



LEAD THE CHANGE SERIES

Q & A with AERA 2024 Presenters: Decolonizing Professional Learning

Note from the Editors:

In preparation for AERA 2024, *Lead the Change* will feature the stellar presenters in the Educational Change SIG sessions. This year, our SIG is proud to present 10 sessions featuring different contexts, perspectives, and methodological approaches to educational change. For these issues of *Lead the Change*, we worked together as the outgoing and incoming editors to collect presenters' reflections on educational change. It was a pleasure to learn more about the exciting work happening across the globe, and we look forward to learning more at the conference. This issue features the presenters in the session, "Decolonizing Professional Learning." Enjoy, and we'll see you in Philadelphia!

Best,
Alex Lamb, Outgoing Series Editor
Liz Zumpe, Incoming Series Editor

Educational Change SIG Sessions at AERA 2024

Thursday, April 11: 4:20pm– 5:50pm EDT

A Roundtable Discussion to Examine a Synthesis of Micro- to Macro-Level Coaching Research

Friday, April 12

7:45am – 9:15am EDT: *Developing Authentic Research Practice Partnerships (RPPs) for educational Change: - Perspectives on principles, and practices from four diverse contexts*

3:05pm – 4:35pm EDT: *Creativity and Localized Change: Teachers and Coaches Supporting Transformation*

4:55pm – 6:25pm EDT: *Equity and Educational Transformation in a Cross-National Perspective*

Saturday, April 13

1:15pm – 2:45pm EDT: *Decolonizing Professional Learning*

3:05pm – 4:35pm EDT: *Education Justice and Equity: Calls for Action in the Field of Educational Change and Beyond*

3:05pm – 4:35pm EDT: *Teachers as Education Change Makers: What Empowers and/or Enervates Them*

Sunday, April 14

7:45am – 9:15am EDT: *(Re)Conceptualization Change at Scale: New Visions for and Models of Educational Change*

11:25am – 12:55pm EDT: *Studies of Equity-Minded Organizational Learning in Educational Contexts*



Educational Change SIG adopts an interdisciplinary and international approach to understanding many aspects of educational change, including large-scale reform, school-initiated change, school improvement, and classroom-level change.

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ABOUT THE SERIES

Lead the Change series, featuring renowned educational change experts from around the globe, serves to highlight promising research and practice, to offer expert insight on small- and large-scale educational change, and to spark collaboration within our SIG.

Educational Change SIG Events at AERA 2024

All are welcome!

Friday, April 12: 11:25am – 12:55pm EDT
Educational Change SIG Business Meeting

Saturday, April 13 8:00pm – 9:30pm EDT
Joint Reception: Leadership for School Improvement
SIG, Educational Change SIG, Organizational Theory SIG

Introduction to the Symposium: Decolonizing Professional Learning

Joelle Rodway
Ontario Tech University

AERA's 2024 annual meeting calls the educational research community to action in service of dismantling racial injustice and constructing educational possibilities that center the humanity and learning of all people. In Canada, we are also called upon to engage in the critical work of decolonization, dismantling the colonial infrastructures that maintain our K–12 and post-secondary education systems as we respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (2015) [Calls to Action](#), which includes changes directly related to our schools and school systems.

“A pan-Canadian network of educational researchers and their practitioner colleagues seeks to deepen this work of dismantling colonial systems.”

In response to these calls, researchers and educators have been engaged in the unlearning, learning, and relearning (Lopez, 2020) required to rebuild learning systems that are inclusive of Indigenous and other ways of knowing and doing and decentering Eurocentric pedagogical practices. In August 2022, a convening of 30 researchers and educators from across Canada gathered at Memorial University in St. John's, Newfoundland at an event called [Decolonizing Professional Learning](#). Over the course of three days, we came together in sharing circles, small fires, [a public panel](#), and various writing activities to engage our guiding questions:

- Where are we coming from? How do we situate ourselves as educational leaders and researchers in these spaces?
- What work and research are we doing in our representative regions to decolonize professional learning in the context of K–12 education? What can we learn from each other?

- In what ways are we disrupting conventional views of professional learning to create spaces that honor multiple knowledges and ways of knowing?

In this issue of *Lead the Change*, we seek to engage you in the learning from three of the groups who attended this meeting. These three groups are also actively involved in building a national network called *Decolonizing Possibilities Education Change Network*, a pan-Canadian network of educational researchers and their practitioner colleagues that seeks to deepen this work of dismantling colonial systems and build equitable learning spaces that honor the humanity of all people. We hope sharing our work with you opens up space for further knowledge sharing and collaboration and inspires you to take up AERA's call to respond to racial injustice by creating new educational opportunities that strengthen our societies and benefit us all.

