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Founding Co-editors: Dr. Ishmael Baksh (retired) and Dr. Amarjit Singh (retired)
The Morning Watch was first published by the Faculty of Education at Memorial in the fall of 1973, with Dr. William J. Gushue, Dr. Ishmael J. Baksh, and Dr. Amarjit Singh serving as editors. Gushue noted, "The birth of The Morning Watch is explained by the somewhat rapid awakening of the Newfoundland consciousness. Indeed, that fact is reflected in the title of the journal, in that it is the morning watch that precedes a new day -- a new and better era for Newfoundland and its people." (Society, Culture and Schooling, ed. Amarjit Singh and Ishmael Baksh)

The Morning Watch has a broad scope, addressing questions relating to such matters as curriculum, pedagogy, educational administration, equity, decolonization, Indigenous reconciliation, and educational reform. Contributions come from members of the Faculty of Education, faculty in other units of the university, and an increasing number of national and international sources. In time, The Morning Watch became an important medium for the discussion of educational and social issues and for the dissemination of the results of research conducted in the province.

In the general excitement that marked the approach of the 25th Anniversary of Confederation, Newfoundland culture became more and more the focus of attention in the province. Not surprisingly, The Morning Watch first dealt extensively with issues of Newfoundland culture and education, and its articles reflected a variety of disciplines. As we near the Morning Watch's 50th Anniversary (1973-1974 to 2023-2024), this excitement continues as we continue as a new editorial team (since 2019) to share the founding editors' legacy.

From the Senior Editor regarding The Morning Watch Journal (MW): Educational and Social Analysis and 'Peer Review':

Since its first publication in 1973, the Morning Watch (MW) has had a long and distinguished history. For nearly 50 years we have strived to promote scholarship and research consistent with Memorial University's mission to support local research and development in education. As such, our focus is on being formative and informative as we support writing-scholarship linked to important issues in the scholarship of the educational community in this province and country, as well as internationally.

Over the years there have been many discussions about the nature of our publication, in particular whether or not we are peer reviewed. As we move forward with a new editorial team (since 2019) a clarification of the nature of peer review in the MW is in order. So, let's try and set this straight by answering the same question twice.

First: What does peer review mean? Merriam-Webster Learner's defines peer review as "a process by which a scholarly work (such as a paper or a research proposal) is checked by a group of experts in the same field to make sure it meets the necessary standards before it is published or accepted". Elsevier (2020) argues that the peer review process is essential to "uphold the quality and validity of individual articles and the journals that publish them".

Second: What does peer review mean? The question is repeated but the answer is different. As the reader will know, there are different types of peer review, so the second question really asks what type, or types, best fit the MW? Often one type of review will be preferred by a subject community. Quite common in education-focused journals is the double blind peer review, but other types are also valid and widely used. Elsevier (2020) relates that peer review comes in different flavours, and that each system has its own advantages and disadvantages. A key point Elsevier makes is to consult the journal editorial team for clarification of any questions you might have.

I once submitted an article to a journal that had seven blind reviewers. Less extreme and most common types are the single blind review, double-blind review, and open review. Wiley (2020) distinguishes "variations" of the first three: transferable, collaborative, and post publication. The most pertinent for MW purposes, taken from Wiley (2020), are outlined below:

Single Blind Review: In this type of peer review the author does not know who the reviewers are. This is a common form of peer review.
Double Blind Review: In this type of peer review neither the author nor the reviewers know the other's identity. This is also a common form of peer review.
Open peer review: The identity of the author and the reviewers are known by all participants. There is a growing minority of journals using this form of peer review, but popularity among reviewers is yet to be proven.
Collaborative review: This covers a broad variety of approaches in which a team of people work together to undertake the review. One format is to have two or more reviewers work together to review the paper, discuss their opinions and submit a unified report. Another approach is to have one or more reviewers collaborate with the author to improve the paper until it reaches a publishable standard.

Using these definitions, we are comfortable stating that this particular edition of the MW is an open and collaborative peer-review publication. Added to this discussion is the point that the MW is not the intellectual property of any institution or corporate entity, nor does it claim copyright (copyright remains with the contributor), commercial connection, or our cost for usage. It is an open-source journal. We will never state rejection rates as we do not see a link between rigor and high rejection rates. This way, we strive to support the highest quality and rigorous peer review dissemination research and scholarship through peer-to-peer engagement and support. It is peer-to-peer collaboration that drives quality, and that is our mission.

