

Running Head: LEARNING AT AN EDGE

**Learning at an Edge: Engaging Unique and Discerning Learners in Alternate
Education Programs**

By

Cara Smith

Bachelor of Biological Science, University of Calgary, 1999
Bachelor of Education in Secondary Science, University of Calgary, 2001

A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of the Degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

In the Area of Curriculum Studies
Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Cara Smith, 2019

University of Victoria

All rights reserved. This project may not be reproduced in whole or in part, by
photocopy, electronic or other means without the permission of the author.

Supervisory Committee

Dr. Michelle Wiebe – Supervisor (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Dr. Ted Riecken – 2nd Reader (Department of Curriculum and Instruction)

Abstract

In Elliot W. Eisner's (2001) article "What does it mean to say a school is doing well?" (p. 370) we are asked to imagine what we might pay attention to in schools if we didn't rely on standardized testing to give us information about success. He wonders whether we should be less concerned with, "... whether [students] can answer our questions than with whether they can ask their own" (p. 370). Many changes in the new BC curriculum reflect the work of Eisner and other curriculum thinkers who were looking for more diverse and creative markers of school success. They believe that the development of creative expression, critical thinking, collaboration, voicing self-determination, and reflective self-evaluation are more indicative markers of success than standardized test scores based on prescriptive curricula. As an alternate schoolteacher, I see that, despite movement towards these ideals, we still have a long way to go to get past our reliance on traditional markers of success in the education of vulnerable students. Alternate school students often learn in a very different way and on a very different schedule than their peers, but are still learning and developing in sophisticated and meaningful ways.

Inertia in the organization and managing of schools means many of those at the extreme ends of the learning spectrum, and those dealing with personal health, family, and social issues, will continue to be pushed to the edges of the education system. While

the direction in the new BC curriculum starts us along a path to move past standardized assessment and a rigid curriculum, we still rely on language, attitudes, and assumptions that academic learning is really all that youth can expect from their schools. Students who continue to be pushed to the edges of our school systems prove that work still needs to be done. Schools need to analyze and re-evaluate where the most vulnerable students are being failed by the school system. Alternate education programs (AEPs) that are well designed are able to re-engage learners who may be close to leaving school early. By looking closely at the ability of these programs to build teacher-learner relationships that create trust; to value teachers as agents for change; to turn diversity into strength; and to create classroom environments that are responsive to the needs of those who are the most difficult to engage and motivate you can find lessons of the success from which all schools can learn.

Keywords: alternative education program, alternate schools, vulnerable learners, inclusion, marginalization, risk environments

Table of Contents

Supervisory Committee	2
Abstract	2
Table of Contents.....	4
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	5
Learning at an Edge	5
Background.....	7
Research Questions.....	8
Definitions	8
Methods: Research Pathway for Project.....	9
Chapter 2: Literature Review	10
Alternate Education Programs	10
The Trust Relationship between Teacher and Learner	13
Teachers as Agents of Change.....	15
Diversity as a Strength and Ability as a Given.....	17
Belonging to Environment and Community.....	20
Conclusion	22
Chapter 3: Project	23
Introduction.....	23
Presentation.....	24
Annotated Resources for Discussion.....	24
References.....	28
Appendix 1. EDCI 598B Project Presentation: Learning at an Edge.....	35
Appendix 2. EDCI 598B Final Presentation Handout.	39

Chapter 1: Introduction

Learning at an Edge

Elliott Eisner (2001) challenged how we lapse into complacency and over-rationalization in education. Current changes to the BC curriculum are intended to move away from standardization and towards more personalized and open-ended learning in a way that reflects some of Eisner's ideals. Eisner (2001) asks, "What does it mean to say we are doing well in schools?" (p. 370). Even with the recent changes in BC curriculum Eisner's question is, in many ways, still unanswered. Will the changes result in greater learning opportunities and outcomes for our struggling students? Will school days really change for a student who has been placed outside a regular school system? What does it mean to say we are doing well in our schools when many students are not able to function within mainstream schools? These unanswered questions mean that there is still much work left to ensuring success for all students, especially those at the edges of mainstream schools.

Success in school can be very different for different learners. For those learners with severe learning disabilities (LD), experiencing socio-emotional differences or upheaval, developing mental health problems or illnesses, demonstrating disruptive behaviour disorders, successful school days can look very different from their peers. When these vulnerable learners are no longer able to make academic gains in their regular classrooms, they are often moved to an alternate education programs (AEPs). In BC, an alternate education program policy focuses on providing rules for the education of learners with complex needs through differentiated instruction, specialized program

delivery, and enhanced counselling services (BC Ministry of Education, 2009). The BC Ministry of Education (2009) notes that AEPs have a,

...disproportionate numbers of children and youth in care, Aboriginal students, children and youth living in poverty or the street, gifted children who have difficulty in social situations, children and youth involved in drugs, alcohol and the sex trade, and youth with mental health concerns.

This is why in BC, AEPs are considered a Type Three facility with a mandate to provide a more comprehensive intake process, annual review of the students' individualized education plan (IEP) or student learning plan (SLP), transition planning, and evidence of additional counselling services AEPs. Also, within this group of learners you will find an increased number of learners with LDs (Q Designations) and intensive behavioral needs or diagnosed mental illness (H Designation) as compared to mainstream classrooms (BC Ministry of Education, 2016; Education Analytics, 2017). It is the intention that within policy and purpose of these AEPs that the neediest and at-risk learners will experience success at school.

It is my intention in this paper and project, to look more deeply into the work being done in AEPS and what best can be done to support vulnerable learners. It is my observation that it is common practice for educators in AEPs to not come into their jobs as specialist teachers, but rather learn on the job through district in-service and collaboration with more experienced educators. This means that sharing stories, ideas, information, and frustrations in responsible and reflective ways is important to the value of the work being done (Brunzell, Stokes, & Waters, 2018). I explore the roles of the learner-educator relationship, educator agency and well-being, responsibility, and learner ability influence success in an AEP classroom.

