (Hierck & Weber, 2014 p. xiv). A student's anxiety and depressive symptoms are sometimes under-identified due to inaccurate parental and educational staff observations. School-wide mental health screening assessments can help educators and parents to identify issues before they become symptomatic. Parenting dimensions also play a crucial role to a child's self-esteem and psychological growth (Wouters et al., 2018). Schools should provide training to parents, such as through the Responsibility-Centered Parenting (RCP) program (Thompson et al., 2017). Providing incentives for parents to participate in the program, such as door prizes and providing dinner for meetings, gift cards, and prize baskets, may increase the success, as well. Children who internalize issues may develop emotional problems that may worsen as they transition into adulthood. It is the duty of educators to ensure that the adults in a child's life work as a team to create a successful future for all. Researching, creating, and offering as many supports and programs as possible are key to children's success in school.

Internalizing Emotions

Students who have anxiety and depressive symptoms are at risk for "educational failure, physical health problems, adult mental illness, substance abuse, and increased risk in suicide" (Finning et al., 2019, p. 187). As a child, I internalized my feelings and emotions out of fear. I struggled with anxiety and academic success throughout grade school. Students are often too embarrassed to share their experiences with others. Some children learn at a young age to internalize their issues out of fear, and they feel unsafe to share (Alec, 2020). Most schools provide interventions only to students who display disruptive behaviour. One of my students struggles with anxiety, and the parent reached out to the school for supports. I made a referral to the school psychologist, but the case load was too heavy to take on a new student. This student does not show disruptive behaviour, and therefore is not viewed as a priority for the school year. This is not fair to students who internalize their problems (Finning et al., 2019).

Anxiety and depressive symptoms do not go away on their own; it takes time, prevention, space, and extra supports to tackle these issues.

It would be helpful if schools train all teachers and offer small groups sessions for students who need emotional supports. Check-ins, parental involvement, and the Strong Kids program are a starting point for students to learn about anxiety and depressive symptoms, and how to navigate their emotions in a safe manner. Daily mental health check-ins should be at the top of an educator's priority list; this will encourage students to feel comfortable and safe to express their emotions. Parents and caregivers should also be informed and offered information and training sessions to encourage using check-ins at home (Mitchell et al., 2021). Another effective program is RTI; this program is intended to provide supports to students as soon as they display academic or behaviour challenges (Hierck & Weber, 2014). The Strong Kids program at my school is taught by an outside Mental Health Facilitator once a week. The Strong Kids program is a "socio-emotional learning curriculum designed to reduce students' internalizing symptoms" (Neth et al., 2020, p. 1). To build a successful community and make space for emotional concerns to prevent internalizing, it is important to make available mental health supports for students, staff, and parents who may need support.

Anxiety and Depressive Symptoms

Under-identification of anxiety and depressive symptoms in children can lead to emotional problems. Some parents may be too busy to have meaningful conversations with their children about emotional hardships. Detecting depression in children is hard, due to internalizing and lack of communication. It can take up to eight years for a major depressive disorder to develop if the first episode goes unnoticed. (Gudmundsen et al., 2019). Without tackling the issues at an early age, the door is open for all sorts of failure in a child's life. Parents and caregivers who are required to report on their child's mental health condition, for school or counselling, may not have the skills to provide precise information (Gudmundsen et al., 2019). Therefore, anxiety and depressive symptoms at a young age are disregarded. These symptoms may lead to bigger issues, such as "absenteeism from school, inability to complete education, reduction of self-confidence, drug abuse, and anxiety disorders in adulthood" (Dehaghi et al., 2020, p. 25). It is often difficult for educators and parents to identify when a student is suffering emotionally, especially if there are outstanding assignments that need to be completed and there are other issues in the home.

When schools implement a school-wide mental health screening assessment for all students, they may be able to address students issues early. Parents would be involved in the assessment process. The assessments could take place three times a year, at the same time that report cards are distributed. It is important to keep a timeline of events that include traumatic events, death in the family, relationships loss, and anything that may cause a child to develop emotional concerns. Children spend several hours every weekday in school. Therefore, schools play a major role in identifying mental health issues in students (Burns & Rapee, 2019). Educators must incorporate time and resources to identify, support, and prevent the onset of anxiety and depressions symptoms. All education staff should be trained to monitor students who show such symptoms as fatigue, worrying, and change in appetite. Creating and incorporating health modules for each symptom may also be of benefit (Gudmundsen et al., 2019). Schools also need more external supports to implement interventions, such as hiring full-time mental health facilitators for each school and training all staff and parents (Eiraldi et al., 2019). Educators, parents, and the community should work as a team to ensure success in every child's life. This may prevent future anxiety and depressive disorders.

Parenting Dimensions

Parenting dimensions can affect a child's self-esteem, positive personal growth, and confidence to make decisions in life. Parents who are over-bearing and have psychological control over their child may create low self-esteem issues (Wouters et al., 2018). As a parent, I was guilty of being too over-bearing. This caused issues with my daughter's confidence to make her own decisions. My daughter struggled with relationships, friendships, and deciding what route she wanted to take for university. Parents must be cautious about how they react to their child's successes and failures (Wouters et al., 2018). This course has taught me to be more mindful of how I parent my adult-child and how I handle my students' behaviours, as well. A parent's reactions may have a negative impact on the child's development and transition into school and extra-curricular activities (Wouters et al., 2018). They can also affect the teacher's and classmates' well-being. This may cause a student to be overly sensitive or to overreact when it comes to losing in school games and successfully completing assignments. Another issue that may affect a child's emotional well-being is parental conflicts caused from separation. Some parents struggle with the separation, and the emotional well-being of the child may not be priority. Parental separation and lack of commitment may cause children to be unmotivated and to lack independence (Nusinovici et al., 2018). Parents play an important role in contributing to the positive development of their child's self-worth, mental health, and educational success. Parents are a child's first role model and leader; they must ensure they are mindful as they raise a child.

Schools can offer training and information sessions on RCP. This program helps parents guide their child through challenging issues by following these steps: support the child, provide clear expectations, breakdown the issue, discuss benefits of overcoming the issue, and closure (Thompson et al., 2017). In order to get a buy-in from parents, the schools could offer door prizes, incentives, snacks, and child-minding. Schools could also offer small-group meetings for parents to discuss their concerns and ideas, and support each other. It is also important to keep in mind that both parents and educators address their own emotional triggers prior to offering supports to their students and children (Thompson et al., 2017). Parents may need to learn about how to deal with their child's challenges and they may not be aware that their parenting styles are damaging their child's self-esteem. Parents must be careful with how they provide guidance and love to the child; too much and too little may confuse a child (Wouters et al. 2018). This is where the educators can support the child and the parents. It is important to support students and their parents, in a non-judgmental manner, and work as a team to build healthy relationships. If everyone is on the same page, this will improve the child's education and success. The opportunities would be endless for both the child and parent.

Conclusion

Anxiety and depression are the leading contributors to childhood psychological illness (Finning et al., 2019). Students who internalize their problems are at a greater risk than the students who externalize their problems. Daily check-ins, the Strong Kids and Response to Intervention (RTI) programs, and having additional mental health support staff may ensure that students have a safe place to share their emotions. These strategies and programs are a starting point to help students talk about their emotions. Under- identification is caused by parents, caregivers, and educators who do not have the knowledge and resources to identify when a student is facing anxiety and depression (Gudmundsen et al., 2019). Using a school-wide screening assessment would be of benefit for educators and parents to support a child's emotional challenges. Parenting styles can also greatly affect a child's self-esteem and success in school (Wouters et al., 2019). Implementing the RCP program for students and parents would improve the relationships at home. Students who are struggling emotionally will not be capable of learning or reaching their full potential until the issues are addressed. Those who are

surrounded by students who suffer from anxiety and depressive symptoms may also be at risk for developing anxiety and mental health hardships. It is important for educators, parents, and the community to work together to support children's well-being and to create a successful future.