References

- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to action*. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collecti_on_2015/trc/IR4-8-2015-eng.pdf
- Lopez, A. (2020). *Decolonizing educational leadership: Exploring alternative approaches to leading schools*. Palgrave MacMillan.



Joelle Rodway is an Associate Professor in Education and Leadership in the Mitch & Leslie Frazer Faculty of Education at Ontario Tech University. Her work queries how the relational patterns among and between education stakeholders both facilitate and constrain school and system improvement processes with specific interests in knowledge brokerage and professional learning. Currently, she is working with colleagues across Canada to develop a network of education researchers whose focus is on examining the ways in which professional learning (un)intentionally reproduces privilege and impede equitable education for all.

Building Relationships and Decolonizing Possibilities through Education Change Networks

Leyton Schnellert
University of British Columbia

Bonny-Lynn Donovan
University of British Columbia

Sara Florence Davidson
Simon Fraser University

The 2024 AERA theme is Dismantling Racial Injustice and Constructing Educational Possibilities: A Call to Action. How does your research respond to this call?

Professional learning structured as collaborative inquiry between educators and Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) community partners and researchers has the potential to foster culturally sustaining and responsive practices that broaden and decolonize understandings of student success and pedagogy (Lopez, 2020; Paris, 2021; Schnellert et al., 2022). Our research offers an example of K-12 educators who have primarily white/settler identities working with Indigenous educators, Knowledge Holders, and researchers within an education change network (ECN). In the *Welcoming Indigenous Ways of Knowing ECN* Indigenous educators and Knowledge Holders participated in all aspects of the ECN from planning to implementation. Sylix Indigenous Knowledge Holders shared local knowledge and protocols to support educators in welcoming local Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing into their classrooms. Our time together also included attention to anti-racism, The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015) *Calls to Action*, and the lasting impact of Canada's Indian Residential Schools.*

“Our research offers an example of K-12 educators who have primarily white/settler identities working with Indigenous educators, Knowledge Holders, and researchers within an education change network.”

What are some of the ideas you hope the field of Educational Change and the audience at AERA can learn from your work related to practice, policy, and scholarship?

K-12 educators in our context experienced meaningful engagement with local Indigenous knowledge through their interactions with Sylix Knowledge Holders. Findings derived through analysis of interviews, participants' reflective writing, and field notes also revealed that education change network activities supported educators to engage with difficult knowledge as they awakened to structural inequities. Educators reported conceptual learning and shifts in practice through participation in large group presentations from Indigenous Knowledge Holders and university researchers, and “small fires.” Small fires are a form of action research circles introduced to us by Indigenous educational leader Pamela Spooner based on her experience in an Indigenous women's leadership group. We hope that our learning relating to developing teacher capacity to enact decolonization and reconciliation in collaboration with local Indigenous Knowledge Holders will contribute to others seeking to engage in this work.

What excites you about the direction of the field of Educational Change, and how might we share and develop those ideas at AERA 2024?

Indigenous students must be “viewed in the context of systemic barriers and inequalities inherent in the current education system that marginalize Indigenous knowledge systems and result in significant challenges to the educational success of Indigenous children and youth” (Hare & Davidson, 2019, p. 204). We recognize that reconciliation and pedagogical and system transformation need to work in tandem if we are to disrupt hierarchical practices and structures that enact a hidden curriculum of privilege and racism. We look forward to AERA 2024 and

opportunities to engage with other researchers who collaborate with equity-deserving groups to find intersectional affinities to further dismantle racial injustice and construct educational possibilities.

*We shared what we have been learning about *Welcoming Indigenous Ways of Knowing ECN* processes at the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada-funded Decolonizing Professional Learning gathering in Newfoundland in August 2022 (see Joelle Rodway's introduction to the symposium above).

References

- Hare, J., & Davidson, S. F. (2019). Learning from Indigenous Knowledge in education. In D. Long & G. Starblanket (Eds.), *Visions of the heart: Canadian Aboriginal issues* (5th ed., pp. 203–219). Oxford University Press.
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Leyton Schnellert is an Associate Professor at the University of British Columbia. He is Pedagogy and Participation research lead in UBC's Institute for Community Engaged Research and Inclusive Education research lead for the Canadian Institute for Inclusion and Citizenship. His community-based collaborative work contributes a counterargument to top-down approaches that operate from deficit models, instead drawing from communities' funds of knowledge to build participatory, place-conscious, and culturally sustaining practices.



Bonny Lynn Donovan is a Métis PhD Candidate at University of British Columbia's Okanagan Campus. Her research focuses on Indigenous ecocultural literacy.