Background

As an educator, there is often a student who for complex reasons doesn't seem to be able to participate in your lessons. Despite their keen ability to downplay and hide their anxiety, agitation, and confusion, you can tell there is a lot going on underneath the hood of their sweater or behind their behaviours in class. Their distraction, frustration, or disruption means that they are apart in not only your classroom, but also from their peers, families, or communities. They often seem to be both uniquely creative and extremely self-destructive at the same time. While they appreciate attention and are aware of everything socially that goes on in the room, they are always a little apart from the action of class. Unfortunately, in your busy classroom, with lots of diverse needs, you don't always have the time to find out what you can do to help.

It was experience like these that motivated me to develop techniques, skills, and connections that would allow me to reach out better to these learners. I was trained to recognize and report problems I perceived with learning ability and skills but frequently felt unprepared to deal with the issues of my neediest learners. I enjoyed teaching science and math in a regular high school setting, but there were always learners that I seemed to 'lose'. I never felt comfortable that some learners were not getting the time and space they need to grow, explore, and flourish. The mechanics of schooling, the pace of the learning, and the complexity of issues facing these learners meant I had to find a different way to be an educator. It was my drive to develop skills and strategies to best serve these vulnerable and deserving learners that lead me to find teaching jobs in AEPs.

In moving away from mainstream schools, I have found a slower paced learning, a mindful atmosphere, and a more dedicated and invested group of colleagues who provide a richer educational experience for everyone in the classroom. However, seeing

the ways in which school systems choose to move students to AEPs has left me with questions about the effectiveness of our ability to meaningfully guide many of our young people through their education. I am hopeful that the values behind the changes to BC curriculum will create a better experience of education for most learners. However, even with the changes made curriculum and schools will continue to need the eyes, voices, and hearts of educators to mitigate unseen, unspoken, and unfelt harms that are the day-to-day of schools.

Research Questions

From literature on vulnerable students and alternate education programs:

- What changes to strategies and curriculum are most valuable to vulnerable learners?
- What can we learn about success for vulnerable learners from the stories and experiences of learners, parents, and teachers who are in AEPs?

Definitions

- Alternate Education Program (AEP) – An educational program that functions outside of mainstream classrooms. These programs are generally built with a more flexible schedule, modeled for more independent learning, and intimately connected to resources and supports in the community for mental health, poverty reduction, and social services. While these programs vary in their mandate and scope, they are often a last resort to try and provide more personalized educational opportunities and community connection to vulnerable students.
- Vulnerable Learner – Any student who is not able to access, participate, or benefit from the same educational opportunities as their peers for physical, developmental,

cognitive, emotional, mental health, or behavioural reasons, or due to poverty, family situation, housing insecurity, substance use, absenteeism, safety of themselves or others, or managerial convenience (Morris, 2010). Used synonymously in many publications with at-risk learners or students.

Methods: Research Pathway for Project

For the literature review, I looked in the University of Victoria library at educational research in the last five years that appeared when searching for information about alternate education programs and vulnerable learners in Canadian schools. After identifying several common themes, I expanded the scope to include research from other countries, fields other than education, like the mental health and social services, and from other programs other than AEPs such as special education, educational psychology, and educational leadership. Additionally, I expanded the research further into the past when I found interesting threads to follow.

The themes I identified as being important to the AEP are: 1. The importance of a trusting teacher-student relationship, 2. The value of teacher as agent for schoolwide and systemic change, 3. Ability of AEP classrooms to look past student learning difficulties and diverse student needs to find creative ways to develop a student's unique strengths, and 4. The ability of teachers to create a classroom that is highly responsive to individual needs. Within each of these themes I chose a selection of papers that were the best representation of what I have experienced myself as an alternate school educator and that had the most helpful strategies and ideas for building classrooms outside mainstream schools.

I then collected a group of papers that best exemplified the movement of thinking extending from these themes. These papers provided stories and knowledge that could be used to drive discussion amongst a group of educators working with vulnerable learners. I did this with the idea that discussion and sharing amongst colleagues is one of the ways not only educators use to move themselves forward with their practice, but also that helps to reach out to vulnerable learners. What results is an annotated bibliography that speaks to the information and relevance of the selected articles and a slideshow that could be used at a professional development day (ProD) activity or professional learning community (PLC) meeting amongst fellow AEP educators to encourage discussion about emerging themes in curriculum development.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Alternate Education Programs

Youth can learn a lot about their value and place in the world by how their schools elect to resource, manage, and assess their education. In the recent past, overly rationalized curriculum and reliance on standardized assessment was used to guide allocation of school resources and effort (Eisner, 2001). In the US, this created schools which, due to poor assessment scores, were forced to function with a resource deficit. Students were often pushed into alternate school programs (AEPs) to protect mainstream classrooms from punitive loss of resources (Mittleman, 2018). While these schools allow vulnerable students to access an education, the focus on discipline and segregation in some AEPs means that sometimes the education system acts almost as an extension of the criminal justice system (Meiners, 2017). As a result, learners from marginalized populations or with undesirable behaviours are often walled out of the mainstream school

system when placed in AEPs (Selman, 2017). An example of this is described in an analysis of an alternate school, the Second-Chance Academy, in Washington, D.C., which was started to deal with the increasing problem of learners leaving school early, but found that eventual over-emphasis of school discipline and behaviour management and under-emphasis of student learning and teacher training led to a way for schools to “push out” vulnerable learners (Horsford & Powell, 2016). Horsford and Powell (2016) have observed that AEPs, while starting out as a valuable final option for education, do not always operate in the capacity in which they started out. Like this example, AEPs can focus around the idea that punishment and separation will lead to better educational outcomes for mainstream learners. In doing this, these schools tend to reinforce class divisions and relegate their learners to lives of poverty and risk. Although historical economic and cultural differences are significantly different in Canadian AEPs, they still have the tendency to be exclusionary or divisive, with students who are disproportionately poor, male, and from Indigenous populations (Thorne, 2017).

Our curriculum leaders have asked us to honour the diversity and freedom that is being lost in our quest for standardized success. Natural inequities in students, teachers, and education provide rich experience (Noddings, 2011). In schools we have the opportunity for meaningful connection to youth who are suffering from loss of belonging and fulfillment resulting from an increasingly isolating society (Noddings, 2017). Thus, education does have the ability to disturb and change some of the mistakes we have made in our society around segregation and classism. If we value youth in our communities and truly are interested their futures, we will look to curriculum to nurture wonder, creativity, and imagination (Naess, 2002). Nowhere are these ideas more important than to those who run and work in AEPs. Here there is often significant personal or institutional harm

that has already affected youth, and there is an opportunity and a duty to be extra vigilant about our support for them moving forward.

