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## Defining the Decade

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Dear Readers,

On behalf of the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University, it is our pleasure to present the 12<sup>th</sup> volume of the Queen's Policy Review.

When our team began working on this publication in November 2020, we were amid the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, while completing our master's program entirely online. After discussing numerous possible themes for this volume, we determined that 2020 marks the beginning of a new decade, and with many competing priorities on our minds, ranging from health, social, economic, educational, racial, and environmental issues, it became clear that many structural changes are needed over the next decade. Thus, we sought to publish essays that offer a glimpse into some of these complex areas.

Responses to the pandemic have varied by each nation and the long-term consequences of such an event on a global scale is yet to be determined. However, the time for economic recovery, preventative health measures, environmental protection, and bettering systems that stalled and failed is now. It is important for Canada, and the international community, to prepare for the next decade and the major policy areas that must be addressed – for they are complex and there are many.

The articles published in this volume discuss the implications of the pandemic on early-childhood health, the intersection of poverty and climate change, and the implementation of curriculum that encourages students to reckon with racial injustices that have been at the forefront of our discourse for the past year and a half.

Although this year's edition is shorter than in previous years, largely due to the entirely online space it has been created in, each article engages with an issue that we believe will define Canadian policy and politics for the next decade and beyond.

We are very grateful to the contributing authors for their time, effort, and patience throughout the editorial process. We hope you, our readers, will enjoy reading this year's edition of the Queen's Policy Review.

Sincerely,

QPR 2020 – 2021 Editorial Team

# ANTI-RACISM EDUCATION IN NEW BRUNSWICK PUBLIC SCHOOLS

By: Abbie LeBlanc



**Abstract:** In the wake of the 2020 provincial election, where race and racial justice were hot button issues, there is a renewed interest in making New Brunswick public school curriculum more inclusive. This article argues that additions to public school curriculum ought to be framed using an anti-racist lens, which seeks to explicitly address racism and white supremacy. Currently, New Brunswick's curriculum is based around a discourse of multiculturalism, which often sidesteps systemically imbedded racism and power relations. This paper seeks to consider how New Brunswick public school curriculum may more effectively employ anti-racist, rather than multicultural, pedagogy through a close textual analysis of the curriculum guides for the mandatory units on "Provincial Identity" in grade three, and "Canadian Identity" in grade nine. The paper argues that these curriculum guides promote a vision of multiculturalism centered on whiteness. The paper concludes by briefly considering how the existing curriculum guides may more effectively practice anti-racist pedagogy, while acknowledging institutional and political barriers that may frustrate meaningful anti-racist education in New Brunswick.

## Introduction

In the wake of the 2020 provincial election, where race and racial justice were hot button issues, there is a renewed interest in making New Brunswick public school curriculum more inclusive. In July 2020, the Fredericton and Saint John chapters of Black Lives Matter began working with the University of New Brunswick to develop The Black Lives Matter in New Brunswick Education Project, an evolving collection of K–12 education resources on Black histories and experiences in New Brunswick (BLM 2021a; Weiland 2020). However, the Government of New Brunswick has yet to address their call to “incorporate content on the history of slavery, segregation, and systemic oppression in New Brunswick and Canada into the public school curriculum of New Brunswick” (BLM 2021b). Thinking in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter chapters in New Brunswick, this article argues that additions to public school curriculum ought to be framed using an anti-racist lens, which seeks to explicitly address racism and white supremacy. This is not a call for curriculum to centre trauma; rather anti-racist education seeks to provide students with context for the topics they study. The dominant discourse in Canadian and New Brunswick schools is one of multiculturalism, which often sidesteps contextualizing discussions about systemically imbedded power relations. This article considers how New Brunswick public school curriculum may more effectively employ anti-racist, rather than multicultural, pedagogy. Through engaging anti-racism scholarship, this paper suggests New Brunswick’s social studies curriculum on “Provincial Identity” and “Canadian Identities” promote a vision of multiculturalism centered on whiteness. After considering these existing curriculum guides, this article concludes by considering how these units may more effectively engage anti-racist pedagogy, while also acknowledging institutional and political barriers may hinder anti-racist education in New Brunswick.

### I. Literature on anti-racist pedagogy

While anti-racism is a concept present in the public consciousness (Kendi 2019) and in Canadian federal policy (Canadian Heritage 2019), it is conspicuously absent from mainstream discourses in the Canadian public education system.<sup>1</sup> By embracing, instead, a discourse of multiculturalism, the Canadian public education system arguably contributes to “the supposed disappearance of race” from society, furthering the assumption that Canadian society is “postracial” (Dei 2000, 26; Goldberg 2015). However, racism continues to exist in Canadian society and schools, at interpersonal and structural levels (New Brunswick Child and Youth Advocate 2018, 32; Pauchulo 2013). As George Sefa Dei (2000) argues, “believe[ing] that we live in a phase of race-neutrality ... masks and denies the existence of racism and provides an excuse for complacency and outright dismantling of anti-racism programs and initiatives” (26). Dei charts how white public school teachers often fail to recognise that their “normal” curriculum actually reflects a white and Eurocentric worldview. Failing to interrogate white normativity allows racial bias to influence the construction of curriculum (Tator and Henry 2006), and interactions between students, teachers, and school administrations (Pauchulo 2013). From an anti-racist perspective, multiculturalism fails to interrogate whiteness as it merely tacks other cultures on to

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1. Neither the Canadian Teachers’ Federation (CTF), nor the New Brunswick Teachers’ Federation (NBTF) reference anti-racism in their most recent annual reports nor on their websites. The CTF claims “freedom from discrimination” is one of their organizational priorities (CTF 2019, 7), and includes resources on their website concerning human rights and social justice issues. See <https://www.ctf-fce.ca/what-we-do/resources/>

“normal,” white-centric narratives (Raby 2004). Such activities often stop at celebrating surface-level cultural differences without addressing the systemic nature of racism and oppression (Pauchulo 2013). Because of this superficiality, multiculturalism understands discrimination on an individual level, originating from unexamined stereotypes; anti-racism, by contrast calls for fundamental social change, as it understands racism to be the result of entrenched systems of ideas which devalue and exclude racialized people (McCaskell 2010, 33). As such, anti-racist education focuses not simply on including other cultures, but on questioning the “normality” of whiteness, which in turn destabilises white supremacy (Dei 2000).

Anti-racist education thus requires a robust understanding of race and whiteness. While the concept of race appeals to biological characteristics, like skin-colour, the actual racial significations of these attributes is “always and necessarily a social and historical process” (Winant 2000, 172), meaning that racial identities are both unstable and politically contested projects (182). As Dei (2000) suggests, white people seem “raceless” because white supremacy entrenches itself as “the unmarked norm” against which all other groups are measured and racialized (see also: Goldberg 2002, 218–21). Rather than looking at racialized groups through the lens of white supremacy, anti-racist education seeks to foreground the agency and power of individuals and groups by presenting “a basic reorganization of being and knowing” (De Lissovoy and Brown 2013, 540). In short, anti-racist education requires contextualising curriculum topics within the structures of power in which they exist. Anti-racist education is thus not a call to focus solely on trauma; rather, it is concerned with the framework students are given to understand these topics.

Providing students with anti-racist frameworks allows them to better contextualise their understanding of power relations. Through this context, they can understand the fluidity inherent to power dynamics; for example, there can be tensions within cultures or groups, even while these groups might also face systemic oppression (Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2008). For example, Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua (2005) argue that, in practice, anti-racism tends to ignore Indigenous perspectives and questions of land ownership, thereby reinforcing ongoing settler domination. However, the practice of critical questioning that anti-racist education instills as a framework lends itself to challenging other systems of oppression, and to critiquing and improving anti-racist practices (Dei 2001).

Concerning this emphasis on reflexivity, anti-racist education is deeply influenced by the concept of praxis developed by critical pedagogy scholars (Freire 1996; hooks 1994; McLaren 1997). Per Freire (1996), praxis is the union of action and reflection (128). Curriculum guides, even if they contain a genuinely anti-racist philosophy, are not by themselves an example of praxis, particularly if they are the result of “a fragmented, top-down approach to social change” (Dei 1996, 12). Effective anti-racist curriculum must be implemented by teachers and administrators who are equally committed to anti-racist principles both in theory and practice. Outlining the institutional changes necessary to train New Brunswick teachers to be anti-racist pedagogues goes beyond the scope of this essay. Nevertheless, curriculum development has often been a starting place for anti-racist projects (McCaskell 2010, 32). Drawing on critical discourse analysis, I seek to describe, interpret, and explain the understanding of social reality presented by New Brunswick’s public school curriculum guides (Kellner 1998; Van Dijk 2001).