Yours in scholarship, Kirk Anderson, PhD.
Senior Editor- The Morning Watch

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We would also like to thank Patrick Gamsby for his consultation and technical support.

A note from Dr. Pamela Osmond, Dean, Faculty of Education

It was fifty years ago that our esteemed colleagues, Dr. Ishmael Baksh and Dr. Amarjit Singh first envisioned the need for a scholarly repository dedicated to celebrating the rich tapestry that is education in Newfoundland and Labrador.
Since that time, The Morning Watch has been a steadfast companion of the Faculty of Education. From pioneering research on rural and multi-age schooling to the evolution of distance education in the province and everything in between, The Morning Watch has shaped our understandings of the unique challenges facing our schools and communities and showcased our resilience and ingenuity.

In celebrating five decades of publication, we honor the many visionaries, educators, researchers, and practitioners who have contributed to The Morning Watch and its enduring legacy. It is their commitment to scholarly inquiry that has been the driving force behind the journal's remarkable permanence.

In commemorating this significant milestone, however, we must also look forward to the future. Debates around issues such as artificial intelligence and class size and composition are complex and multifaceted, but they are also ripe with opportunity for what I hope will become the next fifty years of scholarship featured in The Morning Watch.

In closing, please join me in celebrating 50 years of inspiration and impact from The Morning Watch. As we embark on the next chapter of this remarkable journal, may we all be inspired to continue pushing the boundaries of scholarly dissemination and innovation in education for years to come.

With heartfelt congratulations, Dr. Pamela Osmond-Johnson
Dean, Faculty of Education

From the Editors - Opening comments from Dr. Noel Hurley

One of the biggest challenges facing new scholars is getting their research published in a refereed journal. This edition of the Morning Watch provides a platform for our present and recent graduate students to demonstrate their research and writing skills. Our graduate program has a large component of international students who bring their personal experiences and lived realities to the written articles, The edition also features the work of our Canadian students.

Khatereh Bahmanpour introduces the journal with her poetic lead-in to the Kelly and Wine article on sustainability in education. She, Jan Buley, and Kirk Anderson have thoughtful poetic interludes interspersed between the research articles. The wealth of experience of the graduate contributors to this edition of the journal is evident from how their professional practice informs their research and analysis throughout the articles. Collaboration, empathy, and social justice are recurring themes that pervade several of the articles in this edition. Dr. Jan Buley and her husband, Dr. David Buley, have demonstrated these attributes consistently ever since joining the Faculty of Education through their work with disadvantaged members of our communities. Their work and the work of other faculty members inspire some of the research undertaken and reported here.

Bukola Boluwade uses her knowledge of restorative justice practices to design a novel approach to enhance its effectiveness in a learning circle setting. While her case study cannot be generalized, it provides a description of her successful application of the approach. She thoughtfully recounts the establishment of the learning circle strategy in a restorative justice framework and details the problems and advantages of the approach.

Jessica Fancy-Landry uses her rural education experience to design an effective study of achievement among her rural Nova Scotia study participants. She explored factors of success and their key components as perceived by school practitioners in the rural area of her province. She described the importance of community support, student well-being, teacher and student retention and policy implications going forward. She recommends policy development to enhance quality and equitable education for rural Canadian schools.

Nevra Ozeren Sener provides a review of restorative justice practices and its socio-cultural relationship to classroom assessment. Her study explored the relationship between classroom assessment and restorative justice practices among teachers in rural Newfoundland and Labrador.

Omoregie Abiemwense Edokpayi examines terrorism in Nigeria and offers a proactive approach that emphasizes the use of "soft power" to address the root cause of terrorism. He encourages an approach to disrupt the cycle of violence by direct interventions that attempt to disrupt the underlying causes.

Richmond Kwashie explores the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the promotion of educational equity in rural Ghanaian communities. His qualitative inquiry investigated the effectiveness of NGOs in achieving educational equality.

