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Halfway Tree in Autumn



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The 85-foot eastern cottonwood Halfway Tree marks the midpoint between Brandon and Winnipeg on the Trans-Canada Highway. It is the remaining one of two trees planted by farmer Fred Archer in 1919 to memorialize the loss of his wife and newborn in childbirth.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the forty-second issue of the *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, devoted to rural, northern, and Indigenous education. Our authors for volume 18 are current and past BU Faculty of Education graduate students. I thank these educators for sharing their professional expertise.

- Shane Hicks' refereed article explains how school leaders can support teachers to cultivate more inclusive school communities.
- Melissa M. Buhler-Wiebe and Aloysius C. Anyichie's article discusses self-regulated learning as essential for optimizing students' elementary school experiences.
- Corrie C. Krahn's refereed article examines burnout among high school physical educators. She recommends shared and anti-oppression leadership approaches toward a solution.
- Amber Lawrence's refereed article holds school leaders responsible for setting the tone of a school's overall culture.
- Simone Miranda's refereed article articulates how emotional intelligence empowers leaders to strengthen the relationships that are central to school communities.
- Lyle Morris' refereed article advocates restorative justice to replace punishment in schools.
- Kristel Sproll's refereed article offers strategies to reduce absenteeism so that all students can experience the long-term benefits of staying in school.
- Randi Leigh Michaniuk's refereed article confirms the academic and social struggles of students with ADHD, and offers practical ways to help these students succeed in school.
- Chelsea Zaliska's refereed article urges critical literacy teacher training so that students will become digitally responsible members of society.
- Joyce Soldier's personal reflection shares her Indigenous experiences of racism as a catalyst for her commitment to equity and social justice.

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Educational Leadership and Its Support of Teachers

Shane Hicks

Abstract

Educational leadership is a complex role that shapes school environments, supports teachers, and creates a quality learning environment. Proper preparation of future school leaders cannot be overlooked by teachers interested in pursuing this next step in education. Four leadership-based solutions that strengthen teacher support are practising intentional communication, integrating Indigenous ways of knowing, creating meaningful leadership opportunities for teachers, and maintaining a focused approach to workloads. Using research and examples from the cited resources, these solutions are outlined in a way that support whole-student methods of effective school leadership practices. When these solutions become part of a school leader's daily practice, they can cultivate more inclusive school communities.

Educational leaders have the ability to guide a school community to success through implementing clear vision, encouraging inclusivity, allocating resources in meaningful ways, and many other avenues. Educators routinely find themselves coping with the little they have been given. The ever-changing landscape of education creates many challenges for teachers, and having proper support from educational leaders can make a marked contrast. Three significant issues that educators and educational leaders face in today's schools are lack of support for teachers, rapidly changing education objectives, and poor preparation of the next generation of leaders. There are many solutions that help both teachers and educational leaders continue to provide high-quality education in this shifting landscape of education, including improving communication, incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing, creating leadership opportunities for our teachers, and focusing the workload for both educational leaders and teachers.

Three Problems

Lack of teacher support, which can take many forms, leaves teachers with a feeling of uninterest, absence of autonomy in the classroom, and ultimately being overwhelmed by the need to complete tasks over and above teaching (Brauckmann et al., 2020). Teachers and educational leaders are also limited in their ability to request proper support for the conditions they find in their classroom, resulting in top-down decision-making that may not result in meaningful change (Niesche et al., 2021).

To exacerbate the issue of little support for teachers, educational objectives are constantly – and rapidly – changing each day (Karacabey et al., 2025). For example, there are constantly changing requirements for students to attend university, technology with which students are to be competent, and changing requirements by employers. These are only a few examples of the target for which teachers are striving. Considering all these changes and the speed at which they occur, it can seem impossible for teachers and educational leaders to stay on top of relevant educational information (Teschers et al., 2024).

Insufficient preparation of future school leaders is the third problem of note that creates challenging teaching conditions. School leaders are faced with expectations for knowledge in all areas of curriculum, leadership, building management, and guidance and counselling, and they must have an idea of how to apply this knowledge to varying situations (Brauckmann et al., 2020). Therefore, these expectations, along with the complex role of school leadership, require significant preparation of those who are considering the challenge of becoming a school leader.

Communication

Quality communication is one of the most important considerations for educational leaders to provide proper support for teachers. Numerous resources focus on the importance of communication in a variety of settings: personal relationships, friendships, family, or in this case teachers. In a community such as a school, many people provide meaningful input about what activities should be prioritised each year, and teachers and educational leaders are expected to triage the importance of each piece of information (Doygunel & Köprülü, 2022). The way we carry out this communication can be a point of focus to reduce the burden on our educational system. For example, it can be overwhelming for a teacher to open their computer at the end of the workday and find an incredible number of email messages to answer. When relying so heavily on technological means to communicate, such as emails, text messages, Microsoft Teams chats, etc., the nuance of quality communication is lost and, as a result, a teacher's stress levels are increased (Palmer, 2024). To contrast these digital methods of communication, educational leaders could prioritise more authentic means, such as face-to-face conversations with staff. In turn, they are more able to foresee problems, encourage proper behaviour, have nuanced conversations, and improve/support the educational objectives in the building overall (Streshly et al., 2012).

Quality communication is also essential in supporting inclusive education. Seven Oaks School Division in Manitoba, Canada, for example, found the value of preserving traditional language used in our community. Through meaningful dialogue within the division and community elders, classes are now offered in Ojibwe, Ukrainian, Punjabi, Filipino, and of course English and French. Additionally, students can earn high school credit in Spanish, Italian, Latin, Hebrew, German, and many other languages through extra-curricular study (Divisional Languages, n.d.). This initiative can improve our communication with the caregivers of our students and the students themselves. It is an example of a supportive practice that offers meaningful solutions to community suggestions, as opposed to an "abandonment" reaction whereby teachers ignore these suggestions because of being overwhelmed (Razer & Friedman, 2017). Louie and Prince's (2023) study in British Columbia, Canada, involved such extensive communication between First Nations peoples, teachers, students, and their school community that they created meaningful change in the community. With all the positive change they made, Louie & Prince still cited communication itself as the main driver of all improvements.

Communication is thus an integral part of a successful school and can be the solution to many problems. Providing practical solutions for teachers to navigate rapidly changing educational objectives, offering proper supports for teachers, and discovering more meaningful ways of preparing school leaders are all educational processes that rely on making communication a priority in schools.

Indigenous Ways of Knowing

In the Truth & Reconciliation report published in 2015, the late Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair is quoted, "Education got us into this and education will get us out" (Reconciliation and NCCIE, 2020, para. 1). Since the publication of this document, decolonization of education in Canada has taken priority. Collaborating with Indigenous elders and Knowledge Keepers provides possibilities for decolonizing education and creating accessible schools for the Indigenous community, and for developing excellent resources for improving the delivery of education in all schools (Schnellert et al., 2023). One of the more common Indigenous teachings, the medicine wheel (Doucette et al., 2004), puts together the aspects of physical, intellectual, spiritual, and emotional ways of being as we are connected to nature, self, and others (Papp, 2018). Many benefits extend to every classroom when applying the intent of the medicine wheel. To completely pull apart the beauty and complexity of the medicine wheel, it is a means to heal the whole self (Doucette et al., 2004). Applying these teachings in an

educational setting results in making deeper, meaningful connections with students. Of course, these teachings can also be applied to all relationships a teacher maintains daily. Not only does it result in better communication, but integrating Indigenous ways of knowing with “western knowledge” provides a wholistic approach to improving every place of learning (Papp, 2018, p. 167). On the Government of Manitoba’s education website (Manitoba Education, n.d.), there is information on Global Competencies, which outlines whole-child education methods focusing on educational approaches that are similarly effective – “complex ways of knowing, being, doing, and becoming in consideration of the learner as a whole” (Manitoba Education, n.d.). With proper implementation of Indigenous ways of knowing, our educational systems can provide valuable solutions to educational challenges, including more meaningful support for teachers, focused educational objectives, and better preparation for our future educational leaders.

Leadership Opportunities

Educational leaders can also take on the “whole student” educational approach with teachers and support them in more meaningful ways. School administrators must have a broad knowledge base in a wide variety of educational, management, and leadership topics to carry out their job effectively (Doygunel & Köprülü, 2022), and they can pass on this knowledge to teachers in various ways. Providing autonomy for teachers in curriculum delivery, opportunities for collaboration, professional development, etc., offers opportunities for teachers to feel they are in control of their decisions (Wermke & Salokangas, 2021). As a teacher of 16 years, there are times when I find opportunities for autonomy in my classroom and, at the same time, can feel completely disconnected from the whole-school environment. These more comprehensive experiences are an important part of preparation for future leaders, which requires a wide variety of knowledge and exposure to whole-school, even division-wide, activities. In Seven Oaks School Division, for example, future school leaders are expected to have a proven history of reaching the highest level of teaching in their subject area of expertise, and to experience many different educational settings, including book clubs, extra-curricular activities, divisional gatherings, adult transition programs, and different levels of schools. This amount of preparation helps future leaders to understand what supports need to be available on a day-to-day basis in each school setting (Keo, 2015). Preparing the next generation of educational leaders requires current teachers to move back into a place of vulnerability, learn new skills, connect with a wider community, and create a wider regard for the well-being of the entire staff and student population of the school (Vanier, 2008, p. 2). Teachers can also be given the opportunity to participate and lead in the areas of curriculum development and delivery, project-based groups, inquiry groups, teacher-led professional development activities, mentorship and coaching, and much more (Keo, 2015). These opportunities for teachers help to close the learning gap for aspiring educational leaders and provide a smoother transition from teacher to administrator.

Focused Workload

In the rare moment when teachers find themselves without a class in front of them, there are undoubtedly endless distractions to keep them occupied. Between email messages, student visits, extra help sessions, parent communication, reporting, marking, coaching, supervision, duties, extra-curriculars, clubs, phone calls, etc., teachers are constantly distracted. In my division, there have been a few reminders for teachers about the topic of communication practices. The division has reminded us that we are expected to reply to communications, be it through teams, email, phone, etc., only during work hours. I do think, however, that a significant intention of the email message was to reiterate safe communication practices with students and parents (using only divisional accounts and devices) in addition to clarifying their expectations of our communication times. This also helps with teacher burnout by directing teachers to limit their work time and work interactions.

As a result of the new level of access students have with teachers, the line between paid versus unpaid hours begins to blur (Harper et al., 2025). A lot of the work that becomes burdensome to teachers does not require teacher skills unique to teachers and pushes out time for that more meaningful work (Stacey et al., 2023). However, finding the budget to hire someone to take care of this “busy work” is usually not available. This educational solution of focusing a teacher’s workload also connects with the previous solution of providing leadership opportunities, streamlining teacher and administrator workloads, and focusing on more important tasks, which increases fulfillment and satisfaction for those teachers and educational leaders (Bellibaş et al., 2023). The main objective of teachers should be to develop positive rapport with each of their students (and leaders with their teachers) in a much more meaningful way. Reducing the amount of time spent interacting through technology, being consumed by “busy work,” and focus on meaningful interactions with students are excellent places to start focusing teacher workload.

A teacher’s main role is to spend time teaching, interacting with students, and helping them through the learning process. Educational leaders are to be there (physically and supportively) for their teachers by providing solutions, assistance for bigger issues, clarity of work, and improving school culture. When these main objectives are the focus for each professional, the well-being of each improves, everyone can focus on meaningful student learning.

Conclusion

Educational leaders can, and do, guide a school community to success and provide meaningful supports for teachers. There are many challenges for teachers having proper support can make a large impact on student learning, and support from educational leaders can take many forms. I have found that each of the following solutions of improving communication, incorporating indigenous ways of knowing, creating leadership opportunities for our teachers, and focusing the workload for both educational leaders and teachers can be a topic of its own research paper. There are seemingly endless numbers of resources that support each of these objectives, which proves its significance in including them here. In short, focusing on the solutions that make the biggest difference in our educational settings leads to the well-being of our teachers, improved education for our students, and healthier communities.

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About the Author

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Effective Practices for Supporting Self-Regulated Learning in Canadian Elementary Classrooms¹

Melissa M. Buhler-Wiebe
Aloysius C. Anyichie

Abstract

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is essential for supporting Canadian elementary students' academic achievement, engagement, motivation, and emotional regulation. However, research indicates that SRL is not consistently or deeply embedded in classroom practice. Three themes emerge from the literature on effective practices that support SRL in Grades 1–6: (1) theoretical foundations of SRL, including social-cognitive and socio-cultural perspectives; (2) classroom practices that embed SRL, including Assessment for Learning (AfL), explicit supports for emotional regulation (e.g., mindfulness-based routines), and teacher scaffolding, co-regulation, and culturally responsive instruction; and (3) documented outcomes related to engagement, motivation, academic learning, and emotional regulation. The article concludes with implications for classroom practice and recommendations for strengthening equitable and sustained SRL implementation across Canadian elementary schools.

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is widely recognized as a critical foundation for students' academic success, engagement, and motivation in elementary classrooms. In Canadian contexts, SRL is particularly important during the early and middle years, when students are developing the capacity to plan, monitor, and reflect on their learning with increasing independence (Cartier et al., 2010; Hutchinson et al., 2021). Despite its importance, research indicates that many students struggle with core regulatory processes such as goal setting, strategic monitoring, and emotional regulation, suggesting that SRL is not consistently embedded in classroom practice (Anyichie, 2024; Cartier et al., 2010). These challenges are particularly evident in Grades 1–6, when learners are transitioning from externally guided learning toward greater independence.