On a final note, an important aspect of anti-racist praxis is taking stock of one’s “relative positions of power, privilege and disadvantage” (Dei 2000, 25). Recognising that I do not occupy “a privileged standpoint” in terms of understanding racism (hooks 1994, 176), means recognizing “the violent

determination” not just of the privileges I enjoy, but of my identity as a middle-class white settler (De Lissoy and Brown 2013, 546). For my work to be useful to anti-racist projects, I must be prepared for “a persistent, difficult, and inconclusive confrontation” with “the basic epistemological distortions” that have produced the identity I inhabit (546). I hope returning to the New Brunswick public school curriculum, a version of which informed my own education, actively engages me in this on-going process of confrontation.

## II. New Brunswick Curriculum Guides

This section focuses on the curriculum guides for two mandatory social studies classes: the third grade “Provincial Identity” curriculum, and the ninth grade “Canadian Identities” curriculum.<sup>2</sup> Following Anna Laura Stoler (2002), I am interested in the “grids of intelligibility” that underwrite the narratives of regional and national identity the curriculum guides present, and in identifying “the assumptions about racial thinking” they contain (369). As units on national and regional identity, the discourse of multiculturalism is readily apparent in these curriculum guides. I examine how, “lurking below and working in tandem” with this discourse, is an assumption that whiteness is a default norm (Abu-Laban and Nath 2007, 73). While this paper focuses narrowly on these two guides, multiculturalism infuses all subject areas, from visual arts (Matthews 2005) to science (Mujawamariya et al. 2014). By failing to interrogate this white-centric discourse, the curriculum guides may stymie attempts to include anti-racist pedagogy.

### II.i. Provincial Identity, Grade Three

While the word “multiculturalism” does not appear in the grade three social studies curriculum overview, this concept effectively summarises the dominant discourse the guide presents. Designed to be implemented in the fall of 2011, the curriculum reflects a similar concern for “cultural and racial diversity” as that embodied by the Canadian Multiculturalism Act (1988), which emphasises the promotion of diversity within a framework of anti-discrimination and human rights (Kymlicka 2007b). The curriculum guide is organized into “three units based upon the essential elements to build provincial identity over time: Place, Peoples, and Citizenship” (New Brunswick 2011, 32). While the discourse of multiculturalism is most readily apparent in the unit on “Peoples,” it infuses all three units.

Multiculturalism is most visible as a discourse in the unit on “Peoples” due to the repeated invocations of the “diverse peoples” who live in New Brunswick and Canada. The primary learning outcome of this unit is for students to “examine the diverse peoples in their province” (49). The guide suggests that students “will discover how different traditions and beliefs co-exist and serve to promote positive interactions amongst diverse cultures within a region” (49). Students are to identify the “various groups of people who presently inhabit their province,” and “how the diversity of peoples in their

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2. Only English translations of the curriculum guides were available, despite New Brunswick having separate anglophone and francophone school districts. As such, considering how the language divide in New Brunswick might impact the implementation of anti-racist pedagogy goes beyond the scope of this paper.

province has changed over time” (50). The differences between these “diverse peoples” is explored almost exclusively through “expressions of culture—e.g. language, stories, folk tales, songs, music, poetry, dance, visual art” (53). However, a more explicitly political dimension is introduced through “the concept of stereotyping” (57). The curriculum seeks to promote “positive interactions among people” (57). Teachers are encouraged to focus their lesson plans on the harm caused by stereotyping to avoid reinforcing harmful stereotypes, and to generate “a class action plan to promote positive interactions among people” (57). Thus, without introducing students to multiculturalism explicitly, the guides promote an understanding of regional identity as consisting of a mosaic of many different but equal cultures. This reflects what Kymlicka’s (2007a) calls the “multicultural ethos” at its best: the promotion of diversity and inclusion.

The discourse of multiculturalism is also present in the units on “Place” and “Citizenship.” The “Place” unit teaches students to locate New Brunswick in relation to other places (New Brunswick 2011, 36). This understanding of New Brunswick’s physical geography and climate— as well as the human geography of the province, in terms of how the population is dispersed over urban and rural areas— lays important ground work for understanding how the “diverse peoples” discussed in the next section can have a shared regional identity. Taken together, the two units suggest that despite the myriad cultural difference, these peoples possess a shared identity because they inhabit a particular geographic area. The curriculum concludes with a unit on “Citizenship.” This marks the first time New Brunswick public school students are introduced to explicitly political concepts—though they are introduced to the idea of interactions between groups or communities as early as grade one (New Brunswick 2005). Students learn about the “purpose, function, and structure” of provincial and municipal governments, as well as First Nation governments (New Brunswick 2011, 64). This appears to reflect a genuine desire to include First Nations peoples as part of the “diverse peoples” of New Brunswick; there is a lengthy footnote on proper terminology for the Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqiyik, the two First Nations whose traditional land encompasses the land now known as New Brunswick (65). From this discussion of formal institutions, students are introduced to the concept of an “active citizen” (68). They also discuss the rights and responsibilities of citizenship within the context of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (71). Again, while not drawing explicitly on the word multiculturalism, the emphasis on individual citizens and rights-based frameworks are an important part of the multiculturalism discourse (Bromley 2011; Kymlicka 1996).

The welcoming inclusion of other cultures and history may appear to make anti-racism an easy addition to the curriculum. A more critical reading of the curriculum guide, however, highlights that this discourse of multiculturalism is supported by a tacit acceptance of white supremacy. Beginning with the unit on “Place”—which, in contrast to the second unit’s emphasis on “Peoples,” is singular—students’ understandings of New Brunswick’s regional identity is firmly grounded in the physical, territorial boundaries of the province. There is no mention of the Mi’kmaq or Wolastoqiyik in this unit, nor how their understanding of the land reflects the fact there are multiples ways place can be conceptualised. The Eurocentric understanding of territorial boundaries is an unquestioned norm that makes a “New Brunswick identity” possible. Moving on to the “Peoples” unit, First Nations peoples are contextualised as sharing in this “New Brunswick identity” as one the diverse peoples of New Brunswick. The unit tacitly suggests that all these diverse peoples have migrated to New Brunswick at some point, further erasing the uniqueness of the Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqiyik’s connections to the land. Likewise, the unit struggles to address the situation of those whose ancestors were forced to migrate, as was the case under slavery (for a history of slavery in New Brunswick, see Whitfield 2018). While inclusive, the curriculum shies away from addressing the unequal power relations that have



shaped how these diverse peoples interact with each other, and with the idea of belonging to New Brunswick.

One could argue that the curriculum guide still supports a more nuanced discussion of belonging. By taking into account all the diverse perspectives, students could contrast the uniqueness of the Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik's connections to the land with settlers and other migrants. Discussing the history of slavery in New Brunswick might similarly allow students to understand the injustice of such a situation, by contrasting it with the stories of immigrants who chose to come. However, such inclusions fail to challenge the assumed "normativity" of the white experience (Dei 2000). As Thobani (2018) argues, a Canadian identity—and in turn, New Brunswick identity—is predicated upon the racialization of immigrants, refugees, and Indigenous peoples, even under a discourse of multiculturalism:

Canada's adoption of multiculturalism functioned as state recognition of the diversity within the population, but did so by recoding racial classification within the politics of cultural diversity and confining the economic and political struggles of people of colour to the realm of culture (170).

Racialized communities are brought within the scope of a Canadian identity, without requiring the Canadian public or state to reckon with the structures that continue to marginalise these communities. By focusing only on "language, stories, folk tales, songs, music, poetry, dance, [and] visual art," (New Brunswick 2011, 53), the curriculum guide furthers the conflation of race and culture that Thobani identifies as central to "the unequal integration" of racialized communities (Thobani 2018, 170). Moreover, by discussing only stereotyping, students are ill-prepared to understand anti-racism or decolonialism as systemic economic and political struggles; rather, the implied solution to discrimination is for individuals to examine their prejudices.

The multiculturalism of the curriculum guide continues, in Thobani's (2007) words, a process of "exalting" the national subject, who is defined in contrast to "an Other" (10–11). In its simplest form, this logic is embodied by the multiple activities in the curriculum guide that would have students "persuade immigrants to live in your area of the province" (45), or "produce a brochure for newcomers, explaining how the provincial government is structured and its responsibilities" (67). The activities literally have students present their regional identity in contrast to an implied other. Likewise, this logic is reflected in the inclusion of First Nations government as a level of government within the Canadian system comparable to municipal or provincial government. By not discussing the Mi'kmaq and Wolastoqiyik's sovereign claim to this land, which predates—and as such, calls into question the legitimacy of—the Canadian state, the curriculum domesticates and neutralises the threat posed by the "dangerous internal foreigner" (Dahmoon and Abu-Laban 2009, 164). Indigenous peoples can share in New Brunswick identity, so long as they do not challenge settler understandings of land, and white conceptions of identity. While valorising cultural diversity, the activities bring the racial other within the bounds of the regional community without considering the racialized nature of these boundaries, thus creating an unequal integration of these diverse others.

## II.ii. Canadian Identities, Grade Nine

One notable change between the ninth and third guides is the replacement of "identity" with "identities"; however, despite this nominal change, the structure of the guide is much the same. The curriculum is grouped into three units: "Canadian identities," "Canadian physical and human

geography,” and “social responsibility”—units that could otherwise be labelled “Peoples,” “Place,” and “Citizenship.” It is worth noting that the New Brunswick public school curriculum for social studies ends with grade nine; this curriculum is a capstone to students’ social studies education and is likely deliberately revisiting key themes. Perhaps because the guide was issued in 2019, or perhaps because it is targeted to older students, this curriculum does seek to address colonialism frankly—though racism is not mentioned in the guide itself. Like the third grade curriculum, it uses a “multicultural ethos” to promote inclusion (Kymlicka 2007a); however, these efforts are stymied by the curriculum’s failure to question white supremacy—most notably, through its failure to discuss Canada’s history of systemic racism alongside its history of colonialism.

Unlike the third grade curriculum, multiculturalism is explicitly invoked in the units on human geography and on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. The guide begins, however, with a unit on “Canadian Identities”—analogous to the third grade unit on “Peoples.” This unit introduces students to “the concept of identity and perspectives of various groups in Canada” (New Brunswick 2019, 18). Particular emphasis is placed on including Indigenous perspectives; some key concepts the curriculum guide includes are “Pre-Contact, First Contact, and Colonialism” (18). The guide also recommends that this section be used to “examine different perspectives of nationalism, considering the rise of nationalism in Canada, and its significance in identifying as ‘Canadian’” (18). While multiculturalism is not mentioned explicitly in this section, the exploration of cultural diversity and “different perspectives” lays the groundwork for the multicultural tenet that, despite cultural differences, there is a “common identity” shared by all Canadians (Greensmith 2018, 58).

The second unit explicitly relies on the discourse of multiculturalism. This does not necessarily appear to be the case when the second unit begins by recapitulating the material on Canadian, world, and Atlantic Canadian geography introduced to students in grades four, six, and eight, respectively. From there, however, the curriculum discusses “the effect of human settlement on place over time” (New Brunswick 2019, 22). Again, Indigenous perspectives are foregrounded, with “Turtle Island,” and the “Six Cultural Regions of Canada’s First Peoples” being key concepts. Finally, the unit concludes with a discussion of immigration and migration, which foregrounds both “the impact of immigration on Indigenous way of life [*sic*],” and the role of immigration in creating Canada’s “cultural diversity” and “multiculturalism” (24). While Indigenous issues are recognised as distinct, they are still presented as compatible with a multicultural understanding of Canadian identity, wherein every cultural group faces their own challenges.

Multiculturalism is explicitly invoked again in the second half of the third unit. The first half covers the formal “structure and operation of governance in Canada” (New Brunswick 2019, 28). While the grade three curriculum includes First Nation governments alongside provincial and municipal governments, the grade nine curriculum covers federal, provincial, and municipal systems, as well as introducing international organization like the United Nations. First Nations’ issues are treated in the second half of the unit, which seeks to “examine persistent issues involving the rights, responsibilities, and status of individuals and groups in Canada” (30). First Nations’ concerns constitute a significant portion of these “persistent issues”; the unit’s key concepts include First Nation governance and desires for self-governance, the Assembly of First Nations, the Wabanaki Confederacy,<sup>3</sup> the Indian Act, wampum belts,

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3. The Wabanaki Confederacy designates four allied eastern Algonquin groups, including the Mi’kmaq and Wolastoqiyik as well as the Passamaquoddy and Penobscot (Costa 2018).

and the Peace and Friendship Treaties between the Mi'kmaq, Wolastoqiyik and British (30).<sup>4</sup> The “persistent issue” given second most emphasis is “gender disparity,” with the Suffrage Movement and Canada’s Advisory Council on the Status of Women being key concepts (30). Gender identity, sexual orientation, economic disparity, aging populations, and the Quebec separatist movement are also identified as key concepts, as well as multiculturalism and cultural diversity. Treating all these issues together fits within the logic of multiculturalism, as it demonstrates how these different groups, despite their different challenges, take part in a shared nation-building project (Kymlicka 2007b). The curriculum thus comes full circle by recognising a multiplicity of “Canadian identities.”

On its face, the grade nine curriculum appears far more willing to engage in critical discussions, particularly through its willingness to address Canadian colonialism. However, the multiculturalism which the curriculum guide promotes still fails to contextualise this history within a framework of systemic racism and white supremacy. Notably, by separating the final unit into a section on formal structures and “persistent issues,” the unit effectively designates concerns about racism and colonialism as cultural or social issues, separate from the formal structures that organize the Canadian state. The implied solution to these issues is to embrace our multicultural “Canadian identities,” rather than interrogate how the Canadian state perpetuates these racial, colonial, economic, and gendered disparities. As hooks (1992) argues, “evocations of pluralism and diversity,” which are often restricted to the cultural and social sphere, replace programs of consciously anti-racist action, allowing for “assimilation and forgetfulness” (345). For example, despite designating pre-contact Indigenous life and Turtle Island as key concepts, the curriculum brings Indigenous peoples within the scope of a permissible “Canadian identity.” Students address the historical injustice wrought by colonialism in order to “discuss factors that connect Canadians to a shared identity” (New Brunswick 2019, 18). The primacy the guide assigns to the colonial “Canadian” identity is reflected even in the seemingly trivial turn of phrase, “Canada’s First Peoples,” which situates Indigenous groups as belonging to Canada, rather than acknowledging their own independent and sovereign identity (22). Ultimately, a critical engagement with Canada’s ongoing colonialism is hindered because the curriculum guide does not seek to address the concept of white supremacy.

Addressing settler colonialism and racism in Canada requires interrogating white supremacy, and how it forms and shapes the Canadian state. Inclusion and diversity alone do not illuminate this relationship. The curriculum guide’s celebratory emphasis on cultural diversity and multiculturalism when discussing Canadian immigration, for example, glosses over how Canada’s immigration policy is deeply racialized to prefer white immigrants. Consider historical examples, like the head taxes paid by Chinese immigrants in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Thobani 2007), or contemporary ones, like the heightened scrutiny faced by Muslim immigrants post 9/11 (Thobani 2018). Even if these examples were included, the guide fails to promote an anti-racist attitude in students, as these examples are not contextualised within a structure of systemic racism. This is similar to how Indigenous perspectives are not situated within the ongoing structure of settler colonialism. Anti-racism, as Dei (2000) argues, must explicitly name “the issues of race and social difference as issues of power and equality, rather than as matters of the cultural or ethnic variety” (27). Understanding this relationship in terms of power, means recognizing the power implicitly afforded to the seemingly un-racialized category of whiteness (Frankenberg 1993). While the curriculum guide repeatedly calls for the inclusion of “diverse perspectives” (New Brunswick 2019, 18, 20, 22, 24, 26), presenting different

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4. A central element of these Peace and Friendship Treaties is that they do not surrender any land to the British Crown (Costa 2018).

points of view does not necessarily “disrupt the dominance of whiteness” (Dei 2000, 28). That white, settler, Eurocentric values form the standards by which these perspectives are evaluated, is a long-standing problem with multicultural inclusion (Taylor 1994), yet it is a problem with which the curriculum guides fail to reckon.

### III. Looking forward

It is worth noting that the multiculturalism embodied by the guides does appear to reflect a genuine desire to make classrooms more equitable spaces. This impulse towards greater inclusion, and diversity need not be at odds with anti-racist pedagogy. However, anti-racist pedagogy requires introducing students to critical examinations of systemic racism and white supremacy and providing them with a framework to think about these concepts. Naturally, this will also require educating teachers in anti-racism, which is an important endeavour on its own. However, having curriculum guides that embody anti-racist principles remains a crucial resource for teachers and students alike. Returning to the curriculum guides as “grids of intelligibility” (Anna Laura Stoler 2002, 369), the curriculum itself shapes how students and teachers see, understand, and know the world (Abu-Laban and Nath 2007, 73). To meaningfully engage in anti-racist pedagogy, they must provide students with a framework for understanding racism—as well as colonialism, sexism, classism and ableism—as systemic problems in Canada.

However, as Dei (2000) notes, the interrogation of whiteness or other dominant narratives should “not shift attention away from the plight and concerns of society’s disadvantaged” (28). Black Lives Matter Fredericton’s development of curriculum resources on the history of Black life in Atlantic Canada is an important piece in this struggle. Turning to the histories of marginalised communities, looking at both their existence as well as their acts of resistance can destabilise the dominant narratives. Nevertheless, if these resources are subsumed by the discourse of multiculturalism, their liberatory potential may be lost. In the case of Indigenous perspectives, their inclusion in both the third and ninth grade curriculum does not challenge the dominance of the settler perspective, as the narrative of multiculturalism fails to acknowledge the uniqueness of Indigenous peoples’ connection to their land and suggests any tensions that arise are cultural rather than political problems. An anti-racist education would provide students with an understanding of the unequal power relations shaping interactions between settlers and Indigenous peoples, as well as racialized and white individuals.

One way students might be introduced to these concepts includes expanding the unit on stereotyping in the third grade curriculum to include an introduction to the concept of privilege, in turn allowing students to understand issues of “social difference as issues of power and equity” (Dei 2000, 27). If students begin their political and civic education with a critical introduction to power and equity, when they return to these concepts in ninth grade, they will be prepared to confront white supremacy and settler colonialism directly. Such discussions provide students with the context necessary to better understand what is meant by “Canadian Identities.”

Developing and implementing anti-racist curriculum in New Brunswick would undoubtedly face other institutional and political obstacles. Teaching students to engage critically with curriculum can be perceived as threatening the authority of teachers, and disrupting traditional classroom dynamics (hooks 1994). Likewise, acknowledging that racism is reproduced through institutions, and not just personal biases, can spur significant backlash, as demonstrated by recent panic over “critical race theory” in the United States. Nevertheless, the on-going work of the Black Lives Matter chapters in New Brunswick demonstrates that there is a desire to improve the province’s public school curriculum.

If New Brunswick classrooms are to become more equitable, they must reckon with the limits of multiculturalism, and take anti-racism calls seriously to dismantle the structures that produce and reproduce inequality.

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# POVERTY AND CLIMATE CHANGE: TWO IMPORTANT GLOBAL POLICY ISSUES OF OUR GENERATION

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**Abstract:** Today's world is grappling with two grave crises that are interlinked, rising poverty and climate change. Poverty is particularly challenging because it can inhibit potential progress on climate change mitigation. It also negatively impacts climate education and necessary behavioural/lifestyle changes that may be needed to achieve the goals of reducing global warming. In this paper, I showcase the interlinkages between poverty and climate change, whereby the two problems feed off and aggravate each other. I will also discuss previous international efforts that have been to tackle both climate change and poverty. While the efforts to combat climate change, albeit insufficient, have binding legal status, the international poverty eradication efforts the world has seen so far have no legal status. This calls into question the political will of world leaders, who have made various declarations reiterating their commitment to end global poverty over the years. Grassroots participation in crafting poverty reduction programs and replacing the current international poverty reduction sustainable development agenda with legally binding agreements are recommended as possible policy responses to put an end to these important global issues.

## Introduction

Poverty is the biggest global challenge and a crucial determinant for achieving sustainable development (UN, 2015), while climate change has been labelled an existential crisis (Myers, 2014). The geographies of poverty are unevenly spread with much more concentration in the global south. However, no one, no matter their location on earth would be spared the impacts of climate change and its portending calamity, especially if the current trajectory is not reversed or mitigated. The COVID 19 pandemic produced real-world experiments on both poverty and climate change; however, the results for each were on the opposite ends of a spectrum. The lock-down measures introduced to stem the spread of the COVID 19 virus meant that people moved around less, consequently reducing emissions significantly across the globe and resulting in positive net gains for the climate (Berman & Ebisu, 2020; Venter, Aunan, Chowdhury, & Lelieveld, 2020). While emissions and pollution were reduced, poverty levels surged with increased economic difficulties experienced by the already impoverished. In contrast, the world's wealthiest had their wealth grow by 54%, to USD 4 Trillion, within the same one-year period from March 2020 to March 2021 (Collins & Ocampo, 2021). This real-world experiment and the measures taken by governments to stem the spread of the virus suggest that we may have the solutions to climate change. However, the world is still very off the mark on poverty eradication. As of yet, there has been no strong commitment to eradicate global poverty and the wealth inequality gap was further heightened by the COVID 19 pandemic. Nonetheless, poverty could be wiped out if the right policies, support, and measures are implemented. In this paper, I discuss the nexus between climate change and poverty; the global policy responses to climate change and poverty; and policy recommendations to help solve these pressing problems.

## Poverty and Climate Change

Poverty and climate change are inextricably intertwined and are products of societal ills which deserve urgent attention. The landmark Brundtland report affirmed there is a nexus between poverty and climate change by naming inequality as the earth's main environmental problem. Ali (2006) highlights sections of the Brundtland report showing how poverty pollutes the environment and creates environmental stress because people who are impoverished and hungry inevitably harm the environment to fulfill their survival needs. He notes the futility of dealing with environmental issues without first confronting the root causes of poverty.

It is not news that global warming, largely caused by the industrialized nations of the world, has the greatest impact on the world's poorest regions, notably in Africa where the impacts of climate change have been devastating for farming and food security (Menton et al., 2020). Multinational corporations (MNCs) operating in developing countries are also known to severely pollute the environment in a manner that would not be permissible in their home countries. These MNCs leave in their wake severe environmental degradation and depleted natural resources, causing further impoverishment. In summary, pollution drives climate change (Swart, Amann, Raes, & Tuinstra, 2004), which disadvantages the vulnerable further (Liu, Yu, & Wang, 2015).

The multi-dimensional impact of climate change on the already impoverished leads to intergenerational disadvantages, perpetuating inequality across generations. A significant number of households in subtropical and tropical smallholder systems in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia obtain most of their income from communally owned ecosystems which are already being threatened by climate change (Islam & Winkel, 2017). When families' livelihoods are threatened, children have their futures jeopardized, as it is common to withdraw children from school when the family cannot afford the associated costs. Such education interruptions lead to future disadvantages for children, perpetuating the cycle of poverty. Additionally, food insecurity worsens as food production is

increasingly impacted by water scarcity due to climate change (Afriyie-Kraft, Zabel, & Damnyag, 2020; Mugambiwa & Tirivangasi, 2017; Tomich et al., 2019).

The impacts of climate change transcend environmental and social consequences, often affecting even political conflicts and wars. Many areas in the poorer regions of sub-Saharan Africa are already witnessing crushing impacts of climate change in the form of conflicts stemming from water scarcity due to the drying up of Lake Chad, droughts, and flooding. In Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation and biggest economy, climate-related conflicts occur on an almost daily basis. Nomadic herdsman are forced to migrate from their usual grazing grounds as a result of the drying up of Lake Chad. They migrate further west in search of pasture for their herds, leading to increased clashes with farmers in these regions and communal wars (Eke, 2020; Sabo, 2020). These crises are so serious that the country's very existence is threatened by the rising tensions among its different ethnic groups (Anejionu & Ahiaramunnah, 2021). In the Middle East and Asia, climate change has also been linked to small-scale conflicts and riots, with the poorest suffering the most from these incidents (Ide, Kristensen, & Bartusevičius, 2021; Ide, Lopez, Fröhlich, & Scheffran, 2020). The effects of climate change are undeniable and necessitate legally binding international policy responses, some of which we have seen; however, the same cannot be said for poverty.

### International Climate change policy Responses

Over the past few decades, some level of global action has been taken in cognizance of the impact of climate change. However, these responses have been critiqued as insufficient while also facing ongoing opposition by industrial lobbyists (Klenert, Funke, Mattauch, & O'Callaghan, 2020). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change came into force in 1994 and is charged with preventing the dangerous human interference with the climatic system. The goal of this paper is not to assess the impacts, nor the successes or failures of these initiatives, but to highlight what international efforts have been undertaken so far in a bid to tackle climate. The various international treaties regarding climate change are discussed below.

**The Montreal Protocol:** The Montreal Protocol is a global treaty finalized in 1987 to preserve the ozone layer by discontinuing the manufacture and use of ozone-depleting substances (ODS). ODS are man-made greenhouse gases that destroy the ozone layer and contribute to the radiative forcing of climate change (Laube et al., 2014; Velders, Andersen, Daniel, Fahey, & McFarland, 2007). The ozone layer is important because it filters out harmful ultraviolet (UV) radiation which poses a threat to the survival of living things on earth (Mandi, 2016). Increased UV rays have negative impacts on agricultural productivity, disrupt the marine ecosystems, and are linked to diseases like skin cancer and cataracts (Chang, Feng, Gao, & Gao, 2010; Sharma, 2001).

It is believed that in the absence of the Montreal Protocol, a larger depletion of the ozone layer would have occurred as a result of the continued build-up of ODS. It thus provided significant global benefits by stabilizing the stratospheric ozone layer with accrued benefits to the surface climate in general (Morgenstern et al., 2008). From 1990 to 2010 alone, the equivalent CO<sub>2</sub> emissions were reduced by 135 billion tons (Sovacool, Griffiths, Kim, & Bazilian, 2021). The Montreal protocol has been lauded as successful and innovative and was the first agreement to be ratified by all countries. Over the years, it has been modified, with the latest modification being the Kigali amendment in 2016 which seeks to reduce the manufacture and use of hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), which are used as alternatives to ODS but are also very potent greenhouse gases (GHGs). Today, the ozone layer is self-repairing and is anticipated to heal completely in the coming years. The Montreal protocol continues to expand its scope to also include the ODS replacements, such as HFCs, that contribute to climate change in general.

**The Kyoto Protocol:** The Kyoto Protocol was negotiated in 1997 and set forth legally binding emission reduction targets for developed countries for the four year period between 2008-2012 (Christoph, 2003). The protocol recognized that industrialized nations are mainly accountable for the present-day elevation of GHG emissions in the atmosphere. Individual countries were to reduce emissions by an average of 5.2% below 1990 levels during this period (Rosen, 2015). Six main GHGs are covered in this agreement: carbon dioxide, nitrous oxide, methane, sulfur hexafluoride, perfluorocarbons, and hydrofluorocarbons (Reilly, Mayer, & Harnisch, 2002). The commitments were to be calculated on a net basis, factoring in sources and sinks, with each country responsible for credibly measuring its contribution to meet the allotted commitment threshold. Countries are also at liberty to cooperate to meet commitments on a joint basis, for example using regional agreements and can use ‘flexibility mechanisms’ to improve their efficiency of compliance. These ‘flexibility mechanisms’ comprise of: (i) Emissions trading, which is a market-based strategy allowing countries or corporations emitting GHGs below required amounts to trade their allowance to offset emissions elsewhere within or outside the country; (ii) Joint implementation, whereby a country can cooperate with another to improve sinks or reduce emissions and share the resultant emission units as needed; and (iii) The clean development mechanism, a project-based development aid mechanism whereby approved or certified projects put forward by industrialized nations or their corporations can be used to lower emission in developing nations. The industrialized nation or corporation subsequently earns certified emission reduction units which they can deploy to offset their own mandated emission targets (Christoph, 2003). The Kyoto protocol was renewed for a second commitment period from 2013-2020 in Doha, in what is now known as the ‘Doha Amendment to the Kyoto protocol’ (Riti, Shu, Song, & Kamah, 2017). For this second commitment period, the parties agreed to lower GHG emissions by a minimum of 18% below 1990 levels and compiled a revised list of GHG gases to be reported on by the parties.

**The Paris Agreement:** The Paris Agreement is an international legally binding agreement on climate change. It was adopted in December 2015 by 196 countries and came into force in November 2016. The agreement aimed to lower global warming to below 2 degrees Celsius, preferably 1.5 degrees Celsius, in comparison to the pre-industrial era (Schleussner et al., 2016). The agreement was a product of the Paris Climate Change Conference and was mandated to shift the world to a path that will enable it to address contemporary climate challenges (Savaresi, 2016). The Agreement devises a global procedure of consultation, follow-up, evaluation, and cooperation and is believed to represent an advancement, surmounting the many disagreements that characterized the Kyoto era (Savaresi, 2016). Savaresi (2016) highlights that these disagreements were present between developed and developing countries; between those in support of the market mechanisms and those not in support; and also, between developed countries forming part of the Kyoto agreement and those who are not parties to the agreement. The Paris agreement was met with positive acceptance by many countries who lauded it as balanced, fair, and ambitious (Dimitrov, 2016). The Paris agreement thus represents a shift from the two-pronged system, whereby only developed countries were required to embark on emission reduction obligations, to one where every nation is required to put in collective efforts. Parties to the Paris Agreement make voluntary pledges and set emission reduction targets. While there are no enforceable obligations, it is expected that political pressure will ensure that countries comply with the targets they have willingly set for themselves (Horowitz, 2016). The agreement adopts a hybrid approach with a combination of top-down and bottom-up strategies to climate governance.

### **International efforts to eradicate poverty**

Poverty is one result of inequality and manifests in a myriad of ways. Malnutrition, hunger, discrimination, lack of access to education and healthcare, are just a few of the ways it can manifest. Poverty comprises much more than lack of income or means of livelihood. It chips away at the very

core of human existence and requires a much more concerted effort than seen today. So far, efforts to eradicate poverty have not achieved their set goals, as extreme poverty still abounds, and is rising in many parts of the world. In the subsequent sections, international efforts to eradicate poverty are discussed.

**The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):** The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are a set of eight goals set forth by the United Nations (UN) that were adopted by its member states in September 2000, to be achieved by the year 2015. The adoption of the MDGs signified the emergence of a broad concord on poverty eradication as the overarching goal of development (Fukuda-Parr & Hulme, 2011). The goals were derived from the UN millennium declaration, where world leaders committed to fighting poverty, hunger, disease, environmental degradation, discrimination against women, and illiteracy (Hulme, 2009). The MDGs were the world's pioneer quantifiable and time-bound targets for tackling extreme poverty in its various forms (Oleribe & Taylor-Robinson, 2016). The goals were extolled for having a comprehensible, communicable, and quantitative focus to development, but were also critiqued for detracting attention from more crucial issues (Fehling, Nelson, & Venkatapuram, 2013; Langford, 2010). The goals were also criticized for neglecting the poorest and those who are disadvantaged because of age, gender, ethnicity, or disability, and for not being specific on the accountable parties. They were thus, considered structurally flawed. Ogujiuba and Jumare (2012) also contend that most of the indicators used to measure the MDGs were inadequate and dependant on data that were either unreliable or unavailable in Africa that has a high concentration of the poor. They argue that determining these lapses from the onset would have led to the realization that the goals were unachievable. This may have led to the pursuit of more achievable goals, which could have been more effective at helping realize the goal of poverty eradication.

While the MDGs received strong political support, they were not legally binding. At the end of the MDGs timeline, the goal to alleviate poverty was not met despite the avowed commitment (Campbell, 2017). Furthermore, the growth indices reported by some of the participating countries were faulted as they were misaligned with the reality on the ground. The failure to yield any significant difference in day-to-day living led it to be critiqued as declarative, as the efforts were insufficient with the needed political will lacking (Abur, Eche, & Torruam, 2013). The MDGs were also deemed good-intentioned but poorly conceptualized, thus distracting from more relevant targets, policies, and actions (Hulme, 2009). The MDGs also faced criticism for their manner of conceptualization, whereby elite UN organizations were mainly involved. It was also perceived as another means for Western nations to exert dominance over countries in the global south via the imposition of western development policies (Ogujiuba & Jumare, 2012).

At the end of the MDGs in 2015, the final report hailed the project as 'the most successful anti-poverty movement in history' (Wrisdale, Mokoena, Mudau, & Geere, 2017). There were claims that global poverty and hunger have been cut in half from 1990 levels. According to Hickel (2016), these claims by the UN are intentionally inaccurate and misleading because the statistical data were manipulated to make it appear as though poverty had decreased when the reality was the opposite. Hickel also argued that the definitions of hunger and poverty employed led to the scale of these issues being underestimated, with the fact being that billions of people remained in poverty, more than ever in history and double the figures touted by the United Nations. Despite these claims and counterclaims, the reality is that the rate of poverty and inequality remains high. The damaging impacts of poverty on the societal fabric require comprehensive concerted action at all levels of government, much more than what was executed with the MDGs.

**The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):** The UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) succeeded the MDGs at their expiration in 2015. The SDGs are a set of 17 interrelated goals and 169 targets to

help the world achieve sustainable development by entering into a global partnership (UN, 2015). Just like the MDGs, the SDGs are not legally binding. Their main objective is to provide basic human needs (primarily food, clothing, and shelter) while maintaining the earth's integrity for both current and future generations (Echendu, 2020). Achieving sustainable development is primarily premised on the eradication of global poverty (Liu et al., 2015).

The first of the SDGs calls for an end to poverty everywhere, in all its presentations, by the year 2030. SDG1 aims to ensure the vulnerable and poor have access to basic services and social protection. This first goal acknowledges the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and links it to SDG3 (good health and well-being) and SDG4 (quality education). The current measure of extreme poverty is people living on less than \$1.25 a day. Menton et al. (2020) poignantly note that the SDGs recognize that poverty intersects with human well-being and vigorous/healthy ecosystems and when these are absent or broken, poverty flourishes. Many disadvantaged communities are dependent on vibrant ecosystems and associated services (fertile soil, clean water, fish, etc) which can make up to 90% of the livelihood source among poor rural households. Despite this recognized interlinkage, the underlying targets and action points under SDG1 are still considered deficient, as they do not address the underlying factors that drive poverty. Furthermore, SDG1 does not mention exploitation, rising inequality, dispossession, etc., as primary causes of poverty, and the call for aid from rich countries does not address associated conditional factors like structural adjustment, trade rules, debt burdens, etc. (Menton et al., 2020). For Gonzalez (2014), the more than 18 million people who die each year due to poverty-related causes are a result of the global economic order, which perpetuates malnutrition and starvation among the poor. This cannot be addressed by monetary transfers, but rather by an overhauling of the present economic and political systems that further disenfranchises the poor while favouring the rich (Gonzalez, 2014). The likelihood of achieving SDG1 has been called into question with Cuaresma et al. (2018), simulating a variety of different scenarios and finding that the goal would not be achievable without adopting a change in approach. Some of the conceptual and methodological features and implementation incongruence that led to the failure of the MDGs to eradicate poverty remain present in the SDGs (Akolgo, 2018) and until that is addressed, the pertinent goals it seeks to achieve will remain an illusion. As of 2021, six years after the commencement of the SDGs, the promise to leave no one behind and to reach the most vulnerable seems very far-fetched. Furthermore, while the world was not on track to eradicate poverty before the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic, the goals seem more elusive than ever in the event of the pandemic. In the meantime, billions of people all over the world continue to remain in poverty with children, people living with disabilities, women, and the elderly remaining most impacted.

### **Possible Policy Responses**

The world is gradually coming to terms with the fact that it cannot avoid the impacts of climate change. Climate adaptation and mitigation capacities are dependent on a country's economic means. Poverty, on the other hand, is unevenly distributed, meaning that the developed world can afford to turn a blind eye or take declarative and performative actions with extreme wealth existing side by side with abject poverty. Poverty needs to be tackled on a global scale. This would yield ripple benefits that will also manifest as climate action.

Global poverty contributes to the millions of people lacking basic education. A lack of education in impoverished regions also results in people being less likely to understand the required collective actions necessary to combat the problem of climate change. This is problematic, as the impacts of climate change often throw people deeper into poverty. Rising poverty levels are directly linked with

the increasing number of people engaged in climate detrimental activities to survive, for example, artisanal refining of crude oil, which releases harmful GHGs into the atmosphere, causing further atmospheric warming (Ogele & Egobueze, 2020). Actions to reduce poverty will benefit the climate and vice versa.

***Redefining ways of setting goals and targets:*** There appears to be a disconnect between goal setting on poverty reduction, what is needed on the ground, and what has been achieved. This has been seen with the MDGs where the claims on poverty reduction have been strongly contested. The process of setting goals relating to poverty must include the people whom the programs are designed for. It is key to design programs in line with the specific actions the people for whom the program is meant for need. Bringing those for whom these poverty reduction efforts are directed to the discussion table will enable them to articulate what is most important for them to come out of poverty, what indicators will be useful, and what success will look like. This will ensure that actions align better with needs and improve chances of success. Top-down approaches need to be aligned with bottom-up approaches to arrive at the desired results. Measurements need not rely on quantitative tools alone. There needs to be a periodic, one-on-one direct evaluation with the poor to enable any program gaps to be detected and corrected. Monitoring must be based on realistic indicators, and it is time to rethink the ones currently in use by international development bodies to measure poverty. Programs that would ensure the integration of grassroots consultation and involvement at all stages need to be in place and at the centre of poverty alleviation efforts.

***Non-legally binding agreements are just that:*** The nature and design of the poverty eradication efforts we have seen so far sets them up for failure. The mere fact they are not legally binding calls into question the genuineness of the efforts. Giving global poverty policies the backing of legal status will give them more weight. The lock-down measures and restrictions enforced by countries around the globe, in response to the COVID 19 pandemic, are evidence that governments have the power to enforce strict conditions to achieve goals. While poverty is concentrated in the global south, pockets of poverty exist everywhere, and declaring poverty as a global emergency with the status of a pandemic will ensure swift actions are deployed to ensure no one has to endure the multi-faceted and dehumanizing impacts of poverty. It is necessary to identify and quantify the needed resources that would lift people out of poverty depending on their own needs and work towards deploying these resources. The rich countries of the world, that have benefitted from resource extraction in the impoverished countries of today, have a moral responsibility to step up and contribute legally binding and enforceable financial amounts to put to rest once and for all the problem of global poverty. The fact that industrialized nations are the primary culprits of the global warming we experience today also puts the onus on them to step up on climate action as climate impacts further exacerbate poverty and inequality.

## Conclusions

Poverty and climate action require the same level of urgency as they are intricately interconnected. Even if a person is not currently poor, climate-linked disasters and displacements can thrust them into poverty as the cascading impacts can destroy one's home, social life, and means of livelihood. In the event of climate-linked displacements, there are also difficulties in starting life anew in a new environment and it may prove difficult to harness one's previous wealth in the new environment and achieve stability again. While high profile international conventions and legally binding policy instruments are in place to combat climate change, albeit insufficiently, there are no similar legal status actions for poverty eradication. This is an oversight that could be a serious drawback for whatever progress envisaged from climate change mitigation. Policymakers are encouraged to put in place measures that would eradicate poverty once and for all to achieve a more sustainable planet for

us and future generations. The response of many world governments to the pandemic has shown that they can act when they want to. The climate and poverty crises deserve to be treated with the same level of urgency as a pandemic. Streamlined actions for both problems will have concurrent positive impacts. The current UN SDG goals are deficient because, in addition to being non-binding, they also leave responsibility for action to national governments. This leaves poor countries on their own without requisite support, specific policy directives, or guidelines on eradicating poverty. There is no gainsaying that concerted action is required to combat poverty, which is capable of negating whatever positive results may be derived from climate action. Climate change and poverty require coherent streamlined global action and coordination among all the countries of the world. This would foster structural change that would see poverty become history and yield positive ripple benefits for the environment. Tackling poverty will have a positive feedback effect on climate change and vice-versa.



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# THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF THE COVID-19 RESPONSE ON EARLY CHILDHOOD HEALTH

By: Carly La Berge



**Abstract:** The past year in lockdown has been a difficult time for many people. Emergent research shows, however, that this event may be especially difficult for children and their families. Nearly every aspect of their daily existence has been impacted from routines, visiting friends and extracurricular activities to accessing healthy foods, daycares and support services. Existing inequities are being illuminated during this period. Populations such as families living in rural areas, Indigenous families, low-income families and children and youth with support needs (CYSN) are being given belated attention in discourse. This poses a monumental time for early childhood vulnerability because what government and policy do considering these findings will decide future health trajectories among these children for years to come. They have the power to protect children from potential harms - including negative mental health outcomes, lower educational attainment, and poorer social and emotional development - or exacerbate their situations without immediate intervention. Regardless, the group of children growing up during this time will forever be known as the lockdown generation.

A systematic review of all the available research in Canada was completed on the impacts of the unintended consequences of the COVID-19 response on early childhood health (ages 0-6). Of the key themes that were discovered, the majority negatively impacted children's health, including poorer eating habits, decreased physical activity, worse mental health outcomes, major healthcare and educational service disruptions, and disproportionate negative impacts on certain populations. One positive impact that was seen, however, was increased positive social and emotional development. Recommendations for potential areas of policy action include fostering collaborative action, improving surveillance of children's health, and increasing the accessibility of vital healthcare and support services during and after the pandemic.

## Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a difficult life event. Never in the modern world have families been impacted so suddenly and broadly. For young children this event may represent a large period of their lives or, for infants, be their entire representation of the world. For the average adult, on the other hand, a year in lockdown does not represent such a large portion of their lifespan. Childhood is supposed to be a time when this young person explores the world to gain an understanding of it. This process is greatly inhibited during lockdown due to children not being able to interact with each other or distant family members, many play spaces being closed, and them spending most of their time inside their homes.

While some research has taken place during previous epidemics, including SARS, MERS, and H1N1, showing decreased mental health outcomes, the repercussions of these epidemics were never to the extent that is being seen with the COVID-19 pandemic (Luo et al., 2020). Children growing up during this time are being deemed the lockdown generation and researchers are uncertain of the scale of the immediate and long-term impacts associated with the COVID-19 response on them.

A systematic review using research in Canada was completed on the impacts of the unintended consequences of the COVID-19 response on early childhood health (ages 0-6). Search methods were developed to reflect other similar systematic reviews published earlier this year and databases that were used included PubMed and Google Scholar. From the literature that returned in the searches, the locations of these studies primarily took place in British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec. While the 0-6 age demographic was the focus of the review, studies looking at school-aged children and studies who broadly reviewed all individuals under the age of 18 were used to understand the overall implications of the pandemic response on children. These findings were then used to create recommendations for strategic policy development with the goal of mitigating some of these impacts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had widespread impacts on the health and wellbeing of children across the country. Early childhood is a pivotal time in development, and it also determines the health trajectories of these individuals long into the future. Some of the health disparities that are being seen during the pandemic are not new but simply visible to the broader public for the first time. Policymakers at the provincial and territorial level are provided an unparalleled policy window to provide supports to address inequities that have been illuminated by the pandemic and their action is essential to prevent irreparable health impacts on this generation.

## Physical Health & Well-Being

Studies have shown that the health behaviours of children have changed during lockdown (Carroll et al., 2021; Dove, Wong, Gustafson, & Corneil, 2020; Human Early Learning Partnership, 2021). There has been decreased access to healthy foods with the closure of schools, varying levels of physical activity, with many extracurricular activities being cancelled, and an increase in leisure screen time. Furthermore, food insecurity, defined as inadequate access to safe and sufficient nutritious and cultural foods, is on the rise with 16% of Canadian families (or 1 in 6 children) reporting experiencing food insecurity during the pandemic (International Food Policy Research Institute; Robidoux, Winnipeg, Santosa, & Haman, 2021; Statistics Canada, 2020). For comparison, before the pandemic hit, 12% of households were experiencing food insecurity (Dove et al., 2020). The pandemic is exacerbating the situation by increasing the severity of existing insecurity and pushing more families to experience insecurity (Statistics Canada, 2020). Moreover, many children received their breakfast and lunches from schools, and these sources were removed with the closure of schools during the first wave of the pandemic (Dove et al., 2020). Policies and supportive programming to reach children and families experiencing this level of food insecurity are therefore needed as the pandemic continues.

Unhealthy meals and over-eating have also become more common than before the pandemic, with 42% of children eating more food and 55% eating increased amounts of unhealthy snack foods such as potato chips and cookies (Carroll et al., 2021). However, since more families are spending increased in their households, it was reported that more time was spent cooking together as a family and 26% of families reported more opportunities to eat healthy meals together (Carroll et al., 2021; Human Early Learning Partnership, 2021).

With the closure of many extracurricular facilities, many families were forced to foster activities in their home environments, which may be more challenging for some households. Rates of physical activity varied for families, with a decrease seen in 52% of Canadian children and only 4.8% meeting the movement guidelines for their age groups (Carroll et al., 2021; Moore et al., 2020). Related to time being spent inactive, it was reported that the time spent on devices or watching television outside of educational purposes increased in 90% of children (Carroll et al., 2021). Interestingly, it was also discovered that a third of children have been more physically active. Protective factors to promote physical activity during the pandemic were found to include parental encouragement of physical activity, living in a detached home, family ownership of a dog, and parent co-participation in outdoor activities (Carroll et al., 2021; Human Early Learning Partnership, 2021).

### **Mental Health**

Researchers found that the mental health outcomes of both children and adults diminished over the pandemic, with 67–70% of Canadian children experiencing deterioration in at least one mental health domain including depression, anxiety, irritability, attention, hyperactivity, and compulsions (Cost et al., 2021). This trend was also observed among the 2-5-year-old age group, with 31.5% demonstrating anxiety, 29.6% demonstrating irritability, and 35.2% demonstrating hyperactivity (Cost et al., 2021). Parents report feeling similarly, with 46% reporting that their mental health has worsened (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2020). It is interesting to learn that preliminary findings also show that children are doing worse than their parents think when comparing children's self-reports with parental reports on their child's mental states (Stewart & Samji, 2021).

Anxiety and fear are another major trend during the pandemic, with some children in Canada fearful of healthcare providers in personal protective equipment (PPE) and afraid to access care for this reason (Nicholas et al., 2020). Rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have also risen. It is estimated that 30% of Canadian children who are isolated or quarantined due to a family member catching the coronavirus or contracting the virus themselves will develop PTSD (Waddell, Schwartz, Barican, Yung, & Gray-Grant, 2020).

Many families have also experienced an increase in stress levels due to being confined in indoor spaces during lockdown and this has affected family functioning. Approximately a quarter of Canadian parents reported more negative interactions with their children (Dove et al., 2020). This was defined by Dove et al. (2020) as an increase in conflicts, yelling and the use of discipline. Of major concern for families and healthcare providers are the expected increased rates of witnessing and experiencing family violence during the pandemic. This is caused by an increase in risk factors, including financial stresses, isolation, and substance use (Dove et al., 2020). Exposure to family violence in childhood has been linked with poorer mental health outcomes and may affect a child's future development and learning in school (Campo, 2015).

Unfortunately, fewer abused children and youth are being identified compared to pre-pandemic due to service closures. There has also been an increase in requests for social services intervening among families of CYSN (Bérubé, 2020). Although evidence shows that the rate of family violence is decreasing, researchers argue that it is in fact increasing due to an increase of non-identified or

reported cases (Bérubé, 2020). Schools and daycare facilities typically play a role in reporting cases of potential abuse or neglect, as teachers and caregivers are required to report if they suspect this is occurring. With children learning from home, this made it much more challenging for educators to see the signs of abuse and neglect. (Bérubé, 2020).

### **Socialization & Relationships**

Due to social distancing and smaller group restrictions, there have been fewer opportunities to socialize during the pandemic. Early childhood is an important time to develop this skill to support future relationships (Human Early Learning Partnership, 2021). For example, nearly three-quarters of children whose parents were surveyed in British Columbia have spent less time socializing with their friends during the pandemic (Human Early Learning Partnership, 2021). While these decreased rates of socialization outside of the household are concerning, roughly half of all Canadian parents reported an increase in opportunities for positive interactions with their children (Bérubé, 2020). Positive interactions were defined as feelings of closeness, increased quality time spent together, and showing love and affection (Bérubé, 2020).

Social isolation has been a concern among First Nations communities in Canada. Before the pandemic, suicide and self-inflicted injuries were the leading cause of death for First Nation youth and adults (Ineese-Nash, 2020). The ability to maintain connection during the pandemic has been found to be largely dependent on the resources that families have available to them, including access to appropriate technology and a stable internet signal (Gonzales & MacMillan, 2020). Many new modes of communication were adopted during the pandemic, the main one of note being virtual meetings but also emails and phone calls. Rural and remote First Nations communities in Canada may not have access to a stable mobile and data carrier in their region, making it difficult to connect in this way. The inequitable provision of technological resources by the provincial and federal governments, therefore, may have diminished the ability to socialize during the pandemic (Gonzales & MacMillan, 2020).

### **Social & emotional development**

One of the few positive impacts that was seen on children's overall health was an increase in the adoption of new hobbies (Cost et al., 2021). It was reported that 50.4% of Canadian children spent more time indoors on these new-found activities, and 22.7% had increased outdoor hobbies (Moore et al., 2020). The top three most popular activities included arts and crafts, puzzles and games, and video games (Moore et al., 2020). These are important activities as they foster social and emotional development by providing opportunities to practice motor skills and problem solving, as well as promote creativity and self-expression (Moore et al., 2020). This trend may depend on the resources available to a child around the home, however, such as access to green spaces and hobby materials. Parents who were surveyed in Ontario reported moderate to high levels of boredom in 49% of their children due to the lockdown restrictions and 46% experienced challenges in keeping their child entertained (Gonzalez & MacMillan, 2020).

### **Service disruptions**

Disruptions to healthcare and educational services, either caused by their complete closure or by switching to virtual platforms that are not accessible to all families without reliable broadband, has been another area of extensive concern for families and service providers during the pandemic. The three-month transition to online schooling from March until May of 2020 posed many challenges (Dove et al., 2020). Research shows that the shift to online classes at home was harder for students with complex medical conditions, disabilities, and diverse abilities due to the lack of resources that were available to them through the school system (Dove et al., 2020). This included, for example,

respite equipment and spaces, the provision of breakfast and lunch, and specialized learning materials and educators (Dove et al., 2020). It was discovered that in this three-month shift, over half of children did not attend online classes at all and when in-person classes resumed in June of 2020, just under half of students did not return due to fears of getting sick (Dove et al., 2020). While most students seem to have now returned to in-person schooling, future educational attainment may still be of concern (Science Table, 2021).

Service disruptions have been especially difficult on families of children and youth with support needs (CYSN). British Columbia's provincial government, for example, implemented new restrictive criteria to limit the number of families able to apply for respite funding to decrease their costs during the pandemic (BC Representative for Children and Youth, 2020). Moreover, many diagnostic services that took place in-person were cancelled completely for several months at the beginning of the pandemic (BC Representative for Children and Youth, 2020). This meant that for children without an official CUSN diagnosis to be able to access the supports they needed, their families would be required to cover \$5,000 in expenses out-of-pocket for a private assessment or that they would be placed on a 67-week-long waitlist to receive a diagnosis from a healthcare professional (BC Representative for Children and Youth, 2020).

Moreover, with the lockdown restrictions, daily routines were disrupted for many families, which can cause distress in CYSN. This led to behavioural changes in many of these children and their families often reported struggling to cope. Furthermore, they expressed feeling exhausted due to being the primary caretakers of their child without respite or other supports (Suleman et al., 2020). For this reason, many parents were worried about their safety and their child's safety during the pandemic (Suleman et al., 2020).

### **Racism and population impacts**

Some of the social repercussions previously outlined disproportionately negatively affected certain populations, including Asian-Canadian families, low-income families, Indigenous communities, and rural communities across Canada.

Asian-Canadians have experienced higher rates of discrimination and racism compared to before the pandemic. In a survey conducted by Children First Canada (2020):

- Half of Asian-Canadian participants reported being called names or insulted,
- 61% had adjusted their routines to try to avoid these events, and
- More than half were worried that their children would be the targets of bullying with the return to in-person classes at school due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Considering how foundational positive socialization and routines are to early childhood health, in addition to encountering racism being a social determinant of health, these experiences are presented by Children First Canada as one of the top 10 threats to children's health and wellbeing (Children First Canada, 2020).

Prior to the pandemic, some Canadian families were struggling financially. Now their living situations have been exacerbated and in addition, many are experiencing food insecurity (Policy Bench, 2020). Thirty-two percent of BC residents report experiencing financial stress during the pandemic, and it is expected that 43% will as the pandemic continues (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2020). Furthermore, 5% of British Columbia residents are currently experiencing housing insecurity in the form of overcrowding, poor quality, or homelessness (Gadermann, 2021). These trends are worrisome for



families with children because households experiencing financial stresses show an increase in negative interactions between individuals, including yelling and fighting (BC Centre for Disease Control, 2020; Gadermann, 2021). This has the potential to affect mental health outcomes of the family members as well as affect childhood educational attainment and development (Campo, 2015).

Groups facing technology insecurity, or lack of access to technological devices, have been less able to access support services such as virtual healthcare and education services. This problem has disproportionately impacted rural and Indigenous communities during the pandemic. For example, the populations of many Indigenous communities in Canada are composed of a young population; 80% of some communities are under the age of 40. School-aged children are a significant portion of the Indigenous population, but few students in these communities have access to both technology and a stable internet connection (Ineese-Nash, 2020). This meant that many of these children could not attend online schooling for the three-month switch, and they may face lower educational attainment (Ineese-Nash, 2020). It also meant an inability to attend virtual healthcare appointments and other online support services, which may impact physical and mental health in the future (Ineese-Nash, 2020).

## Discussion

The public health pandemic response in Canada has largely focused on curbing cases and consideration for children's social-emotional learning and broader health needs have largely been missing from Canada's COVID-19 response. Early childhood is a vulnerable period in the lifespan and life experiences that happen during this time can affect their development and future health trajectories. Policy changes are immediately needed to remove the burden off families during the pandemic and to lessen the long-term impacts including decreased physical activity, poorer mental health outcomes, a decrease in socialization and quality of relationships, altered social and emotional development, and heightened racism.

Based on the emerging research, recommendations for strategic and actionable policy development for healthcare services and planning include:

- Enhancing cross-government and cross-organizational collaboration to support children and families.
- Creating an effective monitoring and surveillance system that links data and builds on the COVID-19 research.
- Improving accessibility of needed healthcare services for children and families by building out better enhanced services, improving service coordination, and addressing system gaps in access to enhance health equity.

### ***Enhancing cross-government and cross-organizational collaboration to support children and families***

The federal government of Canada has mandated actions to address the challenges that residents face caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and response (Government of Canada, 2021). This promise also exists across all provincial governments and among many organizations that support the social and emotional development of children, however many of these groups often work separately in silos. These groups have an opportunity to leverage one another's resources, staff, and funding to strategically plan for recovery together. This would also enable the creation of a coordinated and equitable approach to support children and families during and after the pandemic (Government of Canada, Department of Justice, 2021).

Creating an effective monitoring and surveillance system that links data and builds on the COVID-19 research

With so many researchers and organizations reviewing all of the data on the impacts of the COVID-19 response, it would also be beneficial for this to be collated and further attention put towards understanding how childhood trajectories will be altered, to start supporting initiatives now. These sources could also provide an opportunity to understand more thoroughly the social and structural causes of early childhood vulnerability. This could allow targeted interventions to promote equity among disproportionately impacted groups that were noted, including Asian-Canadian, low-income, rural, and Indigenous families, and CYSN. Moreover, each wave of the pandemic affects different populations in different ways and therefore a monitoring system would be beneficial to recognize existing or created inequities to be able to address them.

***Improving accessibility of needed healthcare services for children and families by building out better enhanced services, improving service coordination, and addressing system gaps in access to enhance health equity***

Researchers in Canada have shown that there were delays in accessing healthcare professionals with the closure of many of these facilities at the onset of the pandemic. Furthermore, not all children were able to continue attending their healthcare appointments or school classes online. This could impact children's health trajectories and future educational attainment. Strategies should be built to address these negative outcomes and prevent them from occurring in future waves of the pandemic. Special considerations should be made for groups that cannot attend virtual appointments and whose children's health is deteriorating without access to the services they need. To address this, policies should consider promoting access to mental health services and CYSN services based on need, whether a particular diagnosis exists.

## **Conclusion**

The impacts of the unintended consequences of the COVID-19 response on early childhood health have been vast and intersect nearly every aspect of daily life for families. Early childhood experiences are a powerful determinant of health (Szilagyi & Hafon, 2015). If the responses of the provincial and territorial governments are delayed and the health of Canadian children continues to deteriorate, this could potentially negatively affect their health trajectories for years to come. One of the best places to start is with timely policy that supports improved access to the many facets of healthcare services and programming that bolsters social and emotional development for families recovering from the pandemic. Families have been working hard to maintain their children's health and provide them with a positive childhood during this challenging time and governments need to implement immediate and adequate supports and use their power to minimize the adverse impacts on the generation of Canadian children growing up through this pandemic.

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