We can reach out to students who are being marginalized in the education system by adopting curriculum that is well adapted to promoting diversity, by allowing teachers personal agency and freedom to teach what and how they do best, and changing school standards to welcome all learning styles and personality types. Naess (2002) says, "... to learn well is to learn slowly" (p. 139), yet we continue to push our learners through their education despite the fact we recognize some are not in a position to fit neatly into classrooms. By continually examining the changing needs of vulnerable learners we can find the cracks in our own thinking about learning and adjust our practices to encompass a wider range of learner abilities. In the quest to bring this increased inclusivity to all students we can use information from successful practice within schools. An alternate program can be a positive if it can offer the specialized curriculum needed to meet the social, emotional, and mental health needs of learners (Wilkerson, Afacan, Perzigian, Justin, & Lequia, 2016). Rather than being segregating and exclusionary, being in an AEP could be used to transform school experience by connecting vulnerable learners to the expertise, resources, and time they need to catch up to and reconnect with their peers in mainstream classrooms.

In this literature review, I identify areas in which AEPs can better serve vulnerable students. I look at stories from AEPs in Canada, the US, and worldwide to see if the stories from schools could be tied together to get a bigger picture about the reach and richness, we can capture from students who are learning at the edges of our school system. I have identified several themes of how alternate schools do and think about things differently than mainstream schools. I cast the results of my literature review in

terms of the importance of the student teacher relationship, teachers as agents for change, drawing strength from diversity, and the importance of educational environment to the success of vulnerable students.

The Trust Relationship between Teacher and Learner

The student teacher relationship is central to any successful AEP. A solid, trusting relationship between learners and teachers improves the resiliency of the learner, which can extend through the classroom to their lives outside school and into adulthood (Murphy-Graham & Lample, 2014). The relationship that teachers build with learners can mitigate the risks faced by students in their lives (Sanders, Munford, & Liebenberg, 2016). Often learners who are in AEPs bring hidden trauma, misunderstood disorders, and entrenched coping mechanisms masquerading as willful and disruptive behaviour with them into classrooms every day. Therefore, understanding the pressures that face a vulnerable student and learning how to put trust in peers, teachers, culture, and community is an important job for educational professionals working with vulnerable youth (Murphy-Graham & Lample, 2014). These learners will be slow to trust, be triggered in seemingly safe environments, and may not have the words to communicate their feelings or even recognize their own trauma (Martin, et al., 2017). In addition, youth who are experiencing emotional difficulties, such as those from early trauma or from some type of emotional or mental disorder, need early interventions to avoid the behaviour problems that will result in later years (Kaff, Teagarden, & Zabel, 2017). Being understood for behaviours that do not necessarily represent all of who you are willing to work with you to learn coping skills around is important work for educators. Often vulnerable students with learning disabilities (LD) need additional training around

socio-emotional to succeed academically and later in their vocations (Carnazzo, Dowdy, Furlong, & Quirk, 2018). So, it is important that educators work to improve how students to healthily manage their emotions and see themselves as learners inside and outside of school hours.

Without a trust relationship in place, it is easy to miss the subtle signs that help is needed; opportunities for intervention can be missed. While it is sometimes tempting to downplay the ability of a teacher to effect change in the life of a vulnerable student, a positive and emotionally supportive relationship with a teacher can effect significant change in their life (Stolin-Golzman, Woodhouse, Sutter, & Werrbach, 2016). Also, without a strong trust bond it can be easy for even minor discipline for behavioural issues to do harm to those with underlying trauma. Disciplines as severe as suspension can easily direct a student down a path to dropping out or run-ins with the penal system (Mittleman, 2018). Without the benefit of a solid and stable relationship between teacher and learner it is very hard to gauge the effects of interactions that mainstream students might weather more productively.

The relationship between teachers and learners can also change a student's view of themselves and their place in the world. Vulnerable students who receive educational opportunities, which allow them to connect back to their peers, community, and teachers, develop better responsibility towards others, and feel better about themselves and their futures (Murphy-Graham & Lample, 2014). Also, vulnerable students in particular perceive great benefit from the influence of a caring teacher in their young lives (Harnischfeger, 2018; Sanders, Munford, & Liebenberg, 2016). This means that well trained and responsive educational professionals have a big job to do within a school; not only are they teachers of science or language or art, but also caregivers and healers. The

relationship with a trusted teacher can be a source of resilience and strength that is particularly important to vulnerable learners.

Teachers as Agents of Change

Teachers are able to do much more for learners than just pass on academic learning. The role of an educator is much more a technical position of knowledge purveyor. The ability of teachers to be inventive, draw on their own expertise, interact with the larger community, or alter what they do to be responsive to the needs of their learners is imperative to effective use of curriculum (Taylor, 2013). This loss of ability to design and play with the curriculum, and rigid definitions of what constitutes learning mean that teachers have lost a sense of their power (Golden, 2018). The removal of this type of assessment has freed up teacher time and allowed focus to re-centred the classroom on the needs of the learner. Without the focus on assessment, the role of a teacher now has the potential to be much more transformative. That teachers can be agents of change and advocates for their students is key to the educational success of vulnerable students (Ferguson & Wolkow, 2012). If given a voice, teachers of vulnerable students are in a unique position to see where the system is failing, and to suggest ways in which to remediate that damage. Further, by allowing for the inclusion of core competencies in classroom work we have been given a mandate to dig deeper into our interactions with learners.

When teachers develop their skills through experience and have the freedom to create their classrooms, they can then become agents of change in society. Teachers continually refashion their identity as practical experiences mold their theoretical training into a more cultivated pedagogy (Block & Betts, 2016). Long-term systemic change is

most likely to occur when a teacher can take the prescribed curriculum and apply their own ideas of what learning is and mix in elements of their own experience and personality, to build complexity into their lessons (Bennett & Anderson, 2018).