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Feeding Problems: Autism Spectrum Disorder

Shannon Riccio

Abstract

It is common for children with autism spectrum disorder to experience feeding problems that develop at an early age and include picky eating, food refusal, and rapid eating. This can lead to medical complications such as gastrointestinal issues or nutritional deficiencies. Feeding problems in children with autism can result in social-emotional implications. Children with autism may also experience oral sensitivities linked to feeding problems. Parents, doctors, and educators can use early interventions and behaviour therapy to support each child and improve feeding behaviour. More research in this area is required to support future learning in autism feeding problems.

Autism feeding problems develop early in life and include food sensitivity, food selectivity, food refusal, and rapid eating that can lead to medical complications and nutritional deficiencies. Although roughly a quarter of parents report feeding problems during their children's development, the occurrence of feeding problems in children with autism is notably higher (Aponte et al., 2018). Feeding problems are defined as a disorder in which the inability or refusal to orally consume adequate nutritional, hydration, or caloric intake results in negative nutritional developments that are associated with medical complications (Leader et al., 2020). Although research in feeding problems in children with autism is relatively new, there are interventions, strategies, and techniques that parents and caregivers can access to support their child's feeding problems.

Feeding Problems and Associated Health Concerns

Multiple feeding problems occur in children with autism, the most common being food selectivity, followed by food refusal, and then rapid eating (Leader et al., 2020). People with autism spectrum disorder can be rigid in their routine and will often exhibit repeat behaviours that narrow their eating habits and food choices, which can lead to health concerns (Ansel, 2021). Children with autism can be very selective in their food choices, resulting in a limited food repertoire (Peterson & Ibañez, 2018).

Many children with autism have sensitivities or allergies linked to poor digestion, imbalances in gut flora, and problems breaking down and eliminating certain substances (Muller, 2016). Food issues can have negative impacts on the general health of the child with autism and can lead to medical complications. This could potentially lead to deficiencies in micronutrients, putting the child at risk for medical complications (Peterson & Ibañez, 2018).

In addition to nutritional deficiencies, children with feeding problems can experience gastrointestinal symptoms. Although research of feeding problems and gastrointestinal symptoms is limited, there is evidence that links children with autism to having at least one GI symptom (Leader et al., 2020, p. 1402). Children with autism will limit food selection, not eat enough food, or experience health conditions such as constipation (Ansel, 2021). As a special education resource teacher, I have seen firsthand that students with autism can be quite particular when it comes to their food choices and how much they choose to eat. Parents appear to pack the same food each day, and students refuse to eat anything else with the exception of two or three familiar foods. Many of my students with autism engage in rapid eating and experience issues with constipation, diarrhea, or excessive to the norm bowel movements per day. In many instances, support staff spend a large part of their day helping students in the

washroom. Issues surrounding child feeding problems have become a challenge for me, my colleagues, and parents when encouraging children to try new things for the sake of added nutrition or, in some cases, getting children with autism to eat at all. This issue can be considered a disorder called Avoidant Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID), which resembles an extreme version of picky eating or restrictive food intake and is thought to be over-represented in people with autism (Baraskewich et al., 2021). The rigidity of the lunch routine of children with autism feeding problems continues to pose a challenge for all staff involved at my school. Some will only consume their lunch during the designated allotted time, and many habitually eat only the same familiar food items sent from home. In some instances, a few of our children with autism exhibit severe anxiety surrounding lunch time and will consistently refuse to eat at school.

People with autism can have difficulties in social situations. As children become older, more pressure is placed around social eating and some may require added support (Baraskewich et al., 2021). Feeding problems in social eating situations can directly result in social emotional consequences for both the child and family, and can interfere with inclusion in social community opportunities (Aponte et al., 2018). In my experience, some students with autism downright refuse to eat with their peers or in the same room where there is ample adult supervision. This becomes exceptionally challenging when it means that the child will not consume any food all day. Some students eat very quickly with their entire meal fully consumed in a matter of minutes, which often results in GI symptoms such as a stomach ache, nausea, or diarrhea, which can lead to the child exhibiting negative behaviours due to not feeling well. On any given day at my school, it would be typical to see a student with autism who prefers to eat alone with no one in sight for a variety of reasons, or on the contrary, integrated with peers. Some of my students will eat an entire meal in a matter of seconds, which in an elementary integrated setting often will go unnoticed by others, but I do worry about the social implications for my students in the future. My biggest concern is with the higher functioning students with autism who express the desire to fit in, and the possibility of rejection or ridicule due to odd behaviour or socially unacceptable eating behaviour.

People with autism often have unique sensory needs, including oral sensitivity. Chistol et al. (2017) found that children with autism had significantly higher oral sensory sensitivity, or over sensitivity and other factors linked to food selectivity, such as issues with colour, taste, smell, and texture. Children with atypical oral sensitivity refused more foods and displayed a narrower food repertoire. In my years of working with students with autism, I have witnessed a child prefer to chew on a playground pebble and refuse to spit it out, yet tantrum when asked to try yogurt or an unfamiliar nutritional food item. I have also seen a student gag after touching lettuce when making salad in our food experience class, even though he had never actually tasted lettuce. On the contrary, I have a student with autism who eats mainly whole foods, including a wide variety of fruits and vegetables; however, he is seemingly far from the norm. It leads me to question how each child developed their feeding problems, and what we as educators can do to support the family and child as they navigate through the complexities surrounding oral sensitivities and food selectivity in children with autism.

Interventions and Strategies To Address Autism Feeding Problems

Although research in autism feeding problems is relatively new, there are resources and strategies that parents can access to support their child's feeding concerns. Behavioural treatments are the most commonly used intervention for addressing feeding issues which may have been reinforced by parents and families from an early age and over a long period of time (Ledford et al., 2018). Restrictive behaviours are often used, which include limiting a child's movement during mealtime, prompting of a set amount of bites, and non-removal of the spoon until a bite is taken. These types of interventions can result in significant improvements for children and families (Seiverling, 2019). Although success is reported, parents have indicated

that they prefer a less intrusive treatment (Ledford et al., 2018).

It is important for parents and caregivers to seek additional understanding and knowledge about autism feeding problems. Parent training as an intervention model has been successful with autism behaviours (Johnson et al., 2018). Techniques that parents can use to help with feeding issues involve prioritizing goals, starting small, meeting the children where they are, setting clear expectations, offering plenty of praise and encouragement, and staying consistent and patient (Garey, 2021). Providing parents with videos highlighting techniques, teaching concepts, keeping a diary of food intake, and involving a registered dietician can result in a reduction in parent-reported feeding problems (Johnson et al., 2018). For the most impact, the recommendation is to designate one parent to be the primary person to prepare and give meals to the child (Johnson et al., 2018). In my role, staying consistent with expectations and routine appears to have a direct link to improving autism feeding problems. When students with autism know what to expect, there is less negative behaviour and an increased accomplishment of whichever goal we set out to achieve. For parents, using the appropriate techniques for each child may help with the success of feeding time.

Health care professionals should be alerted to detect feeding problems in early childhood, especially when it comes to children with autism. Early detection is critical, because the prevalence of feeding problems is well known in children with autism, which can result in a timely diagnosis and treatment (van Dijk et al., 2021). Using screening questionnaires during routine checkups can help to identify feeding problems. For example, the Montreal Children's Hospital Feeding Scale (MCH-FS) is a screening instrument based on caregiver reports and can help with early identification of feeding problems (van Dijk et al., 2021). Parents should seek out medical professionals who can rule out biological causes when a child is dealing with eating issues (Garey, 2021). In consultation with medical professionals early in a child's life, parents and caregivers will have the opportunity to obtain appropriate interventions to support their child.