Nicole Gandossi explores how school administrators and leaders can better promote school climates that embraces and supports diversity. She includes concepts of leadership, diversity, culturally responsive teaching, and culturally responsive leadership. Nicole concludes that increasingly diverse in regard to: culture, race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, abilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, socio-economic status and behavioral and social-emotional functioning. She encourages educators to be responsive to their students' social-emotional, academic and behavioral needs.

It is our hope that this edition marks the end of the first 50 years of the Morning Watch and the beginning of the next 50 years. We hope to continue the legacy begun by Ismael, Amarjit, and Bill a half century ago.

Vol. 49 Fall (2023): Graduate researchers share a collection of who we are.

The Authors and their Contributions

1. I built my own world, my dream world
Khatereh Maryam Bahmanpour (originally written August 2022)
Memorial University

About the author: *Khatereh is a passionate educator with over a decade of teaching experience as a Physics and Math teacher in her home country, Iran. She holds her bachelor's and master's degrees in Physics, as well as a bachelor's degree in English Language and Literature. She has moved to Canada to pursue her second master's degree in Education, curriculum, teaching, and learning. Recognized as a "Fellow of the School of Graduate Studies," she received the "Chancellor's Graduate Award," "Fry Family Foundation Graduate Leadership Award," and "Faculty of Education Dean's Graduate Award" in 2023. As a newcomer to Canada, Khatereh channels her passion for teaching and learning into her role as an EAL teacher, where she works with newcomer children in Newfoundland and Labrador schools.*

2. Sustainable Change in Education-The Imperative of Empathy, Empowerment, and Professional Capital
Darleen Kelly and Joanna Wine
Memorial University

About the Author: *Darleen Kelly holds a Bachelor of Arts in Sociology, a Bachelor of Social Work, and a Master of Public Administration. She is currently completing her Master of Education in Leadership Studies. Despite her diverse educational background, her passion lies in learning and supporting the human condition in all respects. Her experience ranges from adult education in corrections to vocational rehabilitation through disability management, as well as policy development aimed at improving these services.*

About the author: *Joanna Wine has worked as an English as a Second Language (ESL) Instructor for adult learners and has served as the head of the English department in a Government of Canada language school. With a career spanning over two decades, she is dedicated to fostering connections, promoting collaboration, and ensuring the delivery of high-quality educational experiences to all learners.*

3. The Road
Jan Buley (originally written January 2024)
Memorial University

About the author: *Jan Buley is a poet, reader, writer, traveller and questioner. She is addicted to storytelling, noticing the world around her and dabbling in creative things. Jan completed her Ph.D. at NYU, gathering stories and examining the assumptions, beliefs and contradictions about family engagement in schools. Prior to NYU, Jan immersed herself in teaching and learning, earning Master's degrees at MSVU in Halifax and Columbia University. She has taught elementary school for some twenty-something years. She is convinced that she is the luckiest person on the planet, offering courses in elementary literacies and drama education to undergraduate and graduate teachers at Memorial University in St. John's Newfoundland, Canada. Locally, Jan coordinates a large gardening project called The Phoenix Garden Project inside Her Majesty's Penitentiary. To date, almost 200 "Inside gardeners" have participated in the program, and last fall, the group build a meditation labyrinth outside and acquired two hives of honeybees. Jan believes that some of the best teachers are 6 years old. She has never made a pie or a powerpoint that anyone has ever raved about.*

4. **The Dynamics of Learning Circle in High School: Teacher and Students in "Equal Partnership"**
Bukola Florence Boluwade
Memorial University

About the author: *Bukola Boluwade holds a Bachelor's degree in Guidance and Counseling from University of Ilorin, Nigeria. After 13 years of work experience, K-12 levels, in both teaching and administrative positions, she moved to Canada in 2014 and worked in two Childcare Centers and Louis Riel District School Board in Winnipeg, Manitoba for over a year. She later completed a Master's in Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning Studies from Memorial University in October 2018. She was one of the panelists in an event organized by Vanier Institute "Families on The Move Satellite Conference" in March 2019. Bukola is now working with the Waterloo Region District School Board as an Occasional Elementary Teacher, and she is a member of the Indigenous, Black, and Racialized Employee Network (IBREN). She continues to work with the administrators on matters relating to internationally trained educators.*