Frustration and stagnation in the system arises when teachers are limited in the ways they can adapt their work for their students. Teaching loses its meaning when you take away a teacher's ability to be responsive, flexible, and autonomous. So, how do you get past this? Teachers can find meaning when they are enabled by the training and latitude needed to respond to the needs of their most complex and needy students (Brunzell et al., 2018). For example, a teacher who notices that a student struggles with written language, but is able to communicate their ideas through art or other creative means, can allow the student alternate avenues of expression and therefore promote learning in alternative ways. This allows for a better connection to the learner and therefore deeper learning in general. Teachers who are able to become agents for change can open up lines of learning for those who might not traditionally be considered academically inclined. This, in turn, can create opportunities for learners who are not learning in the same ways as their peers.

Another example that emphasizes the importance of teachers as agents of change is the current reconciliation mandate delivered by the collaborative process in the development of BC's new curriculum. Teachers are at the centre of a shift in societal thinking and cultural change that will see, at least some, of the damage done in relationships with First Nations peoples acknowledged and put on a path to healing. While teachers can sometimes be resistant to change, preferring to rely on historical patterns of learning; when supported in their own learning they can adapt and pass on that adaptation to others (Aitken & Radford, 2018). From my experience as an alternate teacher, there is a good deal of will to see this reconciliation work not only addresses

through economics and politics, but also through educational institutions. Dealing with the knowledge of past wrongs, and the continual wrongs preserved in our country's laws and structures means a lot of uncomfortable knowledge needs to be discussed and worked through by all Canada's peoples. The need from systemic change for First Nations peoples is clear. Systemic change can occur when educational change does (Bennett & Anderson, 2018). Extrapolating from this, it is possible that changing the way First Nations history and culture is used in our classrooms will change the conversations and experiences for learners, and therefore cascade into larger societal shifts. Teachers know a lot about the conversations between students and the society they are growing into (Golden, 2018). Therefore, teachers are at the forefront of the possibility of reconciliation and are therefore responsible to see those changes made.

Diversity as a Strength and Ability as a Given

The success of many AEPs comes from the recognition, celebration, and inclusion of a plethora of learning styles, personalities, backgrounds, and behaviours. In mainstream schools these diverse learners are often required to repress their natural effervescence. In smaller, more responsive classrooms, as in AEPs, those traits that might have been considered difficult or deleterious can become strengths to be capitalized on and nurtured. Behaviour that might be disruptive or hard to address in large groups can be refocused on an individual basis into leadership and resilience (Zolkoski, Bullock, & Gable, 2016). However, ensuring that students are placed into AEPs is done with care and with the best needs of the learner in mind is important. When used to hastily remove an inconvenient learner or solve a problem relationship, an AEP might not be the best choice. Certainly, identification of the natural talents of these unique learners could also

be beneficial to the mainstream classroom as well. Unfortunately, there are far too many instances where the natural diversity of classrooms is limited by exclusionary practice. For example, we know there is a high rate of Indigenous learners represented in AEPs. This means that the experiences, voices, cultural lessons, and histories of the First Nations communities is being limited when their students are not allowed to participate in classes alongside their peers. Inclusivity by definition can't be achieved in a system that allows learners to be pulled away into segregated programs. How can we say we are incorporating reconciliation into our curriculum while Indigenous students are being diverted from regular classrooms? Indigenous and non-Indigenous students need to learn about Indigenous culture and heritage together (Milne, 2017). Non-Indigenous learners often base their understanding of Indigenous issues on misinformation, misunderstanding, and lack of connection. So, when the two groups learn together, particularly from local Indigenous leaders, everyone benefits. Indigenous students feel more accepted in schools where Indigeneity is a focus of learning and non-Indigenous students stand to gain an expanded worldview and cultural awareness (Milne, 2017).

Unfortunately, it is not uncommon that placement in AEPs is for managerial convenience and before significant interventions have been put in place to help the learner in their regular classroom. The process that designates students as needing placement in an AEP is subjective and often comes after students have encountered school discipline measures that are necessarily set up to deter bad behaviour by encouraging conformity and normality (Fedders, 2018). Often, learners in AEPs are pulled from their classrooms for behaviours associated with learning disabilities for the purpose of protecting their more conforming peers. I have observed that the difference between an offending learner who gets to stay in their classroom and one who is

removed, is the ability of the former to be better at masking their behaviours in front of the right authorities. It almost seems sometimes that the student moved to the AEP is just dealing honestly and openly with their own struggles, and in doing so gets themselves noticed, labelled, and pushed out. Are we actually addressing the behaviours of students being moved to AEPs or are we teaching the students left in mainstream classes how to better hide their issues to keep from getting separated out?

Someone who learns differently is not inconvenient or unable to learn, but is actually quite able in different ways. There is a general idea that at-risk students lack the ability to do academic work (Parekh, 2017). The idea that vulnerable learners are less able, and therefore incapable, causes many problems; the largest of these problems being the labelling of a learner as unteachable or unreachable. Youth from widely varied backgrounds may not learn the same lessons as their peers in any given classroom, but they are completely capable of learning equally important things by sharing experiences in diverse groups (Paisley et al., 2014). In fact, some learners in AEPs are actually quite capable of learning more quickly than their peers. When offered different pacing and different choices these learners can accelerate through their education (Johnson, 1982). Their personality and learning type requires a flexible classroom and a responsible teaching style, but doesn't speak to inability. In fact, I feel that it is often the opinions, verve, and strength of these learner's voices that is what the mainstream classroom culture lacks. This is because when learners with opinions that are representative of all students are given a voice and are validated a strong mechanism for addressing marginalization is created (Allan & Duckworth, 2018).

Interestingly, Andre Maillet (2017) suggests that AEPs need to accelerate student learning in general. He asserts that AEP learners don't value the work they do unless their

educators set high expectations. By accelerating their learning these students are able focus more intensely on work they find valuable. Students in AEPs are frequently very discerning; therefore, focus on design and access to quality educational and community resources goes far in developing a well-used AEP (Marshall et al., 2014). This is borne out by my observation of students who will under-attend and spin their wheels in a course until their 18th birthday. In BC, at 18 years old you can access a different grad plan—it only requires two academic courses and 3 electives to graduate. At this point learners will completely refocus and get the five courses done in one semester to ensure they can attend graduation ceremonies with their peers. Many students will seek out alternate classrooms in these last few months of their education because of the flexibility and focus an AEP affords them. They did not truly value their education before it was strictly necessary to meet their goals.