Conclusion

Feeding problems in children with autism are complex and multifaceted. Early identification and intervention for sensory processing abnormalities are critical for addressing food problems in children with autism (Chistol et al., 2017). Thus, parents and educators need to work together as early as possible when it comes to food and their children. Early intervention at doctors' appointments will be key in alerting the medical professionals and gaining access to treatments. Incorporating a balanced eating plan can also make a difference emotionally and can affect learning (Ansel, 2021). If early intervention does not occur, feeding problems involving food sensitivity, food selectivity, food refusal, and rapid eating could result in long-term medical complications and nutritional deficiencies in people with autism.

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Influencing Factors and Potential Solutions for Closing the Achievement Gap in Schools

Chantalle Crepeele

Abstract

The widening achievement gap is a rising concern in schools that requires prompt attention. It is a result of differing opportunities and resources available to families and students. Present day factors, such as COVID-19 and varying instructional strategies, contribute to learning gaps. Socio-economic diversity, a global pandemic, and instructional strategies contribute to the widening expanse of achievement levels among learners. Potential solutions exist for educational staff, from classroom teachers who deal with students first-hand, to administrators and divisional staff responsible for funding. It is crucial that educational leaders are reminded of the severity of this issue in order to support classroom teachers in differentiating for many abilities, and ultimately for all students to experience success at their grade level.

For decades, educators have been working toward reducing the achievement gap within their classrooms and school districts. An achievement gap is defined as "the percentage of students who do not reach academic proficiency at grade level" (Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020, p. 2) and is common in educational settings. As students continue to demonstrate below-level abilities (Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020), it is unnerving to be reminded that there is no golden rule in eliminating achievement gap completely due to the numerous factors that contribute to it. For example, families that measure lower on a social ranking scale may be less involved with their children's learning experiences and this can negatively contribute to student success (Lareau & Calarco, 2012). Bridging the gap between schools and families, in order to develop and maintain connections, can assist with increasing student success. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, fostering strong connections and creating strong teaching moments between educators and students is more important than ever, as startling deficits have become visible in my own students' grade level abilities. This stress could create a downward effect on learning for a longer period of time (Bailey et al., 2021). Inconsistent learning experiences and instructional strategies can contribute to decreased skill retention (Lyle et al., 2020). Offering professional development opportunities that align teaching strategies to expected outcomes may benefit student progress (Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020). For as long as these influencing factors of socio-economic diversity, a global pandemic, and various instructional strategies exist, achievement gap will be present. Reducing the gap is a harrowing, yet time-sensitive, responsibility of schools and districts to implement the necessary next steps to ensure that every learner has the chance to experience success.

Socio-Economic Status

Lower social ranking can influence interactions between parents and their children's schools, and this may pose a disadvantage to student success. Working-class parents may not have adequate access to resources, such as school services or opportunities, to benefit their children in a learning environment (Lareau & Calarco). Though this might not always be the case, families who have more support and understanding of their children's abilities may help their children progress their learning and work toward mastery at their grade level. It might be questioned whether working-class families, who may not be comfortable or confident interacting with schools, are receiving more or equal support in their children's learning.

To change the narrative about how low socio-economic status may contribute to larger achievement gaps, educators first need to understand how critical the relationship is between

home and school. Then, through strategies that incorporate cultural backgrounds and practices in the school, parents are more likely to become invested in school and community events (Blandin, 2017, p. 289). School cultural days, holidays that are celebrated in the school community, and year-end celebrations are good opportunities to share information with parents or offer volunteering experiences in the classrooms. When educators communicate with families "both formally and informally" (Lareau, 2012, p. 75), through parent-teacher conferences, emails, newsletters and in-person communication, lower status families have a chance to advocate for their children. Parents who are consistently recognized in positive and diverse ways are more likely to initiate conversation, share their own opinions, and ask questions about their children's education. Sending a monthly email or newsletter with current units of studies, important dates, and student/class shout outs is a positive and comfortable way to bridge school and home communication. Often, I will receive a reply to these emails with a note of gratitude or question regarding a student. Had I not taken the time to send out an email, families may not realize that the door for communication is open and accessible. When the relationship between teacher and parent/school improves, families may be more involved in, and better understand, their children's learning. The students may feel a boost in self-confidence, have better attendance, display more attentive behaviour, and demonstrate more effort (Balfanz & Byrnes, 2006). To narrow achievement gaps in education, creating positive bonds and offering educational and non-academic support to lower socio-economic families is imperative.

COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has placed heavy stress on the educational system due to lockdowns and school closures, and tension remains as students play catch-up in their current grade levels. Even if schools were closed for a short period of time and could transition to remote-learning effectively, students could not achieve as much as they would in a regular school year (Engzell et al., 2020). With other stresses that were brought on by COVID-19, many educators and students struggled to adapt to this worrisome and unprecedented time. Returning to the classroom was not a magic solution to these issues. After completing remote learning from home, for example, many students experienced an uneasy transition back into unfamiliar, protocol-filled environments and stressful test-taking situations in the classroom, which could alter test results (Engzell et al., 2020). In my own grade 5/6 classroom, I have observed student regression in skills such as mental math facts and basic writing, when comparing student scores at the beginning of grade five year with the beginning of grade six. On average, both writing scores for Conventions and Ideas and Mental Math scores dropped from a mark of 3 in Term 1 of last school year, to a score of 2 in Term 1 of the current school year. Noting that the pandemic ebbed and flowed, for the duration of both school years, is worrisome when considering long-term effects. To demonstrate the depth of the pandemic's impression, it was predicted by educational researchers that there could be wider achievement gaps in the spring of 2022 than the spring of 2021 (Bailey et al., 2021). The effects of COVID-19 school closures and protocols could therefore affect education and achievement gaps for a long period of time.

As classes return to in-person, or perhaps continue to flip-flop between remote and in-person, the most important focus should be on social-emotional needs. Virus transmission is not the only, or biggest, concern in schools during the pandemic. It has been shared that students made little academic growth during remote learning stints, calculating to a loss of one-fifth of the school year, with much higher losses for lower socio-economic families (Engzell et al., 2020). Despite this, standardized test-scores should not be the main priority this current school year. Educators need to take mental wellness seriously and allow time to teach and practise wellness strategies and techniques that can be used in the classroom and out of the schools, such as stress relief breathing, journaling, and reflecting. Without burdening the children with an intensive workload to make up from remote learning or long absences, students must be met exactly where they are, emotionally and academically. For this to be achievable, individualized

supports and abilities should be considered and extra funding provided to hire more teachers and educational assistants. When a safe and comforting environment is offered, students are more likely to feel like themselves, understand their value and worth, and then begin to focus on the strengths and weaknesses in their learning. Professional development opportunities should be consistently available for staff to learn effective strategies for implementing remote learning and for mentoring students who are at higher risk of larger gaps in their achievement (Bailey et al., 2021). Amid the ongoing pandemic, social-emotional wellness should take precedence over test-scores because healthy and happy students learn best.

Instructional Strategies

Inconsistent learning experiences and instructional strategies can inhibit or enhance skill retention, thus student success. For example, repetitive drills and redundant worksheets may not prepare students to remember a specific skill, becoming an obstacle in achieving optimal success (Georges & Pallas, 2010). Increased spacing between opportunities to practise specific skills can positively influence retention, while offering recurring opportunities to practise the skill may not be as successful (Lyle et al., 2020). Considering the use of technology, middle school students have demonstrated that both online and face-to-face environments provide equal learning experiences in terms of retention of mathematical skills (Edwards et al., 2017). It is equally important to recall that being familiar with the content does not make the educator an expert in how to implement the lessons in a way that will benefit all students' abilities to remember the information (Georges & Pallas, 2010). From year to year and subject to subject, students are exposed to multiple teachers and teaching styles, making it difficult to transition to new grades and classes, which is a contributing factor in long-term achievement gaps.