5. **From the moments of experience to the experience of moments**
Khatereh Maryam Bahmanpour (originally written May 2022)
Memorial University

6. **Prioritization of Rural Youth in Nova Scotia: Understanding Rural School Success with Policy Gaps.**
Jessica Fancy-Landry (Memorial University Graduate Research Fellow)
Memorial University

About the author: *Jessica is a rural school educator who has worn many hats in the education arena in Nova Scotia. From teaching all levels of school and subject areas from Grades 3-12 to being a rural school administrator and an active volunteer, Jessica is a community champion and ferocious rural community advocate. Motivated to create positive change, she dedicated herself to understanding the intricacies of rural education systems. Winning a Memorial University Fellowship in 2021 for her graduate level work on the prioritization of rural school youth in Nova Scotia, Jessica is now Chair of the Board of Directors for the Rural Communities Foundation of Nova Scotia (RCFNS), a non-profit organization aimed at addressing the unique challenges faced by rural communities in Nova Scotia.*

7. Standing on the edge and feeling
Khatereh Maryam Bahmanpour (originally written July 2022)
Memorial University

8. Navigating Interconnectedness: Classroom Assessment and Restorative Justice in Education
Nevra Ozoren Sener (Memorial University Graduate Research Fellow)
Memorial University

About the author: *Nevra Ozoren Sener holds a Bachelor's degree in Guidance and Psychological Counseling from Bogazici University. After nine years of experience in junior high and high school levels in various positions, she completed a Master's in Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning Studies from Memorial University in August 2023. Recognized as a "Fellow of the School of Graduate Studies," her research focuses on classroom assessment, restorative justice, and teacher education in Newfoundland and Labrador.*

9. To Know
Jan Buley (originally written January 2024)
Memorial University

10. Preventing Violent Extremism through Terror Management Theory: Insights from Boko-Haram Insurgency in Nigeria
Omoregie Abiemwense Edokpayi
Memorial University (MA)
University of Alberta (Ph.D. Candidate)

About the author: *Omoregie Abiemwense Edokpayi, has a master's degree from Memorial University. His master's thesis on restorative justice in education paved the way for his Ph.D. at the University of Alberta. His dissertation explores the use of the Africa-centered perspective and Ubuntu relational ontology to address radicalization in Nigeria. He actively contributes to the ongoing SSHRC-sponsored historical thinking project focused on promoting reconciliation in Indigenous education. Omoregie's career*

is diverse, starting in the military. That's where he found his passion for anti-terrorism education and began to develop it. He then transitioned into secondary education, teaching grades 10-12. He is currently immersed in research on Black studies and Afrocentric education at the University of Alberta.

11. If tomorrow comes. I will show you
Khatereh Maryam Bahmanpour (originally written September 2022)
Memorial University

12. **Can NGO's Promote Social Justice and Equity: A case study of rural Ghana**
Richmond Kwashie
Memorial University

About the author: *Richmond is a young educator with eight years of service in rural Ghana, holds degrees in Education and Accounting. His work focuses on promoting educational equity in remote communities, driven by a passion for nurturing every student's potential. Through his dedication, Richmond aims to bridge gaps and provide equal opportunities for learners, making a significant impact on individuals and communities alike.*

13. Leadership: A reflection
Kirk Anderson (originally written February 2024)
Memorial University

About the author: *In 2019, Dr. Anderson became the Senior Editor for the Morning Watch. Kirk is also a Professor of Educational Administration at Memorial University of Newfoundland. He holds a Ph.D. starting his teacher leadership journey with his thesis, "The Antecedents and Influences on Teacher Leadership in Schools." As a teacher and principal, he served as the Branch President, Small Schools' Special Interest Council President, School Administrator Region President, and part of the NLTA Collective Bargaining Team. Before joining Memorial University, he was an education professor at the U Saskatchewan, U Calgary, and U New Brunswick (where he was associate dean). 2007 he received the Teaching Excellence Award from the U Calgary Graduate Students' Association. He served as Dean of the Faculty of Education from 2011-2019. Kirk is the former President of the Association of Canadian Deans of Education and Vice President of the Canadian Society for Studies in Education. In 2017, he served as the NLTA Panel of Public Education member. He is also active in Indigenous, rural, and isolated school research. In 2012, he was appointed as a member of the University of the Arctic Indigenous Issues Committee and was appointed a U Arctic Chair for School Effectiveness and School Improvement in 2022. Most recently (March 2024), Kirk has been elected as North American representative for the newly formed 'Association for Teacher Leadership and Scholarship.'*