SRL is commonly conceptualized as a cyclical process involving forethought, performance, and reflection (Zimmerman, 1989). While this model highlights individual cognitive and motivational processes, more recent research emphasizes that SRL is also shaped by social and cultural contexts that are evident in classroom contexts, instructional design, and social interactions (Anyichie, 2025; Butler & Cartier, 2018; Hadwin et al., 2017). As a result, there is a growing consensus that SRL should be embedded within everyday classroom practices rather than treated as an isolated skill.

This article addresses the following question: What are the effective practices for supporting students' self-regulated learning in Canadian elementary classrooms (Grades 1–6)? Three central themes answer the question: theoretical foundations of SRL, classroom practices that support SRL, and outcomes associated with embedding SRL in instruction.

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Theories and Core Components of SRL

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is grounded in complementary theoretical perspectives that shape how students regulate their learning in classroom contexts. These perspectives emphasize that SRL is a multidimensional process involving cognitive, motivational, behavioural, and emotional components that develop over time through interaction with instructional environments.

Zimmerman's social-cognitive model, initially articulated in 1989 and refined in later work, conceptualizes SRL as a cyclical process involving what students do before, during, and after engaging in a task. The model includes three phases: forethought (e.g., goal setting and planning), performance (e.g., strategy use and monitoring), and self-reflection (e.g., evaluation and adaptation) (Zimmerman, 1989). This framework highlights how learners actively regulate their thinking, behaviour, and motivation in response to task demands.

Building on this work, researchers have emphasized that SRL is not solely an internal cognitive process but is shaped by classroom contexts and social interactions. Butler and Cartier (2018) argued that SRL emerges through dynamic interactions among learners, tasks, and instructional environments. They highlighted the role of instructional design, task structure, and teacher-student interactions in supporting the development of regulatory processes. Similarly, Hadwin et al. (2017) extended this perspective by emphasizing co-regulation and socially shared regulation, through which learners develop regulatory skills in interaction with teachers and peers, particularly in collaborative and scaffolded learning environments. From this perspective, SRL is both individually enacted and socially mediated, evolving through guided participation and shared responsibility for learning.

Empirical research further demonstrates that SRL can be observed within classroom contexts. For example, Perry and Winne (2006) showed that students' planning, monitoring, and strategy use can be captured through "learning traces," or the observable evidence of these processes generated during learning tasks. These traces may include students' notes, revisions, or recorded interactions with learning materials, providing insight into how regulatory processes unfold over time. This work reinforces the view that SRL is adaptive and responsive to both task demands and instructional supports.

In addition to cognitive and social dimensions, researchers have highlighted the importance of socio-cultural context in shaping SRL. Learning is influenced by students' identities, experiences, and classroom environments, which affect motivation, engagement, and the use of regulatory strategies (McCaslin, 2009; McCaslin & Burross, 2011). Culturally responsive perspectives further emphasize that SRL develops most effectively when instructional practices connect to learners' backgrounds and lived experiences (Anyichie, 2025).

Together, these perspectives position SRL as a dynamic and contextually embedded process that develops through interactions among learners, teachers, tasks, and environments. This theoretical foundation informs the instructional practices that support SRL in elementary classrooms, which are examined in the following section.

SRL Practices in Classroom Context

Self-regulated learning (SRL) is most effectively supported when it is embedded within everyday classroom practices. Rather than being taught as an isolated skill, SRL develops through instructional approaches that provide structured opportunities for students to plan, monitor, and reflect on their learning. Key SRL practices are summarized under Assessment for Learning (AfL), emotional regulation supports, and teacher scaffolding and co-regulation within responsive classroom environments.

Assessment for Learning (AfL)

Assessment for Learning (AfL) is a powerful pedagogical approach for embedding SRL within classroom practice. AfL shifts assessment from a summative focus on evaluating learning to an ongoing process that actively engages students in monitoring and improving their learning. Practices such as co-constructed success criteria, goal setting, reflection, peer feedback, and descriptive teacher feedback support students in developing metacognitive awareness and regulatory skills (Perry et al., 2020; Chen & Bonner, 2020).

Through these practices, students are provided with clear learning goals and ongoing feedback that help them understand how their effort and strategy use influence outcomes. For example, when students engage in self-assessment or peer feedback, they generate evidence of their learning and compare it to success criteria, allowing them to identify gaps and determine next steps. In this way, AfL supports key SRL processes, including planning, monitoring, and reflection (Andrade & Brookhart, 2020; Panadero et al., 2019).

Beyond individual strategy use, AfL can be understood as a form of co-regulation, in which teachers and students collaboratively interpret evidence of learning and make decisions about how to improve (Andrade & Brookhart, 2020; Panadero et al., 2019). This shared process reduces uncertainty, supports motivation, and helps students develop confidence in their ability to regulate their learning (Hutchinson et al., 2021).

When embedded consistently across classroom contexts, AfL becomes more than a set of assessment strategies. It serves as an instructional approach that integrates feedback, reflection, and goal-setting into everyday learning. As a result, AfL provides a practical and effective pathway for supporting the development of SRL in elementary classrooms (Andrade & Brookhart, 2020).

Emotional Regulation and Mindfulness-Based Supports

Emotional regulation is a crucial component of SRL, as students' ability to manage emotions directly influences attention, persistence, and strategy use during learning tasks. In elementary classrooms, many students require explicit support to regulate stress, frustration, and anxiety, which can otherwise interfere with their ability to engage in SRL processes (Buono et al., 2020; Zimmerman, 1989).

Mindfulness-based approaches have been widely used to support emotional regulation in classroom contexts. One well-documented example is the MindUP program, which integrates brief, structured mindfulness practices—such as focused breathing, sensory awareness, and moments of reflection—into daily classroom routines. Research has shown that these practices improve students' attention, emotional regulation, and readiness to learn. For instance, in the study by Schonert-Reichl et al. (2015), teachers implemented short mindfulness lessons several times per week over the school year, emphasizing students' awareness of their emotional states and strategies for calming and refocusing attention. These structured routines (e.g., guided breathing exercises, focused listening activities, and brief moments of quiet reflection at the start or midpoint of lessons) help students pause, regulate emotional responses, and sustain attention during learning tasks (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015). By helping students become more aware of their emotional states and develop strategies to regulate them, mindfulness supports key SRL processes, including self-monitoring and persistence during challenging tasks.

Additional research in Canadian contexts further supports the role of mindfulness-based interventions. For example, Malboeuf-Hurtubise et al. (2017) reported reductions in anxiety and improvements in self-regulation following classroom-based mindfulness interventions with elementary students. These findings suggest that emotional regulation supports can enhance students' capacity to remain engaged and regulate their learning effectively.

Beyond mindfulness, research has also examined the role of physiological regulation in supporting SRL. Bearden et al. (2023) found that structured breathing and attention-focused

routines improved students' emotional regulation and readiness to engage in learning tasks. These practices help students regulate stress responses, which in turn supports sustained attention and persistence during learning.

Collectively, this body of research demonstrates that emotional regulation is closely linked to students' ability to engage in SRL. When students are supported in managing their emotions, they are better able to focus, monitor their progress, and persist through challenges, highlighting the importance of integrating emotional regulation supports within everyday classroom practice.

Socially and Culturally Mediated Pathways to SRL

SRL is not solely an individual cognitive process, but develops within socially and culturally mediated classroom contexts. Learning environments characterized by trust, responsive interactions, and shared responsibility support students in developing the cognitive, emotional, and motivational processes required for self-regulation (Hadwin et al., 2017; McCaslin & Burross, 2011). In elementary classrooms, these relational conditions are particularly important, as students are still developing the capacity to regulate their learning independently.

Instructional practices such as scaffolding and co-regulation play a central role in supporting SRL within these contexts. Scaffolding involves providing structured supports—such as modelling strategies, breaking tasks into manageable steps, and offering prompts and feedback—that enable students to engage successfully in learning tasks (Perry et al., 2002; Hadwin et al., 2017). These supports make regulatory processes visible and accessible, helping students develop skills related to planning, monitoring, and reflection. As students gain competence, scaffolds are gradually reduced, enabling greater independence in self-regulated learning.

Co-regulation further supports SRL by emphasizing the role of teacher-student interactions in developing regulatory processes. Through modelling, guided practice, and feedback, teachers support students in planning, monitoring, and reflecting on their learning before these processes become internalized (Hadwin et al., 2017). Research has shown that autonomy-supportive practices, such as offering meaningful choices and encouraging self-assessment, strengthen students' engagement and self-regulatory capacity (Perry et al., 2002).

Culturally responsive approaches extend these relational practices by recognizing the role of learners' identities, cultural backgrounds, and lived experiences in shaping engagement and motivation. Research shows that when instructional practices connect to students' cultural backgrounds, students demonstrate increased engagement, motivation, and ownership of learning (Anyichie & Butler, 2023; Anyichie et al., 2023). These approaches emphasize inclusive learning environments in which students feel a sense of belonging and competence, which support persistence and effective self-regulation (McCaslin, 2009).

Together, these findings highlight that SRL develops most effectively in classroom environments that integrate relational, instructional, and culturally responsive supports. By embedding scaffolding, co-regulation, and culturally responsive practices within everyday instruction, teachers can support students in developing the skills and confidence needed to regulate their learning independently (Hadwin et al., 2017).

Outcomes of Embedding SRL in Elementary Classrooms

When SRL is intentionally embedded within classroom instruction, research demonstrates improvements in students' academic achievement, engagement, motivation, and emotional regulation. Across subject areas such as literacy, mathematics, and inquiry-based learning, SRL-supportive practices enable students to plan, monitor, and reflect on their learning more effectively (Andrade & Brookhart, 2020; Chen & Bonner, 2020).

These outcomes are closely linked to instructional approaches that integrate scaffolding, co-regulation, and formative assessment within everyday learning. When students are provided

with structured opportunities to set goals, receive feedback, and reflect on their progress, they develop greater metacognitive awareness and a stronger sense of control over their learning processes (Hutchinson et al., 2021). These skills support not only academic performance but also students' ability to transfer learning strategies across contexts.

Engagement and motivation outcomes are particularly strong when SRL is supported within culturally responsive and inclusive classroom environments. Instructional practices that promote autonomy, provide meaningful choice, and connect learning to students' experiences contribute to increased persistence and sustained engagement (Anyichie et al., 2023). These findings suggest that SRL is most effective when it is integrated within classroom contexts that support both cognitive and motivational aspects of learning.

Emotional outcomes also play an important role in shaping SRL. Research indicates that students who are able to regulate their emotions are better able to sustain attention, persist through challenges, and engage in strategic learning processes (Buono et al., 2020). Conversely, unmanaged frustration or anxiety can interfere with students' ability to monitor their progress and apply effective learning strategies.

Overall, the evidence suggests that embedding SRL within classroom instruction supports both immediate academic outcomes and the development of transferable skills such as independence, persistence, and reflective thinking. These findings reinforce the importance of integrating SRL as a foundational component of elementary classroom practice (Zimmerman, 2015).

Conclusion and Implications for Classroom Teaching

Self-regulated learning develops most effectively when it is embedded within everyday classroom practices rather than taught as an isolated skill. Instructional approaches such as Assessment for Learning, emotional regulation supports, scaffolding, co-regulation, and culturally responsive pedagogy create conditions that enable students to plan, monitor, and reflect on their learning.

Effective SRL development depends on intentional instructional design that integrates these practices across subject areas. When students are provided with structured opportunities to set goals, engage with feedback, regulate their emotions, and reflect on their learning, they develop greater independence, persistence, and confidence as learners. Research findings reinforce the importance of positioning SRL as a foundational component of elementary classroom instruction (Zimmerman, 2015).

For classroom teachers, these findings suggest that supporting SRL does not require the addition of separate programs, but rather the intentional integration of SRL-supportive practices into daily instruction. Practices such as co-constructing success criteria, embedding opportunities for reflection, modelling learning strategies, and supporting emotional regulation can be incorporated within existing classroom routines. In this way, teachers can create learning environments that promote both academic achievement and the development of self-regulatory skills.

At the same time, several limitations in the existing literature warrant further attention. Much of the research examines SRL over relatively short timeframes, limiting understanding of how these skills develop over time. There is a need for more longitudinal research that examines the sustained development and transfer of SRL across grade levels and subject areas. Additionally, many studies rely on self-report or observational measures, which may not fully capture the complexity of students' regulatory processes.

Future research should expand the use of mixed-methods approaches to better understand how SRL is enacted in classroom contexts, including greater attention to student voice and classroom-based evidence of learning. Further exploration of culturally responsive approaches is also needed to support equitable SRL development in diverse Canadian classrooms.

Overall, the literature suggests that embedding SRL within classroom instruction supports not only immediate academic outcomes but also the development of transferable skills such as independence, persistence, and reflective thinking. Strengthening teachers' capacity to design SRL-supportive learning environments has the potential to foster motivated, confident, and self-aware learners who are prepared to engage actively in their learning.

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High School Physical Educator Burnout: Applying Shared and Anti-Oppression Leadership Theories To Support Teacher Well-Being and Sustainability

Corrie C. Krahn

Abstract

This article examines high school physical educators' roles and responsibilities, the systems and the organizational beliefs that exist within physical education departments, and how these contribute to teacher burnout. The contributors to physical educator burnout are organizational socialization, the teacher-coach dual role, coach/teacher and teacher/coach conflicts, and physical education teaching challenges. An anti-oppression shared leadership lens can promote changes within physical education departments to support diversity, equity and inclusion, as well as staff wellness and sustainability.

It is September 2024. I have been a physical educator and coach for 17 years. I am in a department meeting where a chart of the curriculum and athletic roles and responsibilities is displayed on the projector screen. Physical educators volunteer to put their names beside various duties on the chart. In addition to my job as a physical educator, I am a mom of three children and this year, little did I know, my husband would become quite ill. Fast forward the same school year. It is May 2025 and I find myself on a medical leave, burnt out. I am left wondering how I got here. I start to look around and realize I am not the only one.

Teacher burnout and retention have become a common problem in our school systems, including physical educators. Alsalhe et al. (2021) found that in a sample of over 1,000 physical education teachers, nearly one in four were burned out. Burnout is a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed (World Health Organization, 2019). It includes feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, increased mental distancing from the job, negative feelings, or cynicism related to the job, and/or reduced professional efficacy. This article focuses on high school physical educators and the unique complexity of their jobs through the examination of their roles and responsibilities as teacher and coach, and the existing culture and socialization occurring beneath the surface. When physical education programs follow a shared leadership model, the program can become an educational and athletic endeavor that is valued and accomplished by multiple stakeholders. By applying an anti-oppressive lens, leaders remain mindful of intersectionality and recognize that they must first understand each educator's multifaceted situation before placing additional expectations, roles and responsibilities on them.

An individual's holistic well-being is important and student extra-curricular learning opportunities are valuable contributors. Physical educators have the unique opportunity to come alongside students on their health and fitness journey and support them in living Mino-Pimatisiwin (The Good Life), wherein all four components of a human are being addressed—emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Learning, 2025). This well-balanced life is essential for all teacher and student well-being.

My belief in living the good life fuels my academic focus on physical educator burnout. Being a part of equity deserving groups and a mother of three in a profession and system that was traditionally designed for white men who have a stay-at-home partner and a coach-first, teach-second mindset, I have experienced first-hand the struggles and the burnout. Through my experience, I have learned that I do not need to perfectly fit into, hide, or drown in the existing system, but that the system needs to change. I maintain a radical hope for change to an educational system that continues to overwork physical educators and oppress women and other members of historically marginalized communities.

Factors Contributing to Physical Educators' Burnout

Physical educators are susceptible to burnout. Four themes emerged from the literature on physical educator burnout: organizational socialization, the dual role as a teacher and coach, conflicting coach/teacher and teacher/coach approaches to the job, as well as the additional teaching challenges physical educators encounter.

Organizational Socialization

One invisible and underlying factor contributing to physical educator burnout is the existing organizational socialization that happens throughout a physical educators' life and career. Organizational socialization is the learning process in which an employee learns what roles and responsibilities they are expected to assume and how they will fulfill those tasks (Harding-Kuriger & Gleddie, 2022; Pennington et al., 2023). It is the way physical educators are recruited, trained, and socialized (Pennington et al., 2023). The organizational socialization process begins when they are students observing their physical education teachers. The process is reinforced in their teacher training process and is reinscribed when the teacher interviews for their position and is hired under a pre-existing system of beliefs of what they should contribute.

According to Harding-Kuriger and Gleddie (2022), physical educators are socialized into believing they should be giving their time before, during, and after school. This claim can be verified as most high school gymnasiums across Canada have a continuous flow of events from morning to night. Although extra-curricular activities are considered voluntary (Manitoba School Boards Association & Manitoba Teacher's Society, 2026), one may wonder whether physical educators feel it is an optional role. According to O'Connor and Macdonald (2002), it is common for physical educators to be expected to engage in various roles of athletic coaching and/or sporting event organization. This expectation reinforces the organizational socialization that still has a stronghold on physical education departments within Canada today.

Many physical educators enter the profession because they believe physical education can play a critical role in helping children establish a foundation for an active lifestyle (Pennington et al., 2023). Therefore, it is no surprise that educators often display a willingness to go above and beyond the school day to support students by modelling and practicing what they teach. However, over the years education and societal changes have occurred. The increased job demands due to the growing diversity in student needs, combined with a lack of training and resources, have added challenges for all teachers. Physical educators have also witnessed the desire for more sports teams and specialized programs. Schools that previously offered a few traditional sports now have teams for every sport imaginable. In Manitoba, schools have transitioned grade nine students into high school buildings adding demand for more teams and volunteer coaches. There are not enough coaches within physical education departments to meet the demands. It has many staff reaching a breaking point. Organizational socialization makes it commonplace for all physical educators to have at least some additional role and responsibility in the school's athletic programs.

Dual Role as Teacher and Coach

Within physical education departments, old belief systems persist that contribute to the challenges and burnout. The first is the belief that physical educators must serve a dual role as coaches and teachers. According to Camiré and Kendellen (2016), there has long been a dual role expectation in Canadian schools for physical educators. This naturally leads to increased duties. The authors confirmed that extra-curricular activities are important for student development, while highlighting the need for resources that assist teachers with maintaining a healthy work/life balance. Nearly one-quarter of physical education teachers worldwide are burned out, suggesting that the teacher-coach dual role is unsustainable (Alsalhe et al., 2021).

In response to rising burnout, many school divisions have declared extra-curricular duties to be voluntary (Manitoba Teacher's Society, 2025). However, many physical educators continue to take on extra responsibilities because of the deep-rooted organizational socialization and/or personal belief in the value of student fitness and health. Richards and Templin (2012) described time constraints and inconsistencies in balancing teaching and coaching responsibilities, forcing some teachers/coaches to choose one role as primary. Teachers are dividing their time and energy to the point where either their teaching or coaching struggles to meet standards. Camiré (2015) found marking and lesson planning often suffered and that participants with children experienced a significant impact on their family life. Teacher-coaches shared experiences where families felt as though they were a lower priority. Harding-Kuriger and Gleddie (2022) examined the complexity of multi-roles by interviewing women who identify as a teacher-coach-mom. The stress and divide can have a greater compounded effect on a person holding many roles within the school and personal life. The inequities particularly affect women who are also mothers. People balancing too many roles and responsibilities both personally and professionally will eventually burn out or leave the profession because they feel they can no longer do the full scope of the job. It is important to recognize it is not teaching physical education that is causing burnout, but the workload imbalance resulting from the dual role expectations.

Coach/Teacher versus Teacher/Coach

The second belief causing added challenges is that physical educators should have a coach-first, teach-second approach to their job. Even though coaching is voluntary and teaching is a paid position, there remains an underlying belief that athletics are more important than physical education. Challenges arise when a department of individuals have differences of opinions on the priorities of their job. According to Saffici (2015), some physical educators are more concerned with athletics and some on educating their classes on health and well-being. A person who attempts to be exceptional in both roles may be susceptible to burning out.

The differences of priorities may also cause stress among colleagues when each side believes the other should be doing more for their students or the school's athletic program. This underlying conflict may add emotional strain on one or all persons involved. For those who coach, Camiré (2015) found conflicts arose among colleagues regarding having to cover classes when coaches must leave early for tournaments and other events. The burden of teaching additional classes within a day or having a class size doubled can add challenges and stress. Stress, strain, and conflict may have negative consequences on one's mental state and professional performance, which can lead to early termination or burnout (Saffici, 2015). The unclear expectations and differences in priorities and beliefs among physical educators will add stress and challenges. In addition to the conflict with dual role expectations and differences in priorities, teachers are continually facing complex challenges in their teaching environments.

Teaching Challenges

Several teaching challenges faced by physical educators also contribute to burnout. Teachers commonly experience classroom management as a stressor (Pennington et al., 2023). Physical educators experience additional stress due to limited teaching space, class sizes, inadequate support, student motivation and discipline, outdated curriculum, and limited professional development (Pennington et al., 2023). It is common for physical educators to share their gym space with multiple classes from various age groups. Inadequate teaching spaces, large class sizes, and mixed-age classes can make it challenging to offer adequate programming, equipment limitations, and safety. These factors impact a teacher's ability to manage their class and provide a conducive learning environment for everyone. When

outcomes and resources are outdated and staff have limited knowledge and training on applying inclusion strategies, it can be challenging to engage and motivate students.

Physical educators may find their work devalued and underappreciated by other professionals (Pennington et al., 2023). This occurs when students are removed from physical education for other class activities and when gym spaces are repurposed for exams, picture days, and other events without alternative teaching spaces being provided. This disrupts the flow of a unit in progress, impacting a teacher's ability to deliver the lesson, and it may be unsettling for students, particularly ones with exceptionalities. These actions send the message that physical education, health, and fitness are unimportant while adding to teachers' emotional labor and stress. School leaders and staff must realize that physical and mental well-being are key to social and economic success and therefore should be valued and respected in school. Organizational socialization, dual role expectations, teacher/coach and coach/teacher conflicts and other teaching challenges will continue to burn out physical educators unless school leaders implement leadership theories that offer applicable strategies and practical solutions.

Theoretical Framework: Anti-Oppression Shared Leadership

School leaders can influence significant changes to our school systems. Leadership theories offer frameworks and strategies that assist leaders when confronting a problem. Shared and anti-oppression leadership strategies effectively address many of the factors contributing to physical educator burnout. Combining these theories would empower school leaders to address physical educator workload concerns, while working to change the oppression and discrimination that continues to exist within our schools.

Shared Leadership Theory

Shared leadership theory involves many professionals sharing leadership roles and responsibilities. A leader who values shared leadership believes that, "everyone has the right, responsibility, and ability to be a leader" (Lambert, 2002, p. 38). This framework accesses the skills and gifts of all professionals to improve learning opportunities and student achievement. According to Lambert (2002), a shared leadership framework in schools brings together a variety of professionals in skillful participation to develop a shared vision, complete inquiry and data collection, collaborate regularly, reflect, and continually measure student achievement. Shared leadership taps into the strengths of all staff members as they work collaboratively to share responsibilities in a system that values independence and support. Shared leadership produces sustainable improvement (Lambert, 2002) and works to improve all students' learning opportunities (Diamond & Spillane, 2016). A leader who believes in shared leadership would encourage the distribution of leadership responsibilities and support those wanting to move away from the idea that physical educators take care of all physical education related extra-curricular responsibilities.

Anti-Oppression Leadership Theory

Critical leadership theories such as Dei's (1996) and St. Denis's (2007) anti-racism education consider power, privilege, and their imbalances to support the success of those being marginalized. According to Dei (1996), anti-racism education is an action-oriented strategy for systemic change to address racism and the interlocking systems of oppression. The framework is a critical anti-racism approach to foster inclusivity in education by learning from human experiences. The four main pillars are the integration of diverse knowledge, recognition and respect for difference, identification and action for social and educational change, and facilitation of the important role of parents and community members (Dei, 1996; St. Denis, 2007). Anti-oppression leadership theory promises to help school leaders gain a critical and necessary lens

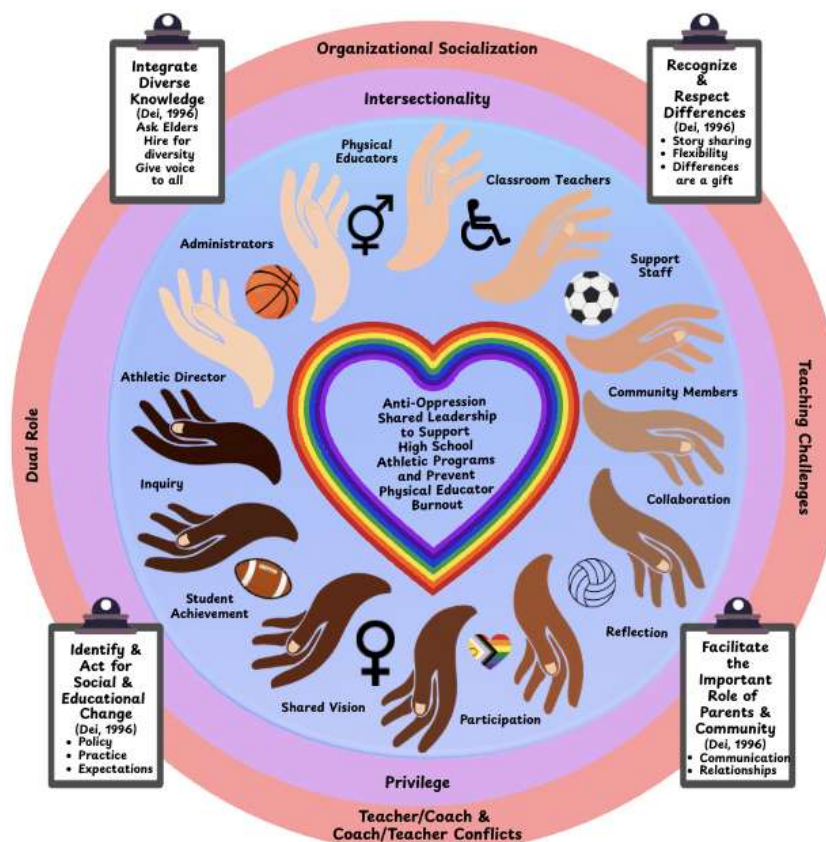
that brings into consideration intersectionality and the unique situation each individual may be experiencing. With this approach, the administrator would engage in meaningful dialogue with racialized teachers to understand their unique challenges before assigning roles beyond their teaching responsibilities. Anti-oppression leadership includes reciprocal dialogue to ensure all voices are heard. This exchange also promotes well-being and sustainability, which is necessary to address burnout and ensure the retention of diverse physical educators.

Anti-Oppression Shared Leadership

Figure 1 combines anti-oppression and shared leadership theories to provide school leaders with a practical and meaningful approach to address physical educator burnout. Anti-racism education theory (Dei, 1996; St. Denis, 2007) and Lambert's (2002) shared leadership strategies could work together. Figure 1 depicts stakeholders working collaboratively towards a shared vision, while continually reflecting and engaging in inquiry-based dialogue, focused on student achievement. The four factors contributing to physical education burnout are listed in the outer circle. The middle circle identifies intersectionality (Crenshaw, 2016) and privilege as factors school leaders must consider, along with each person's experience with oppression and/or privilege. The inner circle introduces anti-oppression shared leadership by identifying the stakeholders who could share the athletic leadership roles and responsibilities. The various shaded hands symbolize shared leadership but bring in the value and importance of diversity. Dei's (1996) four anti-racism strategies are shown on the coaching clipboards.

Figure 1

Improving Physical Educator Well-being Through Shared Anti-Oppression Leadership



(figure developed by Corrie C. Krahn, 2026)

Applying anti-oppression shared leadership theory encourages school athletic programs to continue to thrive, while protecting physical educators' well-being and supporting inclusion and diversity. Shared leadership distributes to a broader group of people the responsibilities that are currently being done solely by physical educators. Anti-oppression leadership gives voice to persons who have historically been silenced and left out of the conversation, and brings insight into what may need to change going forward. A leader who is mindful of intersectionality places equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility at the forefront of a conversation and their decision-making processes. Bringing these perspectives together provides a multifaceted lens to address a multiple layered complex problem.

Discussion

School leaders are positioned to create positive change, but they must have an in-depth understanding of shared and anti-oppression leadership theories to effectively approach problems such as physical educator burnout. Shared leadership has the power to promote the distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities (Lambert, 2002), which will reduce physical educator workloads and help them to gain a better work/life balance. Equally valuable are anti-oppression leadership theory and anti-racism education (Dei, 1996; St. Denis, 2007), which will help to establish diversity, equity, and inclusion in physical education departments and athletic programs. There are identifiable gaps that need to be pursued in the research on intersectionality and gender oppression in physical education.

Applying Anti-Oppression Leadership

A school leader wanting to follow Dei's (1996) anti-oppression theory outlined in Figure 1 would integrate diverse knowledge by hiring for diversity. Leaders need to consider listening to the experiences and stories of those who have been historically marginalized and whose voices have been left out of physical education. There must be a willingness to let go of traditional beliefs on physical education and athletics, to explore new ideas and create a new vision. School leaders must identify and act for social and educational change by identifying who the past systems were made for and amend the systems to meet the needs of its current diverse staff. School leaders can accomplish this by consulting with historically marginalized staff on how roles, responsibilities, expectations, practices, pedagogy, and policies may be reinforcing discrimination and oppression of certain groups. School leaders must also facilitate the role parents and community could have in a school's physical education programs. Meaningful relationships and communication must be established. By bringing people together through social gatherings, meetings, support groups, information sessions, surveys, and celebrations to build trust and a genuine connection.

Applying Shared Leadership

I believe shared leadership is a practical solution to supporting physical educators' well-being. According to Lambert (2002), building leadership capacity will help nurture sustainable school improvement. The current system is not sustainable for staff well-being, which will eventually result in athletic programs being removed from schools. High school physical education extra-curricular programs across Canada need to undergo a transformation and shared leadership is one way school leaders could bring meaningful change and sustainability. If school athletic programs embrace Lambert's belief that "everyone has the right, responsibility, and ability to be a leader" (p. 38), physical educators could be relieved of some of the current roles and responsibilities. Reducing their workload would support their well-being and work/life balance, and allow other individuals into the system who may bring new and innovative skills and ideas.

Combining Anti-Oppression and Shared Leadership

Shared leadership and anti-oppression leadership are two theories leaders must embrace if they are to shift schools to exemplify diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. Lambert (2002) suggested that the old model of formal one person leadership leaves the talents of other stakeholders largely untapped. School leaders who apply shared leadership and promote diversity, equity, and inclusion must follow Dei's (1996) anti-oppression lens to consider the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexual oppression when dealing with people and in their decision-making processes. Diverse female representation in physical education is important, and it is critical that departments across Canada advocate for systemic changes that respect and honour all persons regardless of sex, gender, class, race, sexual orientation, marital status, socio-economic status, and/or ability. Schools that strive for staff diversity and parental and community involvement must ensure the school environment is welcoming and conducive for all people. Therefore, school leaders should understand and implement an anti-oppression shared leadership framework and strategies regularly in practice. Figure 1 displays how the multiple leadership lens are required in conversations, steps forward and decisions made to effectively address the problem. The diagram provides a framework for leaders to confront physical educator burnout while supporting the continued viability of a school's athletic program.

Future Research

How the current physical education expectations, roles, responsibilities, and culture are impacting those who identify with historically marginalized groups needs to be explored. There is limited research specific to women, Black, Indigenous, women of colour (BIPOC), two-spirited, lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, plus (2SLGBTQIA+) persons, and persons with a disability in physical education positions. Harding-Kuriger and Gleddie (2022) brought gender, motherhood and Black women into the physical education burnout conversation; however, more research needs to be done to broaden our understanding of what other systemically marginalized people are experiencing. More research needs to explain these unique and complex challenges.

Conclusion

Physical educator burnout remains a significant problem in Canadian schools. Organizational socialization, dual role expectations, conflicting teacher/coach, and coach/teacher beliefs, and additional teaching challenges are leading factors causing physical educator burnout. Systemic oppression, discrimination, and intersectionality also contribute. Shared anti-oppression leadership can support staff diversity, wellness, and retention by promoting systemic changes that ensure the sustainability of staff and extra-curricular athletic programs. It is critical for school leaders to understand and apply shared and anti-oppression leadership strategies to support diversity, equity, and inclusion and physical educator well-being within their schools.

I am delighted to report that months after my burnout, I returned to work part-time and thankfully my husband's health has improved. I overcame my burnout by seeking professional support, reducing my work hours, and setting boundaries on my extra-curricular duties.

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Leadership with a Focus on Inclusion

Amber Lawrence

Abstract

Leaders set the tone in the overall culture of a school building. If they take proper steps to make that culture an inclusive one of all learning abilities, physical abilities, and overall diversity within the school, then staff and students will feel respected, empowered, and learn how to do the same for others. The backbone of building an inclusive school starts with three key areas when looking at an institution to help build that inclusive culture: physical environment, teaching methods, and professional development. By intentionally fostering inclusive environments and supporting equitable instructional practices through pertinent professional learning opportunities, school leaders can create an inclusive culture which supports and values staff and students alike.

Schools have the responsibility to meet the diverse needs of their students (Villa & Thousand, 2017). Purposeful and tactful inclusion of diverse learners – cultural diversity, disability, giftedness, and so on – empowers and enriches the whole school community. Inclusive school leaders promote and physically prepare an environment and culture both inside and outside the school that represents its student body and connects families to the school. School leaders should support their teachers and staff with trusted teaching methods such as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and should provide and promote effective and purposeful professional development (PD) opportunities, professional learning communities (PLCs), and staff meetings that also focus on the inclusion of diversity.

Physical and Cultural Environment

The leader of an inclusive school develops a physical and cultural environment that is representative of its student body and beyond. This includes what one sees both outside and inside the school, and various systems that promote the cultures and differences that our students and their families represent. Outside the school, cultural backgrounds can be indicated by displaying appropriate flags that reflect the diversity of the student body. Showcasing flags such as the “Pride” flag or an “Every Child Matters” flag shows the school’s stance on diversity and important causes that affect all communities. Posting student artwork on the walls or exterior of the school communicates the school’s pride in students’ work, encouraging students to feel proud and emotionally connected to their school. The playground should have accessible equipment for all abilities and needs. For example, wheelchair accessible swings, even without an enrolled student who uses a wheelchair, makes wheelchair-dependent community members feel represented and welcome to use the playground as part of their community. A student or community garden on the grounds can also give students a sense of purpose, hone practical life skills that may not be taught at home, and provide work experience for students with intellectual disabilities, supporting the additional need of work-related training and not just a focus on curriculum (Hutchinson & Specht, 2020). Such supports provide a welcoming experience for students and community members without even having to enter the school building.

Inside the school, appropriate visuals can add structure and needed representation of the students. Visuals that remind students of events or activities, like a school calendar complete with visuals, are especially useful to students with down syndrome, autism, or ADHD (Hutchinson & Specht, 2020). Accessible classrooms, gym equipment, washrooms, and an overall accessible school break down the barriers that students with disabilities meet outside the classroom. A celebration of diversity within the walls can be made apparent with sayings in different languages adorning the walls, greetings in various languages during announcements,

students' artwork depicting different cultural inspirations, acknowledgement of various religious holidays, and gender-neutral washrooms, to name a few. The leader of an inclusive school ensures physical accessibility and representation of all students.

The culture within a school is built and maintained by all staff, students, and community members. When the leader of the school encourages systems that promote the diversity and differences that students and their families bring with them, an environment rich in social-emotional learning is nurtured, with a focus on the whole student and not just curricula. These attitudes then bleed into everyday classroom management styles, intervention work, various supports, and how the school provides connections and outreach into the community (Reilly, 2017). Such a school culture is promoted by hosting family events such as breakfasts, BBQs, community and family-friendly picnics or sporting events. These events can celebrate different cultures through food, music, athletic events, or general activities.

A great leader also supports any endeavours taken by staff to promote diversity and inclusion, knowing that their efforts may not always be supported by some in the community. Examples are supporting teachers who promote diverse family structures or the basic human rights of all people regardless of sexual orientation. An effective school leader also promotes a culture of inclusion by taking time to make personal relationships with students. This can include being a friendly presence in the morning, greeting students, and even employing the "Two-by-Ten" strategy by having a daily two-minute conversation with a student, particularly those with behaviour exceptionalities, for ten days on whatever the student is interested in (Smith & Lambert, 2008). Students and the whole community benefit from advocating, promoting, and representing an inclusive culture.

A school leader should aim for the framework of a partnership school where families, the school, and the greater community all work together to provide the best experience possible to every student (Stollenwerk & Bartlett, 2012). Good leadership practices of making contact and getting to know your students' families should extend into their religious, cultural, and educational beliefs, ensuring that these are also represented and integrated into the school (Andrews, et al., 2015; Stollenwerk & Bartlett, 2012). Families can enrich a whole-school experience even further when their participation is encouraged through volunteering opportunities, involvement in parent advisory committees, or other groups that affect decisions made at the school level, providing additional opportunities to share views, culture, and other representations. A school leader can further support parents in these endeavours by reducing barriers that may prevent some parents from participating, such as finding childcare opportunities during meeting times, procuring transportation to and from the school, or offering translation services for families who have language barriers. School leaders have the capacity to enrich a school's diversity by encouraging a family-inclusive partnership school.

The Universal Design for Learning

School staff have a resounding emotional attachment to their students and their work, and they need appropriate support to meet the ever-changing needs that an inclusive school demands. Strong emotions can be accompanied by fear of the unknown, or change, that can lead to hesitancy surrounding new strategies to implement for our students (Ekins, 2017). Thankfully, these strong emotions generally mean that the teacher is still putting the student first, and an effective school leader will be able to support staff through changes by modelling and encouraging good practice. An effective method for inclusive teaching is UDL. UDL combines various practices in the delivery of material, the way that students interact with that material, and how they show their understanding to achieve the learning goal using their own individual strengths (CAST, 2018). In reducing the hurdles that may come with stringent or rigid teaching methods, UDL communicates to students that differences are not a burden, but instead are to be expected and celebrated (Hall, et al., 2012).

PD, Staff Meetings, and PLCs

The leader of an inclusive school provides appropriate support and resources for new methods that foster inclusion, aiming to create an environment where change is welcome. These school leaders encourage and provide opportunities for staff to continue learning, such as through PD, PLCs, and staff meetings (Freeze, 2015). By finding outside professionals with experience and the ability to relate their knowledge to the school's specific experiences and communities, PD time can be used appropriately and tactfully and can add to the culture of inclusion in the school. Additionally, leaders of inclusive schools find ways to continue the discussion from the PD and encourage staff to refine their new learning and bring it into the classroom. This could be achieved by encouraging staff to shadow others with effective techniques, sharing ideas in staff meetings, or engaging in PLCs that focus on inclusion and extend understanding from previous PD opportunities.

PLCs provide opportunities throughout the school year to continue discussion. One example would be addressing language from staff when it comes to supporting diversity and inclusion. This time can be used to support and encourage staff to read through resources and then discuss at a meaningful pace (Jana & Baran, 2020; Manitoba Teachers Society, 2022). The readings can be broken into sections to give staff time to discuss, reflect, and add additional discourse to the subject of inclusive language. PLCs also offer the opportunity of choice, allowing staff to participate in small-group learning communities with people of common passions and interests.

Staff meetings are opportunities for school leaders to use their best resource, their staff, in collaboration on student-specific endeavours. Ensuring a plan is set to respect the time of all involved, school leaders can use the nominal group technique, whereby teachers come together in small groupings to find solutions to barriers that a student may be facing (Freeze, 2015). In turn, the solutions are shared and discussed further in the large-group setting for added clarification, and a common solution is found that is enacted quickly to remove barriers and improve the student's educational experience.

Conclusion

Leaders of inclusive schools find ways to support all of their students and their students' families. They foster an environment that physically represents students outside and inside their school, while creating a welcoming culture through inclusive practice. They support their staff with UDL, modelling, and passing on lessons that are adaptable for any student's learning needs. PD and PLC opportunities supplement staff meetings that connect back to students and the school community. In preparing to become a school leader, the inclusive leader puts every student first.

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The Power of Emotional Intelligence in Educational Leadership: Building Strong Relationships for Safe, Caring, and Inclusive Schools

Simone Miranda

Abstract

Emotional Intelligence (EI) is vital for educational leaders in building strong inter- and intra-personal relationships. Emotionally intelligent leaders foster safe, inclusive, and nurturing school environments. They listen empathetically to build trust, engage in dialogues to understand rather than respond, and demonstrate vulnerability as a human quality. However, challenges such as a lack of self-awareness, conversational skills, and compassion can hinder relationship-building. Emotional Intelligence empowers leaders to strengthen relationships, ultimately creating educational spaces defined by care, safety, and inclusivity. These characteristics define effective educational leadership.

The etymology of emotion derives from the Latin word *emovere* which means to move out or agitate. Emotions are a natural, instinctive, conscious mental reaction to subjective experiences acquired through relationships with others (Betty & Brew, 2004). Such relationships can provoke feelings ranging from happiness and excitement to anger and disappointment, with accompanying behavioural changes. Emotional Intelligence (EI) is the ability to perceive, appraise, and control emotions and their consequent behaviours (Goleman, 2005). EI is a vital asset for effectively assessing and regulating emotions and behaviours to generate enhanced relationships for safe, caring, and inclusive schools (Durlak et al., 2011). It is vital for managing conflicts and building solid relationships through social-emotional learning (Gómez-Leal et al., 2021; Manitoba Education and Training, 2017). The more positive emotions a leader has, the more committed people are to an organization.

Emotional self-awareness, emotional self-control, optimism, empathy, and trust building are necessary (Goleman et al., 2013) to manage relationships and organizational conflicts (Grissom & Condom, 2021). If leaders cannot emotionally manage themselves, they cannot emotionally manage relationships (Maulding, 2002). EI assists educational leaders in building strong relationships through self-awareness, conversational competence, and compassion.

The Importance of Emotional Intelligence in Educational Leadership

Before 1990, cognitive intelligence was considered the pinnacle of human capabilities because of its various spheres of influence in reaching outcomes. Psychologists measured levels of human intelligence by cognitive competencies (Goleman, 2005). Humans with high levels of cognitive knowledge were deemed intelligent. After 1990, academics realized that there is more to human success than cognitive intelligence because cognitive intelligence does not cover the essence of human beings: their souls and the dwelling of emotions (Goleman, 2014). EI is indispensable when it comes to understanding and controlling emotions (Chen & Guo, 2020). EI skills are vital to observing, comprehending, and supervising emotions.

Psychology and theology scholars agree that emotions are the core of human souls, where personality traits are evident (Goleman, 2005). Human relationships can be negatively impacted when emotions are not understood and regulated properly (Durlak et al., 2011; Johnson, 2016; Manitoba Education and Training, 2017). The importance of EI lies in the ability to discern, understand, acknowledge, validate, and control emotions to ensure better inter- and intra-personal relationships for a safe and healthy institutional space.

Goleman et al. (2013) identified four domains of EI: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. It is therefore connected to reading one's own emotions, controlling them, being sensitive to the emotions of others, guiding, and motivating

with a purposeful vision. Efficient leaders demonstrate strengths in at least one competence from each EI domain. People can learn how to be emotionally intelligent because EI competencies are not innate. Leaders are thus made, not born. Educational leaders can acquire EI competencies through regular practice, so as to adopt new habits (Goleman et al., 2013). They can create mental maps to organize their ideas in writing regarding abilities to be improved, and mental rehearsal can train leaders to discipline their emotions.

EI is fundamental to helping effective leaders drive emotions positively as they create a safe, caring, and inclusive workplace environment. EI operates as a primal leadership power capable of transforming not only individuals but also entire organizations because “great leadership works through the emotions” (Goleman et al., 2013, p. 3). Therefore, acknowledging emotions in personal and social relationships is crucial in any leadership style (Fannon, 2018). Educational leaders require EI to build strong relationships.

Challenges Related to Building Strong Relationships

Chief executive officers, directors, superintendents, consultants, coaches, mentors, counsellors, principals, vice-principals, teachers, professors, assistant professors, deans, and all other educational leaders are involved in regular tensions that extend from paperwork overload to meeting the needs of students and the labour market. Leaders require EI to correct the imbalance created by these tensions (Grosland & Roberts, 2021). Lack of self-awareness, lack of conversational competence, and lack of compassion hinder educational leaders from building strong relationships for safe, caring, and inclusive schools.

Lack of Self-Awareness

When educational leaders think about themselves, this does not mean that they truly know about themselves. Knowing about oneself means seeing oneself clearly on the inside (Headlee, 2017). Self-awareness requires reading one's own emotions and understanding them as well as one's strengths, weaknesses, values, and intentions (Goleman et al., 2013). Leaders who do not have enough knowledge about their emotions will not become effective emotional guides (Chen & Guo, 2020). Teamwork is formed by humans immersed in emotional conditions that must be observed, understood, acknowledged, and validated. Lack of self-awareness threatens educational leadership relationships because leaders cannot manage teamwork emotions properly if they cannot manage their own emotions (Gómez-Leal et al., 2021). Self-reflection and intuition are attributes of self-awareness, which prevents impulsivity. Educational leaders rely on solid relationships to retain teams, stakeholders, and community members (Betty & Brew, 2004). Self-awareness is imperative when building and strengthening relationships for a healthy and respectful workplace.

Lack of Conversational Competence

Another challenge to educational leaders is the lack of conversational competence. Conversational competence means respecting others' perspectives and assumptions without imposing personal opinions and beliefs (Headlee, 2017). It includes actively listening with empathy, understanding, and learning from others' experiences (Abrams, 2009). Listening to create one's own response instead of listening to understand the other's side (Headlee, 2017) causes relationship gaps that can polarize thoughts and create a toxic and non-inclusive atmosphere.

Lack of Compassion

Compassion is the recognition of others' suffering and taking action to support them (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). It is intrinsically associated with empathy and altruism. In theory, leaders should assist teams to reach their highest potential through proper resources (Goleman, 2014). In practice, there is a lack of compassion among leaders, especially when teams struggle or fail (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Team members' weaknesses are emphasized more than their strengths in many organizations. Compassionate leaders sacrifice themselves for the group they lead, providing opportunities to improve teamwork performances, even if it requires time to study better strategies, which in turn will generate team growth (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Teamwork success and failure are part of the many responsibilities of compassionate leaders.

Building Strong Relationships Through the Power of Emotional Intelligence

Inter- and intra-personal relationships are immersed in emotions, which are the core of the human soul. EI is the foundation of all approaches to building strong relationships since it is connected to managing emotions (Patra, 2004). Developing safe, caring, and inclusive schools through the power of EI is feasible when educational leaders start listening with empathy to build trust, having conversations to understand instead of just to respond, and demonstrating vulnerabilities as a human condition attribute.

Listening with Empathy To Build Trust

Trust is the cornerstone of all sorts of relationships. The best leaders listen with empathy, which has to do with perspective-taking and avoiding judgment (Abrams, 2009). Empathy has to do with choosing to perceive emotions in others and care about them (Headlee, 2017), which generates a positive atmosphere (Goleman et al., 2013). Visionary leaders use empathy to articulate an inspirational vision. They know how to read people, sense their feelings, and understand their perspectives and assumptions (Maulding, 2002). Empathy connects leaders to teamwork emotions, enhancing team members' sense of belonging while providing a safe and caring organizational environment.

Having Conversations To Understand, Not To Respond

When leaders start conversations to understand teamwork instead of merely to respond to them, their relationships improve. If team members feel heard and respected, they engage more and demonstrate better productivity (Goleman, 2014). Leadership requires many skills to be successful, including knowing how to drive emotions positively (Goleman et al., 2013). Emotionally intelligent leaders can motivate the best in people because they listen to the people they lead and understand their perspectives. Regular, informal, and focused conversations with team members, where leaders ask open-ended questions about the way they see things, make all that achievable (Headlee, 2017). These conversations must be based on educational leaders' willingness to learn from individual team members and their own stories (Abrams, 2009). Effective leaders learn from their team members' narratives through constructive dialogue.

Demonstrating Vulnerabilities as a Human Condition Attribute

Connection gives meaning and purpose to life because empathy relates to it. If leaders connect to team members' emotions, they can understand their team better and provide the support they need (Maulding, 2002). In a world where strong people are perceived as those who do not show their vulnerabilities, allowing others to see one's true colours sounds like a

contradiction (Abrams, 2009), but strong leaders are not afraid to show their vulnerabilities. Making mistakes is part of human nature and should be understood as a sign of equality (Headlee, 2017). Honest relationships generate safer and more inclusive spaces.

Conclusion

The leadership challenges to building solid relationships for safe, caring, and inclusive schools include lack of self-awareness, lack of conversational competence, and lack of compassion. Consistent relationships are fundamental to ensure successful leadership. EI assists educational leaders in building strong relationships. It is easier for team members to trust educational leaders who empathetically care about their feelings. Team members' senses of belonging and performance are improved when their leaders have regular, informal, and focused conversations with them to understand their standpoints. Educational leaders' and teams' relationships are also strengthened when leaders do not hide their weaknesses but bring them into conversations with team members.

Educational leaders will benefit from aiming attention on the fascinating power of EI to build strong relationships through empathetic listening, conversations to understand, and demonstration of vulnerability. Leaders who embrace EI have the unique ability to manage the complexities of the modern workplace well by their own emotions and those of their team members. EI enables leaders to master the art of motivation, guiding their teams toward shared goals while cultivating a positive, resonant, healthy, inclusive, and respectful atmosphere, which benefits the whole education community and educational system.

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Restorative Justice in Schools

Lyle Morris

Abstract

Schools are too often not pleasant places for too many. Teachers are taught lesson planning and not classroom management. Consequences or punishments are not equal, are shown to be racist, and seldom fix. Not only does punishment not work, it increases recidivism. As educators, we should be leading with learning and fixing. Punishment does not teach – except to “not get caught.” With restorative justice programs and a philosophy for fixing mistakes, repairing relationships, and seeking to ameliorate the root causes of hurt and harm, the entire community benefits.

Over brunch with a friend and colleague, we lamented that there still does not seem to be much in the way of classroom management training in university education programs. Unless a style or methodology is picked up from a strong cooperating teacher, many in the field do as they have seen or have experienced personally. This fall-back position is, more often than not, rooted in punishment-as-discipline, or the softer sounding “natural consequences.” The original source of that position may be the patriarchy, Judeo-Christian influences, a misguided desire for justice, and/or the much more recent fixation on zero tolerance policies (Williams & Lewis, 2022). This article recommends using restorative justice instead of punishment. The aims of restorative justice are to create the conditions for safety (both physical and relational), repair the harms caused by the incident to the community, strengthen all affected relationships, and address the root causes of the incident (Lewis et al., 2021).

Punishment as Discipline

Punishment leads to recidivism (Gottlieb et al., 2024). Researchers Riesch et al. (2025) also concluded that punishment harms society and communities as a whole. There are impassioned arguments about “doing something” and “standing up for what is right” and so on and so forth, but this binary thinking is scarcity thinking. An absence of punishment does not necessitate an absence of care or reaction or doing something. Punishment does not take into account the human needs of the offending party, and it does not repair or restore harms done (Amemiya et al., 2020). If anything, punishment teaches people not to get caught. As educators, we teach students how to learn from their mistakes, and how to approach the problem next time a similar situation arises. If we use this approach when teaching how to reduce fractions, edit a peer’s paper, or master a different technique on an instrument in band class, surely we can do the same for students in a relational context.

I used to be a Restitution¹ trainer, and I would do workshops for school staffs across Canada and some parts of the US. Restitution – with the definition of “creating the conditions for students to fix their mistakes and return to the group strengthened” (Gossen & Anderson, 1995) – as a restorative practice. I would often challenge the attendees at these workshops to call me on it if they thought I was mistaken. There was almost always someone in the crowd who would take on the role of staff representative for situations like these, and would often say something to the effect of “Once they are out of my room, they are not my problem anymore.” I would challenge them to think about where they will go, where they will end up, “whose problem” they will become, and so on. The people breaking into your garage, accosting you on the street, or

¹ *Restitution* is capitalized because it refers to the restorative practice as a classroom management program and company name.

otherwise being a perceived nuisance are likely people who were pushed out of school. I would then challenge them with a question: “IF we could find a way to have them not disrupt your class, fix their mistakes, and meet their needs in a positive way – would you be interested?” At this point I would have them open to possibilities and we were off to the races.

One of the simplest examples of a punishing practice is suspension. Regardless of the type or length of suspension, students are isolated from their peers and school community. Their academics suffer (Bell & Puckett, 2020), and a negative attitude develops toward school and learning (Trovato et al., 2025). Other researchers have found that relationships matter greatly (Lodi et al., 2021), and punishment – perhaps especially in the form of suspension – does serious damage to a student’s relationships with peers and school staff (Doyle et al., 2025). There is the shame of isolation and othering that bleeds into feelings related to anything and everything at school. Students affected in this way have lower grades and lower chances of graduating (Bell & Puckett, 2020). When punishing is used to uphold safety and respect in school, we damage the school community by making students feel less safe and lowering our graduation rates (Riesch et al., 2025).

Perhaps most disturbingly, punishment has been found to disproportionately affect minority students (Amemiya et al., 2020). Non-white students experience greater rates of punishment than their peers. If we are to switch out punishment with restorative justice practices, we are instantly treating students with more kindness and respect, and lessening any racial divide.

The goal of using punishment is to cause discomfort as a way to dissuade students from doing harmful or distracting things. The intent is to cause harm. I would argue that most well-adjusted adults in respectful and responsible relationships would not seek to cause harm when a loved one is involved. We would instead seek to understand what happened, why it happened, how to fix it, and how to avoid the specific harm (and harms like it) in the future. That is what restorative justice is (Lewis et al., 2021), and that is why we should be using it.

Restorative Justice as Culture

Relatively early on in my career, I was fortunate to attend a Restitution professional development workshop, and it changed my life. It changed my professional and personal perspectives and practices. As a restorative practice, the goal in approaching conflict is focused on needs, as prescribed by William Glasser (2008). Due to the similarity – and current perspectives – I am using the Circle of Courage (Brendtro et al., 2019) instead of Glasser’s needs for this explanation. The Circle of Courage teaches us that we are all motivated by the same human drives: belonging, mastery, independence, and generosity. In other words (but in no particular order), we seek experiences that help us feel connected, give us a sense of power and accomplishment, autonomy and creativity, and finally the desire to share our gifts, knowledge and materials. When we make relational mistakes, there is always one of these needs behind it. Someone who is overly controlling may be seeking power over others or a situation. Members of a gang may act out of the need to belong, and so on and so forth. In Restitution, we teach that all behaviour is purposeful, and that we can learn to meet our needs in healthy, safe, and helpful ways.

Restorative justice as a philosophy reaches further and wider than Restitution. There may be applications for restorative justice in simple, smaller and clean cut ways, but part of its philosophy is to positively impact the entire affected community. People who may be ignorant of the positive outcomes often complain that “nothing happens, they just get a talking to.” This could not be further from the truth. To take part in a restorative process, the offender and offended are required to be vulnerable in their experiences before, during, and after the examination of the incident. Each party sees the humanity in the other, and can express their thoughts and feelings while also seeking to repair the harm in a fashion that leaves all affected stronger than before. It requires work, honesty, self-reflection, and specific learning to avoid repeating the offense. Sometimes there are situations wherein structural change is the

necessary outcome and the inciting incident would otherwise appear to have been a logical outcome. One example from my introduction to restorative justice practices years ago was when a restorative justice circle was utilized in the case of theft. A boy had stolen food for his family. When the community members were made aware of the situation, his family was provided with food.

Restorative justice as a practice does not hew to any one line, style or organization, but instead takes a bigger-picture approach to the practices outlined above. I do not have nearly the training in restorative justice that I do in Restitution, yet what I do know and understand of it makes it a clear choice for discipline and justice in a school, division, or justice system. I have taught every grade from one to twelve, and have employed aspects of this program to the best of my ability as much as possible. I am actively pursuing its applications in the high school I currently work at, as well as involving our divisional clinical director, school psychologists, and social workers. I have heard many anecdotal stories wherein the stakes were much higher, in addition to my own personal experiences. There is a preferred focus on repairing the harms done, and not on making amends or taking punishment for the law/rule that was broken (Lodi et al., 2021). Many times, I have had students in my office for an act that would result in three to five days of suspension. With some time and effort on both of our parts, we were able to tease out the root of the conflict, understand each party's perspective better, fix any damage done (to the offended party's satisfaction), and go back to class – with their relationships to each other in a much better position than originally.

In order to achieve a systems buy-in for restorative justice (and away from the “pound-of-flesh” motivations of punishment), prospective users need to understand how it works and that it does work. The following explanation begins with my best understanding of a possible restorative justice application (there is no “one way”), followed by the research data that supports restorative justice (or RJ as it is called in various publications). There is no absolute definitive guide or organization; readers are advised to consult The Zehr Institute for Restorative Justice (2018) for more information.

Consider a situation wherein two students isolate another student and beat them up. The victimized student is supported physically and emotionally, parents are contacted, and applicable school actions are carried out (information is gathered, appropriate people are contacted, required documentation is completed, and so on). Most important is that the student is cared for and every effort is given to helping them feel strong and safe and that their dignity is upheld. Before speaking to the process regarding the offending students, it is worth mentioning how the process is handled. If we can keep everyone's dignity intact, we can get much further in the healing process. Therefore, we treat the offending students with dignity and respect.

The offending students are brought in, and we gather as much information as possible. We explain why we have the rules and laws that we do, and why it is important to follow them. We encourage perspective taking and empathizing with how their victim felt and feels, as well as anyone else affected (including witnesses or family members). We acknowledge feelings and motivations, and we brainstorm different possible courses of action. Assuming at this point that everyone is calm and there is healthy reflection taking place, we can talk about possibly fixing the harms, and what that would look like. Here is where (separately) we would talk to both parties about meeting.

Restorative justice needs to be accepted and chosen – and not forced. We can move forward only with buy-in from both parties. Assuming this happens, we discuss in detail what this meeting would look like, the appropriate language to be used, what we hope to accomplish, and who else will be there. This stage would not happen without buy-in from both parties, and especially ownership being taken by the offending people. Each person can bring a parent/support to the meeting, and there would also most likely be a counsellor, a social worker, a representative of the administration team and, in this situation, our school resource officer (police). The facilitator, who may be a person already listed, then helps everyone share how the incident affected them and the context of the day (with no blame, using “I statements,” and so

on). Once that stage is complete, we can focus on reparation (often brainstormed together) with the “harsher” ideas usually coming from the offenders. After agreeing on next steps, the plan is written up and approved by all parties. In my experience, this is usually when gratitude is shared by many of the participants, with shaking hands and hugs taking place between the former foes.

The above example is incomplete and in some cases ideal, but it paints a good picture of the process. No two meetings are the same, just as any conflict changes with differing personalities. Often several meetings are necessary, and other details can vary. I did not describe the preparatory sessions and other required steps, but hopefully what came across gives a general idea of what happens. There is a sense of shame that is a natural consequence of the offending actions, a vulnerability required for the healing, and hard work and effort required to see the plan through to completion. Those who think offenders get off easy with the restorative justice process have not experienced it. It is a different kind of wringer that the offending persons are put through.

Perhaps the most important question is, does it work? While no process is perfect, if we want change and improvement in the form of lower recidivism rates, the data supports it. When an offending person undergoes this process, they are less likely to re-offend (Shem-Tov et al., 2024). There are many reasons for the lower recidivism rates. When the people involved have a say in the process, they are more likely to feel involved, humanized, and motivated to see it through (Lodi et al., 2021). Offenders will also see that the structures enabling harm are scrutinized and changed (Lewis et al., 2021), that they themselves are not seen as the problem but as part of the team solving the problem, and in the process their self-awareness and problem-solving skills increase (Lodi et al., 2021).

The restorative justice process is also proven to improve not only relationships between the wronged and offending parties, but relationships in the surrounding community as a whole (Lewis et al., 2021, p. 14). The greater community is less likely to dehumanize and label those involved, and to see hope in a better future. Everyone makes mistakes; what matters is our response to them. A safe community might not be free from challenges and fears, but it is one wherein everyone is heard, problems are solved together, and everyone matters. There is research data showing that students prefer this approach from a young age (Yang et al., 2021), and that younger siblings are positively impacted when their family participates in restorative justice (Lodi et al., 2021).

What Does “Better” Look Like?

There is a lot of talk in society about people getting what they deserve. The Blue Jays deserved to win. That guy deserves to get his butt kicked. Our favourite people deserve to have the other side of the pillow always cool. *Deserve* is intensely subjective, and I am under no illusion that I could feel comfortable using it in most circumstances. Instead of trying to decide what people deserve, can we focus on making the world a better place? Can we share the load of our neighbours, pitch in, and help as we would appreciate being done for us? Part of that is realizing that we have all been dealt different hands, and we have differing levels of privilege. In the meantime, perhaps we can see each other with curiosity and not judgement. Maybe we can celebrate differences and embrace the idea that we are stronger together. If one member of the community suffers in some way, we can isolate them, but this could lead to wondering who is next, and depriving ourselves of their gifts, talents, and contributions. If instead we choose to support those who need it, our community grows stronger. That is how I see restorative justice. We do not punish or throw people away; we give them a hand up. When our culture becomes one of fixing instead of disposing, we all win.

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About the Author

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The Significance of Student Absenteeism

Kristel Sproll

Abstract

There is a large issue with student absenteeism in Canada and around the world. Students may be absent for a variety of reasons, but it is the responsibility of all caregivers to work together to keep students in school. When students miss a large portion of school, they run a risk of having mental health issues and falling behind academically. School attendance policies, consistent communication with families, and building student connections are strategies that all schools should employ to retain students.

Students are absent from school every day. They typically miss school 5% of the time, but this becomes a chronic problem when the time absent is 10% or higher (Sprick & Berg, 2019, p. 5). Student absenteeism is gaining attention because not all school boards or countries report absences. While there is little research in Canada, and it is difficult to measure, an Ontario school board recently reported a gain in chronic absences from 15% to 33% in a span of four years (Whitley, 2024, para. 2). This issue is also prevalent in many countries around the world, where an estimated 263 million children are not in school (Kindu & Bej, 2025, p. 2). When students are chronically absent, they run a risk of mental health and academic issues, which may lead to problems in adulthood, as well (Whitley, 2024).

Schools play a key role in ensuring that students get the most out of their education and develop into adults who function well in society. For academic and behavioural strategies to have an impact, students must consistently be at school to receive benefits (Sprick & Berg, 2019). In response to student absenteeism, government policies are formed, schools are encouraged to make connections to families, and students are motivated to feel connected to school. School boards, schools, teachers, families, and students must work together to keep students in school.

Consequences of Chronic Absences

Chronic absenteeism can interfere with students' mental health and academic achievement. Increased frustration can result in negative behaviours that become disruptive in a classroom setting, disturbing class dynamics and the learning environment for the remainder of students (Kindu & Bej, 2025). I have had many classes where students and I have been displaced due to one student who was acting out and refusing to leave the room. Other students who are present during such disruptions may struggle to concentrate or feel unsafe in the classroom. When the disruptive student returns, there may be some hostility towards that student, and a cycle of absences may ensue (Kindu & Bej, 2025). When students return to class after being absent, they tend to isolate themselves in their seating location and classroom dynamics. Continued negative behaviours may lead to further negative effects on mental health issues and moral well-being, often resulting in issues outside school (Kindu & Bej, 2025). These issues are often associated with social and economic problems throughout adulthood (Özcan, 2020). Student absenteeism and mental health go hand in hand and cannot be ignored when addressing chronic absenteeism in schools.

Missing school means missing key lessons in class. Students learn better when they attend classes regularly and are actively engaged in their classroom and lessons (Zeqiri & Sadiku, 2023). There is a positive correlation between higher attendance in school and higher marks (Ardill, 2024). Chronically absent students often miss crucial details and the vital building blocks of information provided by the teacher (Sprick & Berg, 2019). Therefore, schools that do not deal with chronic absenteeism struggle with students' meeting academic outcomes. Negative

academic achievement begins as early as kindergarten for these students (Sprick & Berg, 2019). Interventions are needed in the early years, because problems will only worsen as students become older (Capretta et al., 2024).

When drafting report cards, I find it difficult to give an adequate assessment when students are often absent. Based on research data, students who typically have three or more absences in a class are less likely to receive feedback and develop confidence in the subject matter, and are more likely to have poor test performance and not meet the academic requirements of that class (Zeqiri & Sadiku, 2022). When assessing, I am directed to give the students an incomplete mark on their report card, since they have not attended school often enough for teachers to know whether they can meet the outcomes. Students who receive incomplete marks on report cards may become more discouraged and continue the cycle of absenteeism.

Reducing Chronic Absenteeism

Attendance policies have existed for many years. When I attended high school in 2000, a student who missed two or more classes in a term failed the course. More than five absences from a course resulted in suspension from school, with a risk of expulsion. Older policies focused on changing the student behaviour instead of understanding the causes of absences that are often beyond student control (Childs & Lofton, 2021). New policies should demonstrate approaches that are student centered, promote a safe, caring, inclusive environment, and focus on building relationships (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Education, 2023).

While each student may have their own underlying cause of absences, consistency in collecting data is necessary for schools to develop proper intervention strategies (Germain et al., 2024). The Government of Manitoba released a new policy in 2023 with six guidelines for school divisions to implement attendance policies: develop common language for families and schools to use, attempt preventative practices, use data to communicate absences, have student specific responses to absences, use restorative practices for students, and understand the roles of the students, parents, teachers, principals and school divisions (Manitoba Education and Early Childhood Education, 2023). Schools and school divisions are directed to implement their own policies based on the provincial guidelines.

Teachers may not always be aware of provincial and school attendance policies when they are required to contact a student's home. At my school, if a student is absent more than twice a week, classroom teachers are expected to contact the home every week. If that absent student continues to be away, the administrators and school social worker take over as case managers, and work together to develop plans to increase the student's attendance. Teachers are often left clueless about the next steps once the student is passed along to the next support person. Because it is often the role of the teacher to get involved, professional development can help staff carry out the school initiatives (Capretta et al., 2024). Teachers not only need professional development on policy, but they also need to know how to implement the policy when dealing with chronically absent students.

Schools cannot work independently to keep students in school. Families need to be engaged with the school and be aware of the impacts of absenteeism (Kindu & Bej, 2025). Families may not be aware of the impacts of high absences, and they may not be aware of the number of absences occurring. Schools should have regular communication with families in a variety of ways, such as email and phone calls regarding student attendance (Sprick & Berg, 2019). Any form of messages to families helps reduce student absences (Dee, 2024). My school uses an online system that reports daily absences to families three times a day, and a phone call home if a student has more than one unexcused absence each week.

Schools should have consistent methods for contacting families regarding attendance. Focusing on the importance of consistent attendance helps families to become more engaged with the school (Germain et al., 2024). Schools need to work harder to build positive relationships with families who have mistrust with the school system. Teachers and schools

should call home for behaviours that are not always negative (Sprick & Berg, 2019). I recently taught a student who refused to do anything in my class. With time and patience, he eventually started participating in class. I informed him that I was phoning home to let his mother know he had an exceptional class. The student was very confused, because he usually did not receive positive phone calls home. Showing I had the child's best interests in mind helped to build trust and connection with the family.

When communicating with families, listening and responding to their feedback is crucial to increase trust (Capretta et al., 2024). My school conducts an annual survey with families regarding their perception of the school. Families have responded by requesting more events for families to attend at the school. Integrating family traditions in schools fosters trust and makes families feel connected (Kindu & Bej, 2025). In response to family surveys, my school offers busing for families who live further away to join our celebrations of learning, provides food at parent conferences, and invites families to attend the school for term awards. Starting with small gestures can build connections with families and their children.

Students are more likely to attend school if they enjoy being there and feel connected. The physical and mental health of students affects the overall engagement, relationships, and attendance (Childs & Lofton, 2021). Student-centered activities and relationship building connect staff to students (Germain et al., 2024). Every year, my school uses data from our school student survey as an anonymous way to find information. When possible, my school uses this data that can be used to create new clubs and programs, that students value. Last year, a football club started due to student requests, and the number of students participating in it is growing. Listening to students' voices is a way for staff to show their care.

Students are very aware of their environment and the people around them. When students believe adults care about them, they are more likely to thrive (Childs & Lofton, 2021). Recognizing the individual needs of students and not using a single plan could help educators build connections with students. Offering student-based support, such as flexible schooling, demonstrates individual planning methods (Kindu & Bej, 2025). For example, my school division offers a unique opportunity for high school students to attend specialized programming at a separate high school that is self-directed and self-paced. There are limited teachers at this school, and programming is student centered. Other school divisions offer technical schools with programs geared toward future work forces. Offering incentives for attendance in school and positive reinforcements can also increase student attendance (Kindu & Bej, 2025). At my school, students with chronic absenteeism often have a gradual return-to-school plan. They may start back at school for half a day, then gradually increase time as their confidence grows. When schools and staff focus on individual students and their needs, students are more likely to connect to school and show an increase in attendance.

Conclusion

Attending school regularly is one of the best ways for students to become educated and maintain their mental health. Education is one of the most important factors in society because it helps one become successful and productive, but for academic and behavioural strategies to have an impact students must consistently attend school. As a teacher, it is my responsibility to create safe, inclusive environments for students to feel welcome in my classroom, but that is not enough. Chronic absences are a complex problem that requires collaboration among multi-level resources that include administrators, school support teams, classroom teachers, and community outreach to create strong family connections and invite student engagement while endorsing updated government policies.

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Students with ADHD: An Ongoing Struggle

Randi Leigh Michaniuk

Abstract

This article explores cognitive and relational issues that students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) face in the school setting, as well as practical solutions that teachers can put into practice to help students with ADHD achieve success in their learning experiences. Students with ADHD struggle with academic and social burdens as they navigate cognitive difficulties, strains on teacher-student relationships, and issues within peer interactions. Through methods of differentiated instruction, collaboration among staff, and effective classroom strategies, teachers can be supportive anchors for students with ADHD.

Students with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) face many challenges within the school setting. ADHD is a neurodevelopment disorder that affects 8.4% of the population of school-aged children (Mastrokouskou et al., 2025). ADHD in children is noticed by levels of hyperactivity, distracted attention, and impulsive behaviour at higher levels than typically developing children (Cordier et al., 2021). ADHD is a cognitive and behavioural disorder; however, it is also a serious social disorder, and the way ADHD is viewed and treated by others influences a child's experience at school (Mastrokouskou et al., 2025). Schools have a responsibility to accommodate the needs of students with ADHD, because these students are already climbing an uphill battle. In Manitoba, Canada, the philosophy of the department of education is to "embrace inclusion as a means of enhancing the well-being of every member of the community" (Manitoba Education, 2011, p. 1). There are solutions that teachers can incorporate into their classroom planning to ease the academic and social burdens placed on students with ADHD. These solutions include effective classroom management strategies, collaboration among staff, and differentiated instruction.

Problems: The Uphill Climb

Students with ADHD face challenges within the academic setting, within the teacher-student relationship, and within social interactions with peers. Students with ADHD tend to perform poorly academically, in comparison to typically developing children (McDougal et al., 2022). In interview analyses of ten students with ADHD aged 6-11 years and their respective teachers, it was discovered that students with ADHD have poor literacy skills due to cognitive barriers (McDougal et al., 2022). Students must see the value in what they are learning, how they are connected to their learning, and they must experience a level of control over their own learning process (Manitoba Education, 2011). Teachers must be mindful of the cognitive barriers that are experienced by students with ADHD.

Students with ADHD face challenges within the teacher-student relationship. Teachers experience ADHD behaviours as some of the most difficult to manage in a classroom, leaving children to experience up to three times more corrective feedback than positive feedback from the teacher (Staff et al., 2022). In a study to observe and track the ADHD behaviours of children aged 6-12 years and feedback correlations from their teachers, it was reported that teacher-student relationships showed significantly higher levels of negative interactions (Staff et al., 2022). ADHD is linked to higher levels of teacher-student conflict (Mastrokouskou et al., 2025), and the relationships between teachers and students with ADHD is of poorer quality with less emotional connection and more conflict across the classroom (Mastrokouskou et al., 2025). Strained teacher-student relationships can pose a negative impact on students' overall school experience.

Students with ADHD face challenges within social interactions with peers. Teachers have noted that social difficulties are a common theme among students with ADHD, most evident during collaboration activities with peers (McDougal et al., 2022). Children with ADHD tend to have more difficulties with pragmatic language in all areas compared to typically developing children, leading to social and emotional impacts (Cordier et al., 2021). Pragmatic language refers to the use of language in social interactions (Cordier et al., 2021). Students with ADHD may have impairments in communication skills and social interactions, which affects daily activities and meaningful friendships (Cordier et al., 2021). Bullies and victims of bullying with ADHD are found to be less accepted by their classmates and experience challenges in their friendships with peers (Mastrokoulou et al., 2025). Students with ADHD struggle to make meaningful connections with their peers, which adds to their daily obstacles.

For students with ADHD, educational experiences are generally negative, with reports of exclusion, unsafe feelings, bullying, and a lack of education among teaching staff (Smith & Dickinson, 2025). Teachers need to increase their knowledge of ADHD (Mastrokoulou et al., 2025) to accommodate students' needs within the school setting. Students with ADHD are climbing an uphill battle, because they face challenges within the academic setting, within teacher-student relationships, and within social interactions with peers. Students with ADHD deserve to have positive school experiences.

Solutions: Steadying the Climb

There are solutions that teachers can adapt into their classroom planning to make the school experience of a child with ADHD easier in the areas of academics, teacher-student relationships, and social interactions with peers. These solutions include effective classroom management strategies, collaboration among staff, and differentiated instruction.

Students with ADHD face challenges in the academic setting, and there are practices that teachers can apply to make these challenges easier for students. Classroom management strategies such as tutoring, alternate seating, choice making, and digital assistance may positively impact academic performance (Gaastra et al., 2022). A well-designed classroom supports classroom procedures, considers the needs of each student, and minimizes off-task behaviours (Manitoba Education, 2011). Students with ADHD may struggle with language and communication barriers, benefitting from interventions that focus on enhancing phonological awareness and vocabulary (Katsarou et al., 2024). Teachers can work with speech and language pathologists, resource teachers, and their administration to ensure that plans are in place for students with ADHD who exhibit challenges with language and communication. A supportive and collaborative relationship between teachers, therapists, parents, and the school community is important for helping children with ADHD overcome the challenges of language and communication challenges (Katsarou et al., 2024). Teachers must consistently make informed decisions about the content, resources, strategies, and procedures that they will be creating for their students (Manitoba Education, 2011). Strong classroom management strategies and collaboration among staff are effective solutions in helping students with ADHD achieve academically.

Students with ADHD face challenges within the teacher-student relationship, and teachers have a responsibility to foster these relationships with effort and care. Positive relationships are foundational for any school-related approaches to positive behaviour supports (Manitoba Education, 2011). Supportive teacher behaviour has a positive impact on students with ADHD (Strelow et al., 2020). Building relationships at the beginning of the school year is a foundation for the rest of the year. The motivation behind behaviour is intention, and teachers must have intention to carry out effective classroom strategies (Strelow et al., 2020). Research indicates that classroom management strategies that focus on consequences and self-regulation especially improve the classroom behaviour of students with ADHD (Gaastra et al., 2022). Classroom management strategies include clear expectations, positive daily feedback, and

praise. Being intentional about these strategies enables students with ADHD to feel appreciated and seen. Teachers who use differentiated instruction create a positive classroom environment that demonstrates growth in students and positive relationships, because individual needs are considered and respected (Gibbs, 2023). Differentiated instruction is a solution to ensure that students' needs are met and to establish trust. Teachers and students must both believe they are being treated respectfully and with dignity, and a balance must be maintained between the teacher's leadership role and their interest in the students (Manitoba Education, 2011). Teachers who establish effective and intentional classroom management strategies and differentiated instruction will strengthen their bonds with students with ADHD.

Students with ADHD face challenges within social interactions with their peers. It is important for students to recognize the strengths and skills of their peers, build on each other's skills, support each other in areas of need, and respect each other during conflicts (Manitoba Education, 2011). Teachers can encourage peers to be socially inclusive by setting strong social norms for behaviours they wish to see and by guiding students to demonstrate the expected behaviours in real time (Mikami et al., 2020). Teachers not only have to be aware of their relationship with students; they also must be mindful of peer interactions. Teachers need to model inclusive behaviour to their students and set clear social norms in the classroom. Teachers who create an inclusive environment, set social norms, and model inclusive behaviour are helping students with ADHD form positive social interactions with peers.

Conclusion

Students with ADHD face challenges within the academic setting, within the teacher-student relationship, and within social interactions with peers. With intention, teachers can create a positive, meaningful, and inclusive classroom environment that will allow students with ADHD to feel comfortable and safe as they navigate these challenges. Students with ADHD are climbing an uphill battle; however, the uphill battle can be a steady climb with the right support.

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Teaching Truth in a Digital Age

Chelsea Zaliska

Abstract

Misinformation and disinformation present growing challenges in education, affecting students' critical thinking and engagement with digital media. This paper examines the factors contributing to the spread of false information, including limited media literacy, reliance on social media, and avoidance of mainstream news. It argues that teachers must receive mandatory education on critical media literacy (CML) as part of licensing and professional development so that they can effectively teach students these skills. It also explores evidence-based strategies for fostering CML in the classroom, such as targeted interventions, digital tools, and approaches that support students' emotional well-being. By equipping educators with CML skills and applying these strategies in classrooms, students will be better prepared to critically evaluate information, resist conspiracy-based thinking, and engage as informed, media-literate members of society.

The widespread production and consumption of misinformation and disinformation is an ever-increasing issue faced by the world today. Some researchers view mis- and disinformation as a symptom of the lack of media and information literacy among the general public (De Abreu, 2021). Other researchers have pointed out the relationship between avoidance of mainstream news sources and reliance on social media, and other alternative news sources, with increased conspiracy-based thinking (Delmastro, 2022). This is partly because social media algorithms lead users into echo chambers and confirmation bias as they continuously expose users to the same information (Delmastro, 2022). Misinformation refers to false information that is created and spread without an agenda to deceive, while disinformation refers to false information that is created and spread with the intent to manipulate, mislead, and deceive the reader (Miriam-Webster). It impacts all levels of society from international government affairs and provincial health institutions to student-teacher interactions in a classroom. Misinformation and disinformation have enormous consequences to public health, democracy, and social justice (Trust et al., 2022). Reliable critical media literacy (CML) skills are both a collective and individual good, where collectively they positively influence policy making and individually they inform personal action that may too have a collective positive effect (Osborn & Pimentel, 2022). What are the impacts of mis- and dis-information in education and what can teachers do to encourage CML skills in their students to better prepare them for the digital age we exist within today?

Misinformation and disinformation have both been ongoing issues I encounter as I teach adult education. There is an overabundance of information available online today and many of my adult students struggle with discerning between true and untrue information they encounter online. The students do not have the skills to research fact-based information when they have questions, so they fall prey to taking opinion-based posts, blogs, propaganda, conspiracy theories etc. at face value. They also have a great amount of distrust for mainstream news agencies and use that to justify their dependency on alternative news sources. This often snowballs into other issues I encounter in the classroom, such as hostile behaviour when learning true information in class, heated arguments with other students, and disciplinary action by administrators, further driving a wedge between the students and their ability to access the education they need. There is an education-based gap that leads to acceptance of misinformation and gaps in teacher education and expertise in responding to misinformation. This article discusses the educational impacts of mis-and dis-information on students and argues that teachers would benefit from additional training, resources, specified learning targets, and targeted intervention strategies to teach and assess for CML to better prepare students for the digital age we exist within today.

Teacher CML Education

Teachers should have mandatory education as part of their licensing programs and continuing professional development training on the topic of CML skills in the context of today's North American society. Trust et al. (2022) explored the responsibility of teacher education in ensuring teachers are equipped with CML skills in the United States. They highlighted that there is no required CML component to teacher education, and argued that more needs to be done since a media-literate society is invaluable to public health, democracy, and social justice. Trust et al. also argued that teachers require CML skills to be capable of thinking critically about the media they employ within the classroom but also to better understand the media they and their students are exposed to on a regular basis, and how to support students to be critical media consumers. A functioning democracy relies on citizens' capacity to access, evaluate, and use reliable information to participate in public discussions (Kellner & Share, 2007). CML aims to explore production, ownership, and distribution of media, analyse the dominant ideology, and allow space for change while understanding the dynamics of power related to the content.

If teachers do not have any CML training themselves, it cannot be expected that they are equipped with the adequate level of knowledge and skills to teach it to their students. Canadian curricula do not have actionable outcomes for digital and information literacy, except minimally for subjects such as science, geography, and social studies. Teachers therefore really don't know what to teach and when. De Abreau (2021) stated that there is a need for media literacy education principles in school curricula. If media literacy education principles were implemented consistently by school curricula, there would be a greater acceptance of mandatory education on this topic in teacher licensing programs and professional development training.

Resources, Specific Learning Targets, and Targeted Intervention Strategies

De Abreau (2021) argued that including media literacy education principles in curricula offers students opportunities to engage with multiple perspectives to inform their views on various subjects. De Abreau explained that adequate media literacy curricular expectations also enable students to be educated on how to find answers to their questions and find trustworthy sources of information. De Abreau supported engaging students on the platform level to inform them about how media works to influence one's thinking. The first step to embracing CML skills in schools can be done by providing students with multiple resources to review while researching and providing students with assessment questions such as "Who is omitted from this message? How might different people experience this message from me?" and other statements intended to question bias (De Abreau, p. 27). Students should explore the purpose of a message and examine the techniques employed to attract their attention.

De Abreau (2021) compiled a list of websites that are valuable resources for teaching CML skills and that are great for fighting fake news in the classroom. These websites are often non-profit and newsfunded organizations. Many provide rubrics and checklists used to evaluate the validity of stories. These websites are a valuable resource for all educators teaching research skills today. Another noteworthy resource comes from the News Literacy Project, a non-partisan education non-profit, which has a student-centred fact-checking website called Checkology where teachers or students can sign up for free use of their services (News Literacy Project, n.d.). The organization puts out a weekly newsletter called The Sift[,] which offers weekly lessons based on trends and issues in CML. Caulfield (2019) also has [has also] created valuable resources for teaching CML[,] including the development of his SIFT method of evaluating digital materials.

Teachers need resources, specific learning targets, and targeted intervention strategies to teach and assess for CML skills and to better prepare students for the contemporary digital era. Osborne and Pimentel (2023) made suggestions about what can be done within science education to address the specific phenomenon of misinformation. They highlighted the newest

PISA framework for the science-focused test of 2025, which includes one of its three competencies to be tested as the ability to “research, evaluate, and use scientific information for decision making and action” (Osborne & Pimentel, p. 567). Osborne and Pimentel argued that it is clearly important that students have the ability to evaluate the credibility of sources[,] and PISA’s inclusion of this skill in their new assessment emphasizes that. They also argued that enacting such changes to the PISA framework requires recognition of the importance of these skills to the science education community both “for science itself and for the epistemic welfare of their students who need the cognitive tools to resist false beliefs” (Osborne and [&] Pimentel, p. 567). Developing students’ CML is vital both for high performance on assessments like PISA and for responsibly navigating today’s digital information landscape.

Contreras-Espinosa and Eguia-Gomez (2023) asserted that videogame-based learning is another effective way to teach CML skills. They studied using video games in the classroom and concluded that video games based on learning skills to combat misinformation are useful tools in education to teach students media literacy. Their research analyzed 24 video games considering their content, design, and characteristics that may affect their usability in education settings. The researchers selected the video games from multiple sources, compiled a list of media literacy learning outcomes from a toolkit for educators, played the video games, identified mechanics, then completed a content analysis of each game. The results showed that the current video games about media literacy on the market are effective learning tools to implement [for use] in the classroom that [to] achieve critical learning goals and enable students to learn, apply, and exercise their skills in combating misinformation, regardless of the game’s level of complexity. This approach can benefit students who enjoy game-based learning, offering a contemporary and engaging method that may increase their participation by demonstrating its relevance to their lives.

Many researchers argue that today’s curricula are insufficient in producing individuals capable of evaluating evidence and arguments critically for themselves, leaving them vulnerable to the influence and power of misinformation (Kellner & Share, 2007). Allchin (2023) provided strategies for combating science misinformation such as developing respect for empirical evidence and skills in interacting with media sources, identifying experts and trusted sources, and developing an understanding of our own personal biases in thinking, especially about information that challenges our beliefs. Sharon and Baram-Tsabari (2020) argued that these four components are most likely to help individuals identify misinformation in everyday life: understanding of scientific practices, judging the validity of expertise, cognitive skills, and habits of mind/open-mindedness.

These multiple points of evidence provide resources and specific learning targets that teachers can use to teach and assess for CML skills. They include websites for learning and teaching CML skills, fact checking, video games focused on CML targets, and strategies for teachers to employ in the classroom while teaching and assessing CML skills. The research conducted by Contreras-Espinosa and Eguia-Gomez (2023) is exciting because it examined the unique approach of utilizing video games as a useful tool for teaching CML skills. This may be a helpful strategy for some students who enjoy game-based learning, providing a modern and exciting approach that may also encourage student buy-in. When teachers have clearly identified learning targets and resources for teaching CML skills, they will be more capable of preparing students for the digital age we exist within today.

Emotional Well-being

It is important that teachers support the emotional well-being of students while combating mis- and dis-information and conspiracy-based thinking (Delmastro & Paciello, 2022). Delmastro and Paciello (2022) emphasized the importance of a supportive intervention at both the individual and social levels. Their study showed that those most at risk of belief in misinformation show higher bias perceptions and higher rates of depression (2022). Emotional

distress such as depression, irritation, or anxiety may increase self-perceived vulnerability, especially under very stressful conditions, and perceived low power is associated not only with depression but also with information-processing biases and misunderstanding the intentions of others (2022). The European Union's Digital Competence Framework also highlights the importance of supporting students' emotional well-being in digital environments while fostering critical thinking skills to evaluate information and recognize misinformation (Cosgrove & Cachia, 2025).

Other studies by Hwang and Jeong (2023) and Adjin-Tettey (2022) showed that there was an education-based gap in misinformation acceptance such that those with lower education were more likely to accept misinformation. Hwang and Jeong found that the effect was mediated by low issue knowledge, reduced systematic processing, and reliance on social media. The study also showed that the education-based gap in misinformation acceptance widened when exposure to misinformation increased. In contrast, Adjin-Tettey's study suggests that higher levels of media and information literacy are associated with lower levels of sharing and trusting "fake news." These results are consistent with existing research on the knowledge-gap hypothesis (Hwang & Jeong). These studies suggest that CML programming should be incorporated into mainstream educational modules, directed at individuals with lower educational attainment who are more vulnerable to misinformation, and be regularly updated to address evolving challenges.

The research conducted by Scherer et al. (2021) highlights the snowball effect of misinformation and conspiracy-based thinking. Like Hwang and Jeong (2023) and Adjin-Tettey (2022), Scherer et al. examined who is most susceptible to online health misinformation and determined that those same individuals are very likely to believe misinformation about other topics as well. Scherer et al. found that those who were most at risk had lower education attainment and reduced health literacy. They identified considerations for best practice intervention strategies, such as supporting students' emotional well-being while combating the issues of conspiracy-based thinking. This information could provide a foundation for developing school-specific intervention strategies for those who are most at-risk.

Conclusion

Some of the factors identified to help educators combat misinformation and disinformation in the classroom are in one's control and some are not. For example, one can integrate some of the resources and targeted intervention strategies in their own classroom, employ the videogame-based learning and fact-checking websites, and incorporate the best-practice strategy of supporting students' emotional well-being while combating the issues of conspiracy-based thinking. Educators may use the ideas discussed in this article to inform their own approach to teaching CML skills in their classrooms. Educators may also find these resources useful to share and apply in leadership roles, staff meetings, professional development sessions, teacher resource forums, or other collaborative settings. These collective efforts can help better prepare students and educators to combat today's mis- and dis-information crisis.

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PERSONAL REFLECTION

What You Haven't Felt: Experiencing Racism from the Inside

Joyce Soldier

I listen to my classmates' stories of their anti-racism stories, all with decorative language, I can't help but feel sympathy for you. I feel as if you never felt the rejection, the negative names we are called, and the treatment of being an outsider in your own home. If you walked into a room full of Native people, maybe you'll understand what racism feels like, the stares and glares from people who might resent you, or the surprise that a visitor has come, or the shock that we are welcoming people. As an Indigenous teacher, I've seen firsthand how systemic racism manifests in the form of negative stereotypes, profoundly affecting students' educational experiences and opportunities. My journey through the educational system has been marked by these pervasive stereotypes, and they've shaped my understanding of equity and social justice.

Growing up in a predominantly non-Indigenous community, I quickly became aware of the stereotypes that others held about my people. In elementary school, I often encountered questions from classmates that were steeped in ignorance: "Do you live in a teepee?" or "Do you have electricity on the reservation?" These questions, while sometimes rooted in genuine curiosity, reflected a deep-seated lack of understanding about Indigenous cultures and lifestyles. The media and textbooks perpetuated these stereotypes, presenting Indigenous people as relics of the past rather than as vibrant, contemporary communities. The video *Teaching the Truth: Why Education Needs To Be Informed and Led By Indigenous People* (Global News, 2026) displays the gentle, understanding that we, as the people, show the development of learning through participating.

One of the most damaging stereotypes I encountered was the assumption that Indigenous students were less capable or less interested in academics. We were rarely encouraged to take advanced courses or participate in academic clubs. I remember a guidance counselor advising my son to focus on vocational training instead of aiming for college, despite his high grades and strong interest in science.

These stereotypes had a tangible impact on my self-esteem and aspirations. I often felt I had to work twice as hard to prove my worth and counteract the low expectations placed upon me. As a teacher, I am acutely aware of the negative stereotypes that still persist and how they affect my students. Students who have come back from the city to attend school here have told me about being perceived as "troublemakers" by their peers and teachers, simply because of their ethnicity. These stereotypes can lead to disciplinary actions that are disproportionate and unfair. Mason et al.'s (2022) research shows that immigrant students, like other students of minority visibility, are more likely to be suspended or expelled for behaviours that are overlooked or handled differently when exhibited by white students. Work must be done to build strong relationships with my students and their families, creating a supportive network that values each student's unique background and strengths. By showing genuine interest and respect for their cultural identities, teachers help students build a positive self-image that counters the negative stereotypes they encounter.

My experiences with systemic racism and negative stereotypes have deepened my commitment to equity and social justice. I have learned that combating these issues requires a proactive and multifaceted approach, from curriculum reform to creating inclusive and supportive school environments. It means advocating for policies that address disparities in discipline while providing academic opportunities and supporting initiatives that elevate Indigenous voices and perspectives, creating the bridge that was used to separate us.

As an Indigenous teacher/principal, I am dedicated to dismantling the stereotypes that have long plagued our educational system. By fostering an environment of respect, inclusivity, and high expectations, I aim to empower my students to achieve their fullest potential and become advocates for change. My vision for equity is one where every student is seen and valued for who they are, free from the constraints of harmful stereotypes and systemic biases.

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About the Author

Joyce Soldier is an Ojibway educator with a wealth of experience shaped by community, culture, and connection. She brings a global perspective from teaching in diverse Indigenous communities, grounded in her First Nations identity. Joyce is committed to inclusive education, empowering students, and honouring Indigenous knowledge, resilience, and lifelong learning.