Today, students are learning differently than before, so instructional strategies need to evolve as well. Often, teachers are stuck in their own classrooms, with their own resources and personal teaching styles, and do not adapt how they teach a specific skill. Educators who host classrooms of diverse needs should focus on including supports in their classes to assist a wide range of learners through differentiated instruction. It is the teacher's responsibility to provide experiences for each student to feel successful by offering levels of activities that students can excel at, while also providing activities that are more challenging (Woodward & Brown, 2006). Using diagrams and other visuals is a successful strategy in expanding student memory (Edwards et al., 2017). Providing opportunities for students to work in partners or groups with various support tools presents students with a chance to collaborate, discuss, and practise necessary skills in problem-solving (Woodward & Brown, 2006). Having educators collaborate by sharing resources and implementation strategies can increase grade-to-grade consistency, teacher motivation, and access to resources. Personal experience has led me to believe firmly that the relationships and collaboration with colleagues, grade level teammates, and administrators are invaluable in reflection, preparation, and planning. Regularly available professional development on concepts such as teaching to multiple intelligences, improving working memory, differentiated learning, small-group teaching and learning, teacher preparation and planning, and cultural understanding could promote achievement for all learners, improve retention, and lessen some of the pressures of achievement gaps (Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020). Educators must adapt their teaching styles to meet the needs of evolving learners and schools should be supporting their staff with these changes in every way possible.

Conclusion

There is no proven remedy to abolish achievement gaps completely. It is vital that educators prioritize reducing the gap for as many learners as possible (Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020). It is important for schools to persevere in finding out where students are behind, in order to advocate for what they need most. Gaps in achievement will remain in

schools if socio-economics of diverse families, the long-term impression of the COVID-19 pandemic, and inconsistent instructional strategies are present. Observing and reflecting on this lost ground in student learning is critical. Measuring student achievement will most likely continue to be procedural in education. However, the methods to collect this data, and discussions on its accuracy, should be up for debate (Bjorklund-Young & Plasman, 2020). If schools are not committed to narrowing these gaps in learning, a much more serious result could appear and students could experience negative effects in their financial status and well-being years from now (Bailey et al., 2021). Though the expense of implementing programming and professional development that align with narrowing the achievement gap may be overwhelming, "the costs of not making these investments could be far larger and long-lasting" (Bailey et al., 2021, p. 11). The investments are necessary to prioritize solutions for reducing underachievement and offering students a higher chance of success.

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Recess Is Not All Fun and Games

Kelsey Kroeker

Abstract

When recess is well-planned out, carefully taught, and expectations are clear, it is a time that can have a multitude of benefits for students. On the contrary, recess time can also be a breeding ground for bullying, name-calling, and aggressive behaviours, which can have detrimental effects on our youth. It is crucial that we recognize the true realities, such as bullying, that take place on our school grounds each day. We must do everything in our power to make the changes necessary to increase our students' safety and well-being while on our playgrounds.

Recess is a time for students to get outside, get fresh air, mingle with their friends, and burn off some energy. Some students state that recess is their most enjoyable part of the day, whereas others argue that it is their least favourite. We know that positive experiences on the playground have physical, social, and cognitive benefits (Lodewyk et al., 2020), but we are often blinded by the benefits of recess and ignore the true realities, such as bullying, that take place on our school grounds each day. An underlying issue related to bullying during recess is that students may not always be aware of what bullying looks like, which can be solved through explicit teaching of terms and strategies to instill empathy. Another major issue is that there are ample opportunities for bullying to go unnoticed due to the lack of supervision during recess; administrators need to revise schedules in order to increase the number of adult bodies present during recess. A third issue is that students enjoy participating in competitive team-oriented sports, which can lead to aggressive behaviours. Teachers need to take the time to teach students explicitly the right way to be competitive and how to take a loss graciously (Kaiser, 2021). The final issue is the lack of recess policies within schools, which can easily be solved by co-constructing expectations with staff and students. We know that recess can have many benefits, but we need to look toward solving some of the underlying issues.

The Construct of Bullying

An underlying issue regarding bullying is that people are not always aware of what it means to be a victim or a perpetrator (Hellström, 2020). This is especially evident when students are questioned about the appropriateness of the banter they are exchanging and they immediately revert to the famous line that we have all heard before, "I was just kidding." As students grow older, their understanding of bullying behaviour evolves and an act that was once "acceptable" can often turn to "questionable" (Hellström, 2020, p. 418). Younger students usually view bullying as physical, whereas older students realize that bullying can appear in different ways, such as social exclusion and verbal aggression (Hellström, 2020). Students sometimes lack awareness of what it means to be a bully and what it means to be bullied.

Students need to be explicitly taught what bullying is, what to do if they encounter it, and how to be empathetic. Far too often, we assume that students are aware of what bullying is and that they can understand the feelings of others, when very few actually can. Just like anything else, if our students are unaware or unsure of something, our job as educators is to teach them. Throughout a school day, there are many opportunities to demonstrate and to learn about feelings authentically. Teachers can create "check-in" type questions for their students that stem into powerful classroom discussions around the students' anonymous responses. When students are aware of others' feelings, it sets the stage for empathetic interactions to take place. These types of conversations can also naturally arise while reading stories and discussing the appropriateness of social interactions (Perillo, 2020). In order for students to learn empathy,

they must be surrounded by empathetic role models. By witnessing their teachers cultivate kind and caring relationships with others, students will be more inclined to do the same (Perillo, 2020). As educators, we need to ensure that we are explicitly teaching students how to be empathetic, what bullying is, and what to do if someone sees bullying take place.

Recess Supervision

Lack of supervision is another key factor in the amount of bullying that can take place on a playground. Cliques, power struggles, altercations, fighting, exclusions, injuries, and teasing can all be found during recess in Canadian schools (Lodewyk et al., 2020). As one looks around a playground, one may also see a lack of supervision. This is a common issue in all of the schools that I have taught in, mainly because recess is a time for not only students to "take a break," but also teachers and educational assistants. The unfortunate result of a lack of supervision is that children are well aware of when they are being watched (Lunder & Tharaldsen, 2020), and when they have "freedom" to display inappropriate and aggressive behaviours that can take the form of physical, verbal, or social bullying.

The simple solution is that recess time needs increased supervision. During the process of making staff schedules, recess is often viewed as less of a priority than subject areas, which results in administrators believing that it deserves less supervision time. The overall idea of recess needs to be shifted, because it is just as important for students to learn how to interact appropriately with their peers as it is for them to grasp the latest math concept in the curriculum (Wood & Freeman, 2015). If supervisors were assigned to active roles, such as teaching students a new game or assisting students in setting the expectations prior to beginning a game, the students would display more positive behaviours (Wood & Freeman, 2015). Usually, the supervisors' role is to react to the problems that arise at recess; however, shifting the role of the recess supervisors will help them to be more proactive in dealing with behaviours. Recess is an important part of the school day that deserves more supervision.