Belonging to Environment and Community

Schools alone cannot provide all the resources needed to support vulnerable students. Schools that are able to draw on the resources of the community and government organizations for the support of vulnerable youth can better prevent students from leaving school (Genao, 2014). Learners that should need an AEP are those experiencing behavioural issues that are so complex, they necessitate help from multiple sources within and outside of the school district. At this point it is important for mainstream teachers to look critically at the behaviour to seek out the source and pass that information on to their school-based teams for investigation and documentation. Students' emotional and behavioural struggles may actually be very relevant and understandable when environment and influences are properly considered (Pereira &

Lavoie, 2016). The point at which a student seems to be the most difficult to deal with in the classroom is when the education system can be most valuable. The education system is on the front line of mitigating the effects of trauma, mental health changes, substance use, and family issues affecting young people. Schools need to be hubs for access to outside agencies and advocates for their students' access to health and community resources. If the solution is placement in an AEP then that needs to come with a flood of phone calls to mental health workers, district resources for student support, social support services, community outreach programs for poverty reduction, health care, or even providers of extracurricular activities. To avoid an AEP becoming a place of isolation and exclusion, it needs to be used as an opportunity for intensive connection. This is because the need for belonging, if not provided by the education system, will be filled from riskier sources by the students themselves.

Belonging is very important to the emotional needs of a young person and should be a cornerstone in education (Allen, Kern, Vella-Brodrick, Hattie, & Waters, 2016). For learners who have been separated from their peers for behaviour reasons or may have attachment issues, the ability and opportunity to belong is even more important than in mainstream schools. Allen et al. (2016) compare the building of belonging to bioecological processes; I imagine this connection like trophic levels in a food chain. Building a sense of belonging not only involves the individual, but increasing tiers of relatedness extending outwards from the individual, to successively larger groupings of influence. While individual factors such as emotional stability and positive personality traits contribute to greater school belonging, so can peer support, relationships with trusting adults, and teacher support. Nesting this individual environment within a group environment that includes extracurricular activities, school safety, geographical location,

and culture creates an ecosystem-like network that extends each learner's ability to be connected to their learning. This ties in with Genao's (2014) idea that the effectiveness of AEPs lies in the ability of many public organizations to come together and coordinate through schools. It is not surprising that schools are central to the structure of a healthy learning environment, but it does prove that the belonging that comes from interconnectedness of schools and community should not be an afterthought, but rather a central purpose of schools.

Also, cultural supports and experts play a very important role in creating the communities and sense of belonging many vulnerable students need. Students experience education in culturally distinct ways, which means that the school community needs to be open to promoting academic success through sensitive educational policy and flexibility (Milne, 2016). Addressing historical and present issues in relationships with Indigenous students is emphasized in BC's new curriculum, but still does not completely reach out to all students from other cultural backgrounds with intergenerational and cultural trauma in their histories. I hope that this sentiment can be extended to help those who are coming to Canada as well. Trauma effects not only with Indigenous Peoples within Canada, but also other recent immigrants who have been affected by displacement, war, and abuse as a result of their own cultures, beliefs, or backgrounds are part of the jobs of AEPs as well. By using the resources available to us through lessons from Aboriginals peoples there is a chance to effect positive development for all youth of any culture (Brokenleg, 2012).

Conclusion

Nothing about learning and teaching in an alternate education program is easily planned or attained. However, the students who chose to keep coming to school every

day, despite what goes on in their lives, deserve the most attention and care we can muster. Many of the school system's seemingly unreachable learners will be able to find success if they have the emotional, social, and academic resources they need. Finding and keeping those resources is a daily challenge for providers of AEPs. However, the success of students in these programs could tell us a lot about how well schools are preparing youth for their futures. The new BC curriculum has made a good start towards making some of these changes, but it still maintains some attitudes and judgments that make it difficult for vulnerable students to get everything they need from their education. Moving forward, teachers and communities have to work together to identify and implement practices that ensure education is a positive force in the life of every young person.

Chapter 3: Project

Introduction

In the literature review, I identified several common themes in creating meaningful and inclusive classrooms for students who learn at the edges of mainstream schooling. An overarching idea that came from this literature review is that professionals working with these marginalized students need to share with each other and with mainstream teachers the successes, strategies, and attitudes they develop when working alongside these students. The purpose of this project is to explore where teachers and vulnerable students find success and to share these stories. In gathering and reflecting on the research in the field of AEPs I found several papers that seemed to exemplify and provide insight on what I have experienced myself as an alternate education teacher. This is done with the idea that through sharing we can become stronger and more versatile

educators for the protection and support of those students at the edge of our education system.

I gathered some important resources from the literature that provide important information about vulnerable students and their needs into an annotated bibliography that could be distributed before the presentation for background information. I have also gathered together stories from these papers in a presentation format that would be suitable for sharing at a PLC meeting or ProD activity. This with the idea that sharing, discussing, and reflecting on the experiences of those in or around AEPs can help make learning at the edge a more forgiving place to get an education.

Presentation

See: Appendix 1. EDCI 598B Project Presentation: Learning at an Edge and Appendix 2. EDCI598B Final Presentation Handout.

Annotated Resources for Discussion

Garrad, T-A., Rayner, C., & Pedersen, S. (2019). Attitudes of Australian primary school teachers towards the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Research in Special Education Needs, 19*(1), 58-67.

This article examines attitudes towards inclusion of students with special needs like autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Traditional thinking is that years of experience and specialized training are most significant in the formation of positive attitudes towards inclusion. This study finds a lack of correlation between positive attitude, and experience and training, but instead from work within an integrated and inclusive education system. It suggests that inclusivity, as opposed

to a segregated schooling system, benefits from policy and legislation rather than from specific levels of training or experience.

Allan, D., & Duckworth, V. (2018). Voices of disaffection: Disengaged and disruptive youths or agents of change and self-empowerment? *British Journal of Special Education, 45*(1), 43-60.

Allan and Duckworth (2018) engage in conversations with disaffected youth about their perceptions of the success of their vocational learning program to help them learn. Part of the setup for this research allows that the sociocultural status of these students, while not always valued in mainstream institutions, can represent a good deal of capital for change in an alternate educational setting.

When disaffected by learning, these students develop a literacy of their own. If we listen to these voices, the learning community benefits as a whole.