Sara Florence Davidson (sgaan jaadgu san glans) is a Haida/Settler Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Simon Fraser University. Her research focuses on Indigenous pedagogies, literacies, and stories, and with her father, she co-authored *Potlatch as Pedagogy: Learning through Ceremony*.

Refusing Erasure: Black and Indigenous Women Educational Leaders Talk Back!

Whitneé L. Garrett-Walker, Ed.D (She/Her)
Natchitoches Tribe of Louisiana, enrolled member
University of San Francisco

The 2024 AERA theme is Dismantling Racial Injustice and Constructing Educational Possibilities: A Call to Action. How does your research respond to this call?

The field of educational leadership is at a crucial moment for both theory and practice (Johnson & Pak, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2021; Lopez, 2019). It is finally reckoning with the idea that school leadership must embrace diversity, equity, and inclusivity, and the nuances of how identity impacts both leadership and the ability to interrupt systems of oppression across schools. While there is research that deconstructs the need for school administrators to engage in equity, diversity, and inclusion, few research studies have explored how racialized and gendered school administrators navigate school leadership (Garrett-Walker, 2021). There are gaps in the literature that speak to Black and Indigenous women school administrators' experiences (Garrett-Walker et. al forthcoming; Faircloth & Tippeconnic, 2013). This paper focuses on the unearthing of the long legacies of the presence, power, and potential of Black and Indigenous women in educational leadership positions and how they engage in freedom-fighting within their schools.

What are some of the ideas you hope the field of Educational Change and the audience at AERA can learn from your work related to practice, policy, and scholarship?

It is my hope that the field of Educational Change and the audience at AERA will learn more about how Black and Indigenous women in educational leadership approach and continue in the work, despite many of the challenges faced. I also hope to be in conversation with many other scholars who do similar work for the betterment of us all.

What excites you about the direction of the field of Educational Change, and how might we share and develop those ideas at AERA 2024?

I am so excited that my dear colleagues and I are gathering and centering wise practices to create the 'elsewhere' that we all are in desperate need of in our field and beyond.

“Few research studies have explored how racialized and gendered school administrators navigate school leadership.”

References

- Faircloth, S. C., & Tippeconnic III, J. W. (2013). Leadership in Indigenous education: Challenges and opportunities for change. *American Journal of Education*, 119(4), 481-486.
- Garrett-Walker, W. L. (2021). Replanting a wild seed: Black women school leaders subverting ideological lynching. *Doctoral Dissertations*. <https://repository.usfca.edu/diss/567>
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- Lopez, A. E. (2019). Anti-Black racism in education: School leaders' journey of resistance and hope. In R. Papa (Ed.), *Handbook on promoting social justice in education* (pp. 1935-1950). Springer International.



Dr. Whitneé L. Garrett-Walker (She/Her) is currently the Assistant Dean of Credentialing and School Partnerships at University of San Francisco, School of Education. Dr. GW is an Afro-Indigenous and Queer wife and Mama-Scholar who cares deeply about Black and Indigenous dream-weaving and solidarity through the praxis of educational leadership. Whitnee is an enrolled member of the Natchitoches Tribe of Louisiana and serves her nation as Ambassador to Canada.

Addressing Truth and Then Reconciliation Education as Professional Learning

Lisa Howell
Nicholas Ng-A-Fook
University of Ottawa

The 2024 AERA theme is Dismantling Racial Injustice and Constructing Educational Possibilities: A Call to Action. How does your research respond to this call?

Our research has spanned a 6-year collaboration between the [University of Ottawa, Faculty of Education](#), and the [First Nations Child and Family Caring Society \(Caring Society\)](#). The [Caring Society](#) stands with First Nations children, youth, and families so they have equitable opportunities to grow up safely at home, be healthy, get a good education and be proud of who they are. The [Caring Society](#) also develops educational resources so that educators and students across Canada can actively participate in social justice reconciliation initiatives (Howell & Ng-A-Fook, 2023a). Transforming educational possibilities was a focus of many of the Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015). Our study contributes to the emerging field of truth and reconciliation research in the context of the age of apology in Canada whereby politicians engage in public expressions of remorse for past injustices. (Howell & Ng-A-Fook, 2023b). Our findings suggest that when educators engage in sustained and collaborative professional learning communities, opportunities emerge for profound (un)learning, and commitments to social justice actions to end structural inequities and systemic racism (see Howell & Ng-A-Fook, 2022, 2023a).

What are some of the ideas you hope the field of Educational Change and the audience at AERA can learn from your work related to practice, policy, and scholarship?

“Government institutions and citizens in different parts of the world continue to deny or distance themselves from the violent history and legacy of settler colonial harms.”