Students' Learning To Lose

During recess, students commonly participate in competitive team-oriented games (Lodewyk et al., 2020), which can result in disagreements that escalate into hurtful exchanges and even aggressive physical acts. These issues often arise when students are playing a game with some sort of point system, because all parties are able to recognize the "winners" and the "losers," and the fact is that some children do not know how to handle loss well (Stewart, 2021). Students may revert to, and claim to be, "play fighting," but it is important to have the perspective that the situation may not be as benign as students let on (Richards & Burns, 2016). Recess is the most common place where I see bullying behaviours occur. Students, especially boys, tend to gather in large groups (Pellegrini, 1995), and when aggressive acts are acknowledged by others they are more severe (Hellström, 2020). This is not only because these acts are witnessed by others, but also because students tend to feed off one another's behaviours and can receive signs of acceptability with something as small as a laugh (Hellström, 2020). Many positives can come from students participating in team-oriented sports during recess, but it is important to be aware of the issues that may arise in such settings.

Students need to be explicitly taught the right way to be competitive and how to take a loss. Students come from all different backgrounds and have varying perspectives on the importance of winning. Some students will come from a household where it is extremely important to be the person or team that comes out on top, whereas others will have been raised just to try their best. Regardless of students' beliefs around winning, it is essential that they learn how to win and lose politely (Kaiser, 2021). School is an excellent place to teach and instill good sportsmanship. Teachers can have their students watch videos of sports games and discuss the attributes of strong and supportive teams. Overly competitive students may also benefit from

learning coping strategies to use after they lose a game, such as taking a deep breath, grabbing a glass of water, and learning to look forward to the next game. I often like to ask my students, "will this matter in 5 weeks? 5 days? 5 hours?" and when they unanimously reply, "no," it assists them in putting things into perspective. Teaching students to be resilient will serve them well when they enter life after high school. Life can be full of setbacks, and we must teach students to build a growth mindset, so that they are able to face these setbacks and embrace challenges (Dweck, 2009). We cannot just assume that students come to school equipped with good sportsmanship; they need to be explicitly taught the right way to be competitive and how to take a loss.

Recess Policies

Recess policies are extremely marginal if existent at all, which can be a major contributor to the obscurities of recess expectations. A 15-minute recess break two times a day can seem minimal, but over time the amount of bullying that occurs during this time can add up. The effects of these experiences can take a massive toll on children's mental health and can negatively affect children for years into their adulthood (Lunder & Tharaldsen, 2020). Overall, in the schools that I have worked in, conversations around the topic of recess procedures and policies have not seemed to hold an important place during staff meeting discussions. In fact, very few schools have recess policies (Pellegrini, 1995). Perhaps this is again because we are blinded by the benefits of recess and feel as though the positives outweigh the negatives; of course, this can sometimes prove to be true, but we also need to protect our most vulnerable students and be aware that if we do not, they may be faced with the cumulative detrimental effects of bullying (Lunder & Tharaldsen, 2020). The lack of recess policies in schools is a major issue.

Recess policies need to be put in place at the individual school level, in order to meet the needs of the students and lower the potential for bullying behaviours. Dynamics and needs vastly vary from one school to the next; therefore, recess policies should not be a blanket-solution. As educators, we know the power of allowing our students to have "voice and choice" within the classroom. I believe that student voices should also be present in the making of recess policies, because students will display more "buy-in" to the end product. An open discussion is an effective way to begin the creation of a new recess policy. One may start by asking students, "Why is recess important to you?" (Wood & Freeman, 2015, p. 177). Of course, co-constructed school-specific rules should be outlined in the policy; however, rules should not make up the entire policy alone. Within the policy, staff and students should include things such as whether students are allowed to be held in to complete missing work, routines for starting and ending recess, and how staff will deal with misbehaviours (Wood & Freeman, 2015). Another topic for discussion might be whether the school should have students or staff teaching new recess games each month, because we cannot always expect that students know how to fill their recess time (Sparks, 2018). Throughout the year, administrators should be checking in with staff supervisors to see if anything in the policy needs to be adjusted (Wood & Freeman, 2015). Creating and implementing recess policies within schools is a surefire way to set clear expectations among students and staff, and lower undesired behaviours during recess.

Conclusion

We know that positive experiences on the playground have physical, social, and cognitive benefits (Lodewyk et al., 2020), but we are also aware that bullying can be a major roadblock that prevents students from having these experiences. Students need to be taught what bullying is, what to do if they encounter it, and how to be empathetic, so that they have a clear awareness of whether their actions are acceptable. In order to minimize the effects of a lack of supervision during recess, administrators need to shift their mindset and recognize the

importance of increasing the number of active supervisors during this time. Students also benefit from learning how to display good sportsmanship so that everyone can enjoy participating in team-oriented games with minimal aggressive behaviours. Lastly, when rules and expectations are not clear, misbehaviours tend to occur; that is why it is essential that recess policies are put in place at the school level, and that all students and staff are aware of what is expected of them. It is crucial that we continue to recognize the true realities, such as bullying, that take place on our school grounds each day. We must do everything in our power to make the changes necessary to increase our students' safety and well-being while on our playgrounds.

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About the Author

At the time of writing, Kelsey Kroeker was in her fifth year of teaching middle years. She began her M.Ed. journey because she would like to open more doors of opportunity for herself. She feels that having her master's degree will help her to attain her goal to become an administrator.

CELEBRATION OF SCHOLARSHIP

We are honoured to recognize the following students who defended M.Ed. theses in 2021.

Kayode Segun Olujumu January 15, 2021 Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Heather Duncan

Novice Teachers: Challenges, Supports, and Effective Strategies

This study used survey research to investigate the challenges novice teachers experience, support received, and the leadership strategies that are implemented to support them. A total of 41 beginning teachers and 31 school principals in Manitoba, participated in this study. The areas that novice teacher participants found most challenging were differentiating instruction, planning and preparation, accessing teaching resources, working with students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), and assessing student learning.

With regard to gender, male novice teachers found differentiating instruction and organizing the classroom significantly more challenging than did their female colleagues. Beginning teachers in rural/small town areas perceived isolation and teaching multi-age classrooms to be a greater challenge than their colleagues who taught in urban/suburban schools. With regard to teaching experience, teachers with less than two years in the classroom perceived isolation to be a significantly greater challenge than colleagues with 2-3 years teaching experience. When considering school size, teachers in smaller schools with less than 200 students considered isolation to be a greater challenge than their colleagues in larger schools; however, teachers in larger schools found planning and preparation and developing collegial relations a greater challenge than those in small schools. With regard to the areas in which novice teachers reported they received most support, the areas most supported corresponded with the areas they felt to be the greatest challenges, with the exception of differentiated instruction, which was their greatest challenge, yet was not well supported. Overall, female novice teachers perceived higher levels of support than their male colleagues. Teachers in rural/small town areas felt more supported than colleagues in urban/suburban locations. Novice teachers valued support programs such as mentoring, induction, and professional development but indicated that not all these programs were available to them.

Principals identified similar challenges for novice teachers as did the teacher respondents, with the exception of planning and preparation, an area that challenged beginning teachers but was perceived as less of a challenge by their principals. Principals reported greater availability of mentoring programs than did novice teachers.

The recommendations for the study included specific areas for professional development and greater provision of research-based mentoring and induction programs.

Carla Ann Woods September 15, 2021 Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Alysha Farrell

The Impact of the Portfolio-Based Language Assessment Implementation on Manitoba Adult English as a Second Language Teachers: A Phenomenological Inquiry

The study explored the personal and professional impacts of the implementation of the Portfolio-Based Language Assessment (PBLA) on adult English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers. Grounded in phenomenological inquiry, the researcher analyzed the experiences of a small group of adult ESL teachers in Manitoba who were involved in the same large-scale change process. Particularly in the first phase of implementation, the participants experienced heightened levels of stress, decreases in motivation, and a loss of professional autonomy. The research provides unique interpretations about why it is imperative for educational leaders to respond to the emotional impacts embedded in large-scale change. Additionally, the study foregrounds the professional knowledge and expertise of adult ESL teachers who offered valuable perspectives on how to make professional development more manageable and sustainable in the field of adult ESL education.