Landhani, S., Cullen, O., Dawes, N., & Dimitropoulos, G. (2019). Transitioning to adulthood: A glance at the education system. *Children and Youth Services Review, 96*, 100-107.

A look at the ability of educational systems to aid in the transition of youth with mental health or substance abuse issues into adulthood is covered by this review. It finds that the ability of educational systems to coordinate and collaborate with other health, mental health, child welfare, justice, employment, and social service systems is paramount to successful movement into adulthood. Given that educational attainment and employment experience lead to successful growth and independence for youth, educational systems need to facilitate positive outcomes by supporting individualized connection to these service providers. Another finding is that schools have the benefit of being able to

identify mental health concerns early. Through early identification and intervention, we can create an atmosphere of social inclusion and well-being that can benefit students far beyond their school days.

Coholic, D., Lougheed, S., & Cadell, S. (2009). Exploring the helpfulness of arts-based methods with children living in foster care. *Traumatology, 15*(3), 64-71.

Children in care are in need of preventative types of services due to a difficulty in transitioning to healthy adult living. These children often need but can be reticent to engage in talk-based therapies. More arts-based therapies assist in the development of self-esteem, socialization skills, and psychosocial functioning. While often reluctant to engage in processes that might necessitate them speaking about their life experiences, arts-based methods allow students to develop coping skills in a fun and creative way.

Brown, E. L., Phillipppo, K. L., Weston, K., & Rodger, S. (2019). United States and Canada pre-service certification standards for student mental health: A comparative case study. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 80*, 71-82.

U.S. and Canadian pre-service teachers, while well-educated about child development are not fully prepared to address the mental health needs of their students. Often new teachers are unaware of mental health care standards, and when they are, they are left on their own to try to figure out how to meet them. While many teachers are presented with specific trauma-informed education their ability to deal with broader mental health issues is often limited. Recognizing the existence of mental illness is an important function of education. New standards that provide explicit mental health knowledge and skills development are needed.

Metzger, M. W., Fowler, P. J., & Swanstrom, T. (2018). Hypermobility and educational outcomes: The case of St. Louis. *Urban Education*, 53(6), 774-805.

Hypermobility, or constant and disruptive living situations, is a particular challenge for low-income and urban families and communities. The effects of this hypermobility can be mitigated by coordination of social services and neighborhood schools. Streamlining of registration processes, access to basic necessities like coats, toiletries and food, and collaboration with community resources are functions of schools that are of value to hypermobile students. Linking these students and their families to services provides for a community-wide surveillance system for identifying risk and need.

References

- Aitken, A., & Radford, L. (2018). Learning to teach for reconciliation in Canada: Potential, resistance and stumbling forward. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 75*, 40-48.
- Allan, D., & Duckworth, V. (2018). Voices of disaffection: Disengaged and disruptive youths or agents of change and self-empowerment? *British Journal of Special Education, 45*(1), 43-60.
- Allen, K., Kern, M, Vella-Brodrick, D., Hattie, J., & Waters, L. (2016). What schools need to know about fostering school belonging: A meta-analysis. *Educational Psychology Review, 30*, 1-34.
- Apple, M. (2018). Critical curriculum studies and the concrete problems of curriculum policy and practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 50*(6), 685-690.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2018). *B.C. Graduation Program Policy Guide*. Retrieved from the BC Ministry of Education.
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/kindergarten-to-grade-12/support/graduation/graduation-implementation-guide.pdf>
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2016). *Special Education Services: A Manual of Policies, Procedures and Guidelines*. Victoria, BC, Canada: BC Ministry of Education, Learning Supports.
- British Columbia Ministry of Education. (2009). *Alternate Education Program Policy*. Retrieved from the BC Government website:
<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/education-training/k->

- 12/administration/legislation-policy/public-schools/alternate-education-program
- Bennett, B. & Anderson, S. (2018). Rethinking the intersection of instruction, change, and systemic change. In G. E. Hall, L. F. Quinn, & D. M. Gollnick (Eds.), *The Wiley Handbook of Teaching and Learning*, 619-638. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Block, L. A., & Betts, P. (2016). Cultivating agentic teacher identities in the field of a teacher education program. *Brock Educational Journal*, 25(2), 71-84.
- Brokenleg, M. (2012). Transforming cultural trauma into resilience. *Reclaiming Children and Youth*, 21(3), 9-13.
- Brown, E. L., Phillipppo, K. L., Weston, K., & Rodger, S. (2019). United States and Canada pre-service certification standards for student mental health: A comparative case study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 80, 71-82.
- Brunzell, T., Stokes, H., & Waters, L. (2018). Why do you work with struggling students? Teacher perceptions of meaningful work in trauma-impacted classrooms. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 43(2), 116-142.
- Carnazzo, K., Dowdy, E., Furlong, M. J., & Quirk, M. P. (2018). An evaluation of the Social Emotional Health Survey -Secondary for use with students with learning disabilities. *Psychology in the Schools*, 56, 433-446.
- Coholic, D., Lougheed, S., & Cadell, S. (2009). Exploring the helpfulness of arts-based methods with children living in foster care. *Traumatology*, 15(3), 64-71.
- Dweck, C. (2019). The choice to make a difference. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 14(1), 21-25.

- Education Analytics. (2017). *Student Headcount by Special Needs Category*. BC, Canada: Ministry of Education. Last Modified: 2018-06-25. Accessed: Feb. 13, 2019.
- Education Analytics. (2013). *BC Schools – Student Enrolment and FTE by Grade*. BC, Can.: Ministry of Education. Last Modified: 2019-01-30. Accessed: Feb. 13, 2019.
- Eisner, E. (2001). What does it mean to say a school is doing well? *The Phi Delta Kappan*, 82(5), 367-372.
- Fedders, B. (2018). Schooling at risk. *Iowa Law Review*, 130, 871-923.
- Ferguson, H. B., & Wolkow, K. (2012). Educating children and youth in care: A review of barriers to school progress and strategies for change. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34, 1143-1149.
- Garrad, T-A., Rayner, C., & Pedersen, S. (2019). Attitudes of Australian primary school teachers towards the inclusion of students with autism spectrum disorders. *Journal of Research in Special Education Needs*, 19(1), 58-67.
- Genao, S. (2014). Measuring the effectiveness of an alternative education collaboration. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 28(4), 432-450.
- Golden, N. A. (2018). Narrating neoliberalism: Alternative education teachers; conception of their changing roles. *Teaching Education*, 29(1), 1-16.
- Harnischfeger, A. M. (2018). Thoughts from the margins: A five-year longitudinal exploration with former alternative education youth. *The Qualitative Report*, 23(4), 801-822.