Today, several government institutions and citizens in different parts of the world continue to deny or distance themselves from the violent history and legacy of settler colonial harms (Carleton, 2021; Howell & Ng-A-Fook, 2022). Such active distancing from historical “truths” affords the intergenerational beneficiaries of settler colonialism, including some educators, to superficially recognize the lived experiences of Indigenous Peoples (Coulthard, 2014). Consequently, there is much work to be done within different educational systems to reimagine our future relations both inside and outside the context of public education beyond settler colonial moves to innocence (Madden, 2019; Wark, 2021). It is our hope that our research might provide curricular and

pedagogical possibilities for (re)thinking what decolonizing professional (un)learning might look like in practice, and what potential transformational changes emerge when we seek to co-create, co-sustain, and co-support such spaces with educators and partners (Howell et al., 2023).

What excites you about the direction of the field of Educational Change, and how might we share and develop those ideas at AERA 2024?

Over four centuries ago politicians, historians, scholars, policymakers imagined certain settler colonial prospects that now constitute the nation-state that some of us now call Canada. We are excited about the different ways educational change might contribute toward unlearning and reimagining different futurities with First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples.

References

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- Howell, L., & Ng-A-Fook, N. (2023a). Just Because

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Dr. Lisa Howell is a settler of Northern European descent. She lives and works on the unsundered, ancestral territories of the Anishinaabe Algonquin in Ottawa, Canada. Lisa teaches aspiring teachers at the Faculty of Education at the University of Ottawa.



Dr. Nicholas Ng-A-Fook is a Professor of Curriculum Theory at the University of Ottawa. His teaching and research are situated within the wider international field of curriculum studies, history education, and life writing research. He recently created the FooknConversation podcast to talk about “academicky” stuff with colleagues, community activists, artists, educational leaders, teachers, and politicians.

Concluding Thoughts from the Symposium Discussant: Decolonizing Professional Learning

Dr. Vidya Shah
York University

The three papers featured in this AERA symposium and discussed above collectively speak to the limits of education systems that were built on the logics of colonialism and white supremacy and continue to uphold these logics. Garrett-Walker (2024) actively names and disrupts these logics in speaking to the importance of centering the experiences of Black and Indigenous women leaders, and documenting counter-stories of presence, power, and potential in their leadership. Howell & Ng-A-Fook (2004) and Schnellert et al. (2024) describe the possibilities of intentional and consistent interventions that situate the possibilities for professional learning between educators within the system and Indigenous Knowledge Holders and researchers outside of this system. Questioning the importance of the “system” and decentering Eurocentric *knowledges* systems demands that Indigenous and community *knowledges* are centered and valued.

These papers also speak to the importance of relationships in decolonizing work. Howell & Ng-A-Fook (2004) explore how educators are made in and through relations as they face long-held “truths” that uphold historical and contemporary settler colonial realities, such as the distanced and innocent positions so easily assumed in an age of apology. Schnellert et al. (2024) invite us to consider the relations necessary to engage in respectful and reciprocal collaborative inquiries that account for power asymmetries. Garrett-Walker (2024) speaks to the importance of solidarity and co-conspiratorship, a type of engagement that requires us to see ourselves as extensions of one another and be willing to risk for the collective. Professional learning needs to offer educators opportunities to practice relational accountability and solidarity, and to

make sense of who we are in relation to (O)thers and the more-than-human world.

Finally, these three papers invite us to imagine otherwise. Decolonizing professional learning must offer a different way, a different space, and a different experience than being made in and through intersecting systems of oppression. Schnellert et al. (2024) assert that efforts at reconciliation need to happen alongside pedagogical and system transformation. Garrett (2024) speaks to the idea of freedom-fighting and that the very experiences of Black and Indigenous women are central to imagining possibilities for educational justice. Howell & Ng-A-Fook (2004) speak to the “co” in creating, sustaining, and supporting learning between educators and partners.

“Professional learning needs to offer educators opportunities to practice relational accountability and solidarity.”

These papers invite us to question our common-sense assumptions about concepts such as *professional*, *learning*, and *professional learning*, disrupting notions that are disconnected, apolitical, ahistorical, and disembodied. We might be well-served to imagine possibilities for professional learning when we center examples of (un)professional (un)learning.

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- Schnellert, L., Donovan, B. & Davidson, S.F. (2024). Building relationships and decolonizing possibilities through education change networks! *American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting*. Philadelphia, PA.



Dr. Vidya Shah is an educator, scholar and activist committed to equity and racial justice in the service of liberatory education. She is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at York University, and her research explores anti-racist and decolonial approaches to leadership in schools, communities, and school districts.

Session Chair



Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad (@DrEizadirad) is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University. He is also a community activist and Executive Director of the non-profit organization Youth Association for Academics, Athletics, and Character Education (YAAACE) in the Jane and Finch community in Toronto.