FOCUS ON FACULTY RESEARCH

Caring During Covid:
An Exacerbated Burden for Gender-Marginalized Faculty

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Candice Waddell-Henowitch, Cheryl Fleming

Brandon University Status of Women Review Committee Research Team

Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted university faculty in profound ways, particularly those who are marginalized by gender. While social and institutional injustices have always existed for these faculty, stressors related to caregiving during a global pandemic have exacerbated inequities related to distribution of care work at home and teaching and caring for students. This amplification of inequities has affected the health and well-being of gender-marginalized faculty, as well as their professional careers. The multi-method qualitative research study described in this report, through a survey and follow-up interviews, examined the impact of caregiving on gender-marginalized faculty at Brandon University during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings from the study illustrate the problematic nature of caregiving for faculty marginalized by gender, the toll it has taken during a global crisis, and the imperative to equitably recognize, value, and compensate such work.

The global COVID-19 pandemic that resulted in the Canadian government declaring a state of emergency in March 2020, has had profound and widespread impacts. Various articles have been written demonstrating the inequitable impacts of the pandemic on those who are systemically disadvantaged, including burdens related to health, finances, isolation, and even loss of life. University faculty at Brandon University (BU) and elsewhere have not been immune to such systemic challenges. One such area of challenge is related to caregiving roles, particularly on the part of gender-marginalized faculty. In a 2021 study, Górska, Kulicka, Staniszewska, and Dobija noted that “the pandemic has acutely made visible the fact that female academics' career progression is jeopardized by factors that have nothing to do with their effort, intellectual skill, and merit, but result from women's primary responsibility for care” (p. 1555). The same can be said for gender-marginalized faculty at Brandon University, a term we define as all faculty marginalized by gender, including (but not limited to) cis or trans women, and non-binary, trans or Two Spirit individuals.

In the fall of 2020, a subcommittee of the Status of Women Review Committee (SWRC), a joint committee of Brandon University and the Brandon University Faculty Association (BUFA) that is committed to equal opportunities for marginalized genders at the university, embarked upon a study to look at the specific and distinct impacts of the pandemic on gender-marginalized faculty members. Through an online survey followed by individual interviews with BUFA members, gender-marginalized faculty were asked about the impact of the pandemic on their teaching, research and creative practice, caregiving responsibilities, administrative duties, service, vacation/time off, and their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. While we left the definition of caregiving open for study participants to interpret, our analysis aligns broadly with the notion of “carework:” the unequally distributed and gendered work, both unpaid and paid, of caring for family, friends, and others that enables the continuation of life (Misra, 2007). This paper, which focuses on the pandemic-related impacts of this notion of caregiving, outlines the

many ways caring for children, adults, elders, and students amplified existing inequities within academe, affecting the work, personal lives and health of faculty marginalized by gender.

Relevant Literature

Institutional inequities for gender-marginalized academics have been cited in literature for some time. For example, gender-marginalized faculty tend to hold fewer high-ranking positions in academic contexts (Acker et al., 2012; Cook, 2018; Marsden et al., 2012; Snow, 2017), more positions in less prestigious institutions (August & Waltman, 2004; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2017), more positions as lecturers as opposed to tenure track positions (Acker et al., 2012; August & Waltman; Serrano, 2008; Snow, 2017), and fewer positions in fields such as mathematics and science (Gardner, 2013). According to Gardner (2013), women academics also have lower rates of tenure and promotion, heavier teaching loads, higher service responsibilities, and lower salaries than their male counterparts, and face gendered environments that can be hostile to work in (e.g., where their research and opinions are discounted or where they are not considered for positions with more power). Such inequities certainly contribute to decreased job satisfaction for gender-marginalized faculty, as well as the increased likelihood that they will leave academia both pre- or post-tenure (August & Waltman, 2004; Gardner, 2013; Gonzalez, 2018; Serrano, 2008).

Academic culture has also historically created inequities for gender-marginalized faculty. Influenced by notions of the ideal or universal (male) worker who is entirely dedicated to his work (Acker, 1990; Harris & Gonzalez, 2012; Serrano, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2017), academia has undergone what is referred to as "academic/upward drift" (Gardner, 2013), creating a situation in which research and publications are valued above other (more feminized) elements of academic work such as teaching and service. This upward drift, which is linked to inequitable tenure/promotion rates, salaries, workloads, and access to positions, has contributed to a devaluing of certain forms of knowledge, expertise, and work in academe. For example, professional expertise in fields such as healthcare and education, fields that are predominantly occupied by gender-marginalized faculty, is often not highly valued in university contexts (Acker, 1997; Kornelson, 2017). Other forms of feminized knowledge, expertise and work are also devalued, or even denigrated, in academic culture, including qualitative research, teaching, and service work (Harris & Gonzalez, 2012). Such a culture creates inequities for gender-marginalized faculty, forcing them to be more careful about how they spend their time in order to avoid the consequences of engaging in devalued or "institutionally invisible" work (Hill, 2020).

The personal lives of gender-marginalized academics are also somewhat unique in that they tend to live "linked-lives" when it comes to career and family, each impacting the other (Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2016). In spite of typically working a 55-hour work week (O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005), many gender-marginalized faculty engage in what Snow (2017) refers to as the "second shift," caring for elderly family members and/or children after work in their personal lives, and taking responsibility for a disproportionally higher amount of household duties than their male counterparts (Acker et al., 2016; August & Waltman, 2004; O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; Snow, 2017). This can make it more difficult for gender-marginalized faculty to achieve the increasing expectations of university contexts, forcing them to continuously negotiate career and personal lives (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2016; 2017). For many, sleeplessness, fatigue, guilt, stress, loss of leisure time, and mental health concerns are the result, particularly for those new to academe and trying to get tenure (Acker & Armenti, 2004; Chambers, 2017; Gereluk, 2020; O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; Snow, 2017; Stoesz, 2020).

Recent literature on the impact of COVID-19 on gender-marginalized faculty has pointed out that the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing institutional and contextual inequities in academe. According to Yildirim and Eslen-Ziya (2021), women academics with children have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19 due largely to the traditionally gendered and

unequal distribution of caregiving and household labour. This disproportionate distribution has hindered the productivity and research capacities of gender-marginalized academics, causing what many are referring to as a #coronapublicationgap (Oleschuck, 2020). While many male faculty members have reported having more time to engage in research during the pandemic, regardless of their family situations, gender-marginalized academics have paid a penalty for being mothers as their research and publications have suffered (Górska et al., 2021). They have also seen an increase in the "invisible academic work" (Górska et al., 2021) or "institutionally invisible work" (Hill, 2020) that they have traditionally been expected to assume at greater rates than their male counterparts as they have navigated new ways of teaching and supported students through transitions to online learning (Górska et al., 2021).

Methods

A multi-disciplinary research team, with representatives from a variety of faculties across Brandon University including Science, Education, Music, Health Studies, Arts, and Student Services, collaborated on this multi-method qualitative research project to identify how the global pandemic has affected the research, creative practice, teaching, and service of faculty marginalized by gender. Phase one of the study included an anonymous online survey sent from the university faculty association to all members. Respondents provided consent for the survey then answered open-ended questions that addressed the impact of the pandemic on their research and creative practices, caregiving responsibilities, vacation, administrative duties, teaching, well-being and supports. The survey was open to respondents during the month of December in 2020. Preliminary analysis of the survey responses guided the creation of prompts and questions used in the individual interviews that made up the second phase of the research.