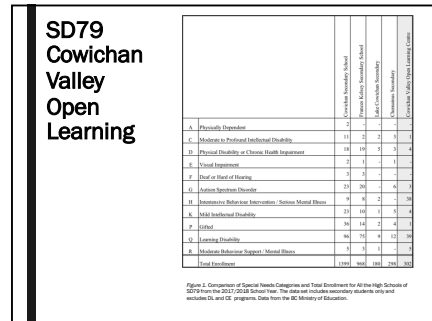
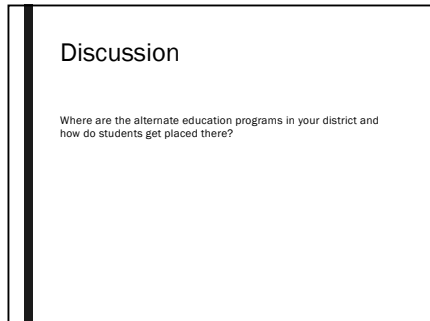
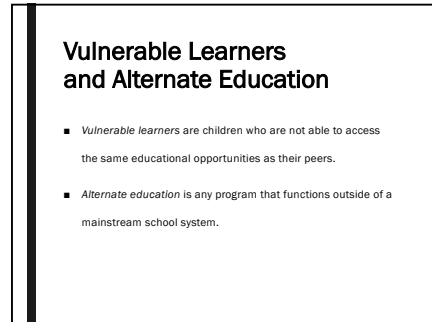
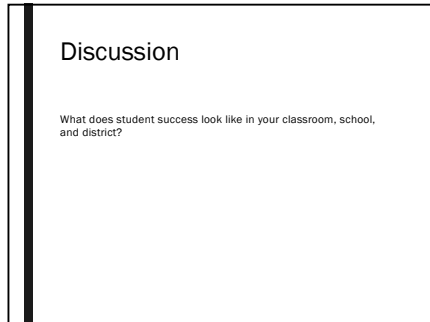
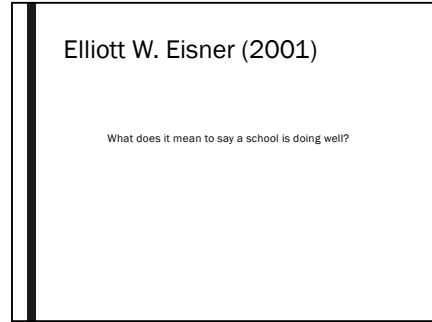
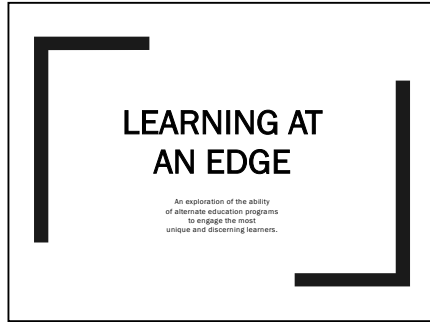
- Horsford, S. D., & Powell, K. L. (2016). Second chances academy: Alternative school or pathway to prison. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, 19*(1), 18-27.
- Johnson, H. R. (1982). Alternative schools: A salvage operation. *The Clearing House, 55*(7), 317-318.
- Kaff, M., Teagarden, J., & Zabel, R. H. (2017). Enthusiastic collaboration: A conversation with Robert Gable. *Intervention in School and Clinic, 52*(3), 188-191.
- Landhani, S., Cullen, O., Dawes, N., & Dimitropoulos, G. (2019). Transitioning to adulthood: A glance at the education system. *Children and Youth Services Review, 96*, 100-107.
- Maillet, A. L. (2017). Six powerful practices for alternative education programs. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 61*(3), 234-238.
- Marshall, J. H., Aguilar, C. R., Alas, M., Castellanos, R. R., Castro, L., Enamorado, R., & Fonseca, E. (2014). Alternative education programmes and middle school dropout in Honduras. *International Review of Education, 61*, 51-77.
- Martin, S. L., Ashley, O. S., White L., Axelson, S., Clark, M., & Burrus, B. (2017). Incorporating trauma-informed care into school-based programs. *Journal of School Health, 87*(12), 958-967.
- Meiners, E. (2017). The problem child. *Harvard Educational Review, 87*(1), 122-146.
- Metzger, M. W., Fowler, P. J., & Swanstrom, T. (2018). Hypermobility and educational outcomes: The case of St. Louis. *Urban Education, 53*(6), 774-805.

- Milne, E. (2017). Implementing Indigenous education policy directives in Ontario public schools: Experiences, challenges and successful practices. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, 8(3). Retrieved from: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/iipj/vol8/iss3/2>. DOI: 10.18584/iipj.2017.8.3.2.
- Mittleman, J. (2018). A downward spiral? Childhood suspension and the path to juvenile arrest. *Sociology of Education*, 9(3), 183-204.
- Morris, R. (2010). At-risk students. In C. Kridel (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of curriculum studies* (pp. 59-59). Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. doi: 10.4135/9781412958806.n30
- Murphy-Graham, E., & Lample, J. (2014). Learning to trust: Examining the connections between trust and capabilities friendly pedagogy through case studies from Honduras to Uganda. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 36, 51-62.
- Naess, A. (2002). You can learn properly only what engages your feelings. In *Life's Philosophy: Reason and Feeling in a Deeper World* (pp.139-159). University of Georgia Press.
- Noddings, N. (2011). Problems of school reform. In *Philosophy of education* (pp.365-389.) Philadelphia, PA: Westview Press.
- Noddings, N. (2017). The search for meaning and connection. *Educational Studies*, 53(1), 1-12.
- Paisley, K., Jostad, J., Sibthorp, J., Pohja, M., Gookin, J., & Rajagopal-Durbin, A. (2014). Considering students' experiences in diverse groups. *Journal of Leisure Research*, 46(3), 329-341.
- Parekh, G. (2017). The tyranny of ability. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 47(4), 337-343.