14. Leadership for Diversity: Culturally Responsive Leadership

Nicole Gandossi
Memorial University

About the author: *Nicole is an action-orientated practitioner who cares immensely about the students, families, and staff she supports. Nicole moved from Vancouver, British Columbia to Mississauga, Ontario in 2005 where she completed a Bachelor degree in Psychology at the University of Toronto. Nicole moved to Dartmouth, Nova Scotia and went on to complete a Bachelor of Education degree from Mount Saint Vincent University in 2014. Over the past ten years, Nicole has worked extensively in a variety of roles as an elementary educator including: Classroom Teacher, Early Literacy Interventionist, and Elementary Literacy Coach. While developing her craft as a responsive practitioner, Nicole completed a Graduate Diploma in Curriculum Studies from Cape Breton University, as well as a Master's degree in Supporting Learners with Diverse Needs and Exceptionalities. She is currently enrolled in a Master's degree focused on Educational Leadership Studies at Memorial University. As an aspiring school administrator, Nicole strives to understand and implement high-leverage practices to support inclusion and diversity in schools.*

15. Concluding thoughts by Jan Buley

I built my own world, my dream world

Khatereh Maryam Bahmanpour (August 2022)
Memorial University

Far from the world out there, I built my own world,
My dream world, A World of Words,Words that speak.

A world of words,Words that feel.
A world of words,Words that seal.
A world of words,Words that heal.

Sustainable Change in Education-The Imperative of Empathy, Empowerment, and Professional Capital

Darleen Kelly and Joanna Wine
Memorial University

Abstract: *Over the past two decades, attempts to reform and improve education outcomes in developed countries, emphasized broad-scale traditional practices. Performance prioritized outcomes such as literacy, mathematics, increasing the number of graduates and post-secondary admissions, as well as governance. Whether successful or not in their pursuits, these outcomes are quickly becoming "narrow achievement goals" for modern educational systems, that are more complex, culturally diverse, and where face-paced change requires innovative and adaptable strategies to meet educational goals that are more demanding than traditionally experienced in the discipline (Hargreaves and Ainscow, 2015, p. 43; Schleicher, 2011). This requires a paradigm shift. This research paper explores the interconnected concepts of empathy, empowerment, and professional capital.*

Introduction

Over the past two decades, attempts to reform and improve education outcomes in developed countries, emphasized broad-scale traditional practices. Performance prioritized outcomes such as literacy, mathematics, increasing the number of graduates and post-secondary admissions, as well as governance. Whether successful or not in their pursuits, these outcomes are quickly becoming "narrow achievement goals" for modern educational systems, that are more complex, culturally diverse, and where face-paced change requires innovative and adaptable strategies to meet educational goals that are more demanding than traditionally experienced in the discipline (Hargreaves and Ainscow, 2015, p. 43; Schleicher, 2011). This requires a paradigm shift. This research paper explores the interconnected concepts of empathy, empowerment, and professional capital. It will be argued that these elements can collectively contribute to a paradigm shift in education. By fostering an inclusive and effective learning environment for students as well as educators, this shift will transcend traditional notions of teaching, welcome innovation, and redefine the role of educators, administrators and policymakers in positively shaping the future of schools. This is a necessary shift for preparing students, and education as a discipline, for the dynamic and evolving complexities that are our modern world. This will be demonstrated using

the work of Hargraves and Fullan (2012), examples of professional capital culture in practice, and recommended guidelines for educators to enact sustainable change by pulling, pushing, and prodding the professional capital agenda forward.

Understanding Professional Capital

Professional capital refers to the combined expertise, knowledge, skills, and abilities of individuals within a professional community, such as the school system. The concept was introduced by Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan in their book *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School* (2012). These authors are renowned researchers in the field of education due to their work on educational change, leadership and professional development. They maintain that the development and investment in the professional capital of educators is critical for improving education outcomes and fostering sustainable and positive change within school environments.

Professional capital differs from the traditional business approach to capital. Business capital views public