Respondents were offered an opportunity to participate in the individual interviews at the end of the survey. Any interested individuals identified themselves to a research team member who was not a member of the faculty association. This research team member conducted all the individual interviews and anonymized the interview transcripts to ensure the remaining research team members were not aware of participants' identities. The semi-structured interview questions included similar questions to the survey, but with more prompts to promote deeper responses from the participants. Additionally, a question was asked within the interview to better understand the impact of the pandemic on academic service, which the research team felt was missing in the original survey. Zoom technology was used to record and transcribe the interviews, which each lasted approximately one hour. Analysis for both the surveys and interviews occurred individually, with members of the research team coding independently, then joining together to identify key themes and insights collaboratively as a group. This manuscript focuses on one of the overarching themes identified in both the surveys and interviews: the impact of caregiving responsibilities on gender-marginalized faculty during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the full report, see (Chamberlain et al., 2021).

Participants

Most of the survey respondents were Assistant, Associate, or full Professors (n=26). The role of the other respondents is identified in Table 1. Respondents came from a variety of Faculties within the University and had varied years of experience (see Table 1). Most participants identified as women and one identified as queer femme. Six participants identified as Indigenous, Black, racialized, a person of colour or a visible minority, while all other participants did not.

Table 1
Demographics of Survey Respondents

Demographic	Number of Respondents
Rank or Classification	
Professor (Assistant, Associate or Full)	26
Instructor	2
Instructional Associate	2
Administrative Associate	3
Professional Associate	2
No Response	1
Faculty	
Arts	13
Education	7
Health Studies	4
School of Music	2
Science	6
Student Services	3
No Response	1
Years at University	
0-1	7
1-5	5
6-10	7
10+	15
No Response	2

Note: While traditionally we refer to "faculty" as those members of BUFA working in the Faculties of Arts, Science, Education, Music or Health Studies, for the purposes of this report, we use the term "faculty" more broadly to include all BUFA members in teaching and non-teaching roles at BU.

Individual interviews were conducted with eight people offered the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms. The only demographic information collected from interview participants was their role and positions in the university. At the time of the interviews, Amanda and Tannis were both Assistant Professors in tenure-track positions, whereas Mary, Rachel, Vicky, and P03 were tenured Associate or Full Professors. Julie and Christine were both faculty within student services.

Results

Caregiving responsibilities for gender-marginalized faculty at Brandon University were profoundly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the survey respondents, 25 out of 36 described an increase in their caregiving responsibilities and/or higher levels of stress related to the well-being of both their family members and students. Moreover, all 8 of the participants who chose to be interviewed for the study reported increases in caregiving responsibilities that impacted their physical and mental health, and their ability to balance their work lives (particularly their research) with their home/personal lives. Despite being open to sharing their struggles on surveys and in interviews, several participants in the study expressed a fear of acknowledging the impact increased caregiving was having on their research and work performance. Mistrust and worry about judgement at various levels of the institution (including for achieving tenure and/or promotion) was a common thread in participant comments.

Childcare

Caring for children was a primary stressor for gender-marginalized faculty members with young families. In addition to the University pivoting to online learning in March of 2020, daycares and schools were also impacted, throwing many families into chaos. Many participants in the study indicated that they bore a greater percentage of the burden this placed on their families, frequently having to deal with their own move to online teaching and the remote learning of their children simultaneously. One survey respondent described the impact of caring for children the following way:

> Childcare responsibilities increased substantially by having children unexpectedly out of school for most of spring and then having little options for summer shared caregiving. In addition, childcare responsibilities have increased in the fall due to needing to take children out of school for any sniffle and not being able to rely on after-school or before-school options. We also used to be able to call on extended family for childcare on Professional Development days and this is no longer possible. (Survey #27)

Several participants echoed these sentiments, including the inability to have grandparents (or other family members at higher risk of severe COVID outcomes) care for children. Such burdens were even more intense for faculty members who were the parents/caregivers of children with physical or learning disabilities as evidenced in the following comment:

> Ugh. I have a son with special needs who did not react well to the sudden shut down of school in the spring. It was awful. As a single parent, juggling work and him at home would have been impossible if I had not qualified for additional provincially funded respite assistance. As it was, I had to take far more time off work when he was sick. . . While my Dean was always understanding and supportive, I still felt guilt, you know? (Survey #20)

Comments such as the one above stood out in the data, making clear not only the inequitable distribution of caregiving responsibilities, but also the range of responsibilities that existed amongst gender-marginalized faculty members.

Participants in the study described several of the impacts that increased childcare responsibilities had on them personally and professionally. General physical symptoms such as fatigue, brain fog, and difficulty focusing were identified, as were the impacts of dealing with the remote learning of children as a “draw on time, emotional energy and my teaching abilities” (Rachel Interview). Several participants described the difficulties they encountered trying to conduct research, think deeply and write alongside of children engaging in remote learning at home, coping with frequent interruptions throughout the day. The result of such interruptions was a perceived decrease in research outputs, something that caused participants significant stress. Finally, mental health concerns surfaced in relation to the burden felt by gender-marginalized faculty dealing with increased childcare responsibilities. With childcare taking up more time, participants noted that they had less time available for self-care and physical activity, further exacerbating stressors. One participant even reported deteriorating mental health that led to self-harm.

Adult/Elder Care

Participants in the study described a variety of situations in which they experienced increased caregiving responsibilities for adult family members and friends. One category of

adults requiring additional caregiving during the pandemic was that of adult children as evidenced in the following statement:

> I do not have young children, but my adult children have really struggled with the pandemic in terms of finding work, dealing with online learning, etc. The added burden of their struggles was difficult for me as a mother. I tried my best to help them negotiate the pandemic, on top of what I was dealing with. My partner and I do not divide this type of emotional labour equally in my household; The weight of their struggles was born primarily by me. (Survey #3)

In addition to adult children, participants noted that many other adults in their lives (e.g., partners, siblings, friends, parents, grandparents) also had a variety of needs related to the pandemic or their personal health that required additional caregiving (e.g., stress due to unemployment, recent surgeries or medical crises, adults with disabilities, isolated parents and grandparents). One survey respondent wrote the following:

> My Mom lives in a care home. I am her essential visitor. They only allow us to come in from 1-4 pm from Monday to Friday. That's right in the middle of my day. . . So, many days I visit my Mom in the afternoon and work in the evening to make up for it but that means that my personal time gets whittled away to very little. (Survey #8)

Data from the study suggested that while all adult caregiving added additional pressure for gender-marginalized faculty, the well-being of elderly family members was as significant a concern as caring for children, likely due to the vulnerability of this demographic in relation to the COVID virus. Some faculty described their attempts to support elderly family members who were isolated during lock-downs, bringing them groceries and checking in on them, while others described an immense amount of worry about the well-being of elderly relatives living at a distance. According to participants, such stress and anxiety affected their mental health and productivity.

Grief and loss also affected some of the respondents in the study. Two respondents reported a close elderly family member dying. One noted that they had little time to grieve and to process the loss with the added pressures of moving to online teaching and other factors impacting their time. Responsibilities related to funeral arrangements and estate planning were added to the already heavy loads of these faculty members, something that was further complicated by pandemic restrictions.

Care for Students

Most of the participants in the study described an increase in the amount of care needed by students during the pandemic. On top of moving to online instruction, the faculty who participated in the study felt compelled to support their students by providing more contact time with students, being flexible and accommodating, extending deadlines, altering assignments, and providing extra help. In her interview, Rachel provided a good description of why this was necessary, the amount of work she engaged in to support students, and the impact this had on her teaching capacity:

> A lot of worry and anxiety about students. I would say yes. And it's mostly to do with supporting students who are in all sorts of dire pandemic-related predicaments. They're either directly pandemic-related, where I've had students who caught COVID and their whole family caught COVID, and

> COVID was running through their community, their remote community, and so it slowed down their ability to complete the course. I've had other students who are having financial problems because they've lost their job and so I'm having to support them in getting through the course and those circumstances and make adjustments in some cases to deadlines. I have students who are ill, in other circumstances, who need adjustments to the course and if there wasn't a pandemic on, they might be able to be doing better but it's not safe for them to be out moving in the world. I have folks who are new parents, who are having challenges with new babies and trying to get coursework done. And I, you know, feel very strongly about wanting to support all the students and so that's really messed with my ability to follow normal teaching timelines, the ability to do all of my marking at once, my ability to get all of my marking back, get all of the grades in on time (Rachel, interview).

In addition to teaching and supporting students academically, participants in the study also spoke about the need to care for students' emotional and mental well-being. Many of the respondents described how they felt a moral obligation to check in on students and make themselves available to students for support. One survey participant said the following about the ways in which they cared for students and the impact this had on them personally:

> The boundaries are very fuzzy. Students contact me at all odd hours, and again as my work/home boundary is tarnished, I tend to answer students on weekends, [at] midnight, early in the morning. In some cases, since students are not in physical contact with me, they become rude and hostile, which I have successfully managed the unacceptable behaviors. In addition, I am becoming more of [a] therapist for isolated students. For some, I am their only external source of communication, and I feel responsible for their mental health well-being. I feel overworked and underpaid. (Survey #10)

Several of the participants in the study mentioned the deterioration of home/work boundaries, noting that this had a negative impact on their own health and well-being. Many of the participants also indicated that they experienced significant stress and anxiety in relation to struggles their students were experiencing, and that caring for students at this time required a significant expenditure of time and energy over and above their usual teaching responsibilities. While this ultimately benefitted the university in terms of retaining and supporting students, it frequently had a detrimental effect on gender-marginalized faculty who engaged in sound educational practices, educating the whole student within the extreme context of online learning in a pandemic.

Discussion

The findings from this study illustrate that the gender-based inequities that are well-documented at other academic institutions are also shaping the lives and careers of gender-marginalized faculty at Brandon University. Faculty members who are marginalized by gender have long been known to spend more time engaging in teaching and service, work that is not valued as highly as research and publications in academe (Gardner, 2013; Harris & Gonzalez, 2012). This study highlights what "invisible academic work" (Górska et al., 2021) or "institutionally invisible work" (Hill, 2020) looks like and how it inequitably affects gender-marginalized faculty. Success in academe is not typically measured by how many students one has successfully mentored (Larson, 2008), and the caring and emotional labour that can play an integral, gendered role in teaching are not always institutionally perceived or celebrated (Larson,

2008; Rose & Adams, 2014). Yet, whether or not women faculty conform to prevailing gender stereotypes, including displaying care and sensitivity, impacts how they are evaluated by students (Kreitzer & Sweet-Cushman, 2022). At the same time, caring for students is made more difficult by online teaching environments, which disrupt the relational dynamic and produce a "tyranny of availability" (Rose & Adams, 2014). Together, the intensified caring expectations placed on gender-marginalized faculty served to negatively impact them as they found they had less energy to engage in work that garnered higher institutional value, which ultimately translates to job security, accolades, and pay. One participant in the study said, "I no longer have time to do research. Too busy preparing for courses, performing pastoral functions for students, and being stressed about the pandemic" (Survey #32). Moreover, the greedy nature of "academic/upward drift" (Gardner, 2013) and institutional expectations about research and publication left participants feeling vulnerable as expressed in Rachel's statement:

> The scholarly side has definitely suffered. And I'm scared to say this stuff, I'm scared that administration is going to hear women and women-identified scholars as not being productive during this and we're, you know, we're a liability somehow to the university, so it is scary to even come out and suggest or admit that I haven't been as productive as I normally might be (Rachel, interview).

Fear about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on job security and career advancement permeated the comments of several participants, particularly those early on in their careers, and they anticipated judgement rather than support from the academic institution. Such comments illustrated the complex ways in which caregiving affected not only the careers of participants, but their sense of peace, their stress levels, and their feelings of self-efficacy.

Findings from the research study also illustrated the extent to which gender-marginalized faculty members' personal and work lives are linked, as other studies have previously underscored (Ward and Wolf-Wendel, 2016). During the pandemic, participants didn't engage in a "second shift" (Snow, 2017), but rather a "parallel shift" as they juggled their work lives, including complicated teaching assignments and struggling students, and caregiving responsibilities for the children, adults, and elders in their lives. Amplified by pre-existing inequities related to the distribution of household duties (Acker et al., 2016; August & Waltman, 2004; O'Laughlin & Bischoff, 2005; Snow, 2017), participants in the study experienced extreme fatigue, guilt about not doing enough at home or at work, stress about the inadequacy of their research agendas and/or achieving tenure/promotion, and disproportionate anxiety and stress about the well-being of family members. All parts of the linked lives lived by gender-marginalized faculty members in the study were impacted by the pandemic, resulting in not only a linear increase in stress, but one that was compounded or exponential in nature.

Finally, the research study conducted at Brandon University both aligned with and extended points raised in earlier research pertaining to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender-marginalized faculty. On one hand, participants indicated that those with children endured multiple stressors that disproportionately affected them, as was clear in the work of Yildirim and Eslen-Ziya (2021). What was evident from the participants in this study, however, was that such stressors were even more significant for gender-marginalized faculty who had children with disabilities and/or health concerns. Additionally, the participants in the study experienced significant impacts in dealing with adults and elderly parents or grandparents as well. For the participants in this study, disproportionate impacts existed for all forms of caregiving, not just caregiving related to children. The study also aligned with previous work that suggested the gendered nature of the transformation of academic work has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Górska et al., 2021). The critical caring that gender-marginalized faculty performed during a global public health emergency, for family, friends, and students, and by extension for the community and university, took a significant toll on these faculty members,

while it benefited the people around them. The study offers an opportunity for university communities to consider not only the gendered nature of how academic work is being transformed, but also how better to support each other in times of crisis, and how better to recognize and compensate the work that gender-marginalized faculty do.

Conclusion

The experiences of gender-marginalized faculty at Brandon University during the COVID-19 pandemic illustrate why pre-existing institutional inequities and the gendered nature of the transformation of academic work are extremely problematic. Pre-COVID, gender-marginalized faculty at Brandon University, like elsewhere, participated in teaching and service work at greater levels than their male counterparts and took on a disproportionate amount of care work in both their closely linked home and work lives. For these faculty, the pandemic was an extreme stressor, a detonator of sorts, that compounded the multiple impacts of institutional inequity in profound ways. Only time will tell what the long-term effects will be for these faculty members. If institutions *care* enough to *care* for gender-marginalized faculty as they continue to *care* for their students, it must remain a topic of study and be considered both in the overall well-being of gender-marginalized faculty and in tenure and promotion processes.

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TWISTED DREAM
sculpture by Eric Lowe

This sculpture reflects Aboriginal peoples' experiences in Residential Schools. The twisted framework of treated 4x4s represents Canada's political plan to "take the Indian out of the child" by erasing traditional values, customs, and languages. The smiling school guard belies the trickery. The coil of barbed wire at his feet shows that they knew what they were doing.

Dream catchers are intended to catch bad spirits over a child's cradle. The sculpture's barbed wire dream catcher, suspended by a steel chain, is reminiscent of prisons. It represents the twisted dream of Canadian politicians to capture Aboriginal children and assimilate them into White society. It also represents the fragmented dreams of the children stolen from their parents and the parents' own dreams that were also destroyed by Residential Schools.

This "found art" sculpture was part of the Manitoba Society of Artists' open juried competition and exhibition (OJCE), Sept. 15 to Dec. 31, 2021. It is dedicated to a survivor who gave Eric Lowe a tour of her Residential School – and to all other Residential School survivors and victims.