- Pereira, L. C., & Lavoie, J. (2016). Students' perceptions of schooling: The path to alternate education. *International Journal of Child, Youth, and Family Studies*, 7(3/4), 381-403.
- Ryoo, J., Crawford, J., Moreno, D., & McLaren, P. (2009). Critical spiritual pedagogy: Reclaiming humanity through a pedagogy of integrity, community, and love. *Power and Education*, 1(1), 132-146.
- Sanders, J., Munford, R., & Liebenberg, L. (2016). The role of teachers in building resilience of at risk youth. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 80, 111-123.
- Selman, K. J. (2017) Imprisoning 'those' kids: Neoliberal logics and the disciplinary alternative school. *Youth Justice*, 12(3), 213-231.
- Stolin-Goltzman, J., Woodhouse, V., Suter, J., & Werrbach, M. (2016). A mixed method study on educational well-being and resilience among youth in foster care. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 70, 30-36.
- Taylor, M. W. (2013). Replacing the 'teacher-proof' curriculum with the 'curriculum-proof' teacher: Toward more effective interactions with mathematics textbooks. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 45(3), 295-321.
- Thorne, C. M. (2017). Alternative education on Prince Edward Island: A hybrid of 'mainstream' and special education. *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties*, 22(4), 365-382.
- Wilkerson, K., Afacan, K., Perzigian, A, Justin, W., & Lequia, J. (2016). Behavior-focused alternative schools: Impact on student outcomes. *Behavioral Disorders*, 41(2), 81-94.

Zolkoski, S. M., Bullock, L. M., & Gable, R. A. (2016). Factors associated with student resilience: Perspectives of graduates of alternative education programs. *Preventing School Failure: Alternative Education for Children and Youth, 60*(3), 231-243.

Appendix 1. EDCI 598B Project Presentation: Learning at an Edge.



Alternate Education Programs

- Relationship building is paramount.
- Learning difficulties point to strengths.
- Teachers are powerful agents of change.
- Are highly responsive to student needs.

THE SEARCH FOR MEANING AND CONNECTION

Noddings, N. (2017). The search for meaning and connection. *Educational Studies*, 53(1), 1-12.

Relationship Building

"It is easy ... to find a group or cause to which one can belong." (Noddings, 2017, p. 4)

Marginalized students have no problem finding a place to belong.

Relationship Building

Enhance all thinking and encourage conversation around all relationships a student might encounter.

- Schools need to act as a hub for the conversation between social service, mental health services, and other community services.
- Talk about families and parenting with students and with parents.
- Increase debate and conversation around human connection and history.
- Teach controversial issues.

What can we do?

Discussion

What social services, health, and mental health supports are needed by the students in your classroom?

THE CHOICE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Dweck, C. (2019). The choice to make a difference. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 14(1), 21-25.

Choosing Change

Human potential can be developed.

- Dweck's original work was about beliefs about intelligence.
- The belief that intelligence is fixed and unchangeable describes a fixed mindset.
- The belief that intelligence can be malleable and developed describes a growth mindset.
- Dweck and others went on to work with mindsets about personality. (Can one's personal qualities be fixed or malleable?)
- They found that personality fixing can contribute to mental health issues like anxiety and depression.
- Therefore, growth mindset work has the potential to reduce the onset of depression and to alleviate anxiety.

Choosing Change

What can we do?

- There are benefits to doing mindset work in your classroom.
- Mindset work is common in parenting, business, and sports.
- With effort, good strategy, and guidance everyone is capable of meaningful growth.

Discussion

What role does art and creativity play in your classroom?

THE CONCRETE PROBLEMS OF CURRICULUM POLICY AND PRACTICE

Apple, M. (2018). Critical curriculum studies and the concrete problems of curriculum policy and practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 50(6), 685-690.

Teachers as Agents of Change

"Education has once again become a site of crucial struggles over authority and identity, indeed over both the very meaning of being educated and who should control it." (Apple, 2018, p. 686).

- Can schools create a new social order?
- What is their role in social change?

Teachers as Agents of Change

What can we do?

- Be mindful of complexity and contradiction, of hidden relations and effects. (Apple, 2018, p.686)
- Ask questions.
- Examine the social realities of schooling.

Discussion

What do you do to advocate for your students that you didn't or wouldn't have been able to do as a new teacher?

RECLAIMING HUMANITY

Ryoo, J., Crawford, J., Moreno, D., & McLaren, P. (2009). Critical spiritual pedagogy: Reclaiming humanity through a pedagogy of integrity, community, and love. *Power and Education*, 1(1), 132-146.

Reclaiming Humanity

Whose knowledge is official?

- Education is a site of struggle over authority and identity—what does it mean to be educated and who should control what is learned?
- Schooling and curriculum has particular histories—drawing from cultural, political, and economic realms.
- As teachers, we have an ethical obligation to challenge the movement of schools and to defend a robust education based on human flourishing.

Reclaiming Humanity

What can we do?

- Inner development is part of teaching work.
- Find time and resources for yourself and your students.

Discussion

What kinds of learning do you offer your students outside of regular academics?

Appendix 2. EDCI 598B Final Presentation Handout.

Learning at an Edge: Engaging Unique and Discerning Learners in Alternate Education Programs (AEPs)

Cara Smith (2019)

Research Questions

- What changes to strategies and curriculum are most valuable to vulnerable learners?
- What can we learn about success for vulnerable learners from the stories and experiences of learners, parents, and teachers who are in AEPs?

List of Helpful Resources

Apple, M. (2018). Critical curriculum studies and the concrete problems of curriculum policy and practice. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 50(6), 685-690.

Dweck, C. (2019). The choice to make a difference. *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 14(1), 21-25.

Noddings, N. (2017). The search for meaning and connection. *Educational Studies*, 53(1), 1-12.

Ryoo, J., Crawford, J., Moreno, D., & McLaren, P. (2009). Critical spiritual pedagogy: Reclaiming humanity through a pedagogy of integrity, community, and love. *Power and Education*, 1(1), 132-146.

Education Analytics: <https://catalogue.data.gov.bc.ca/organization/education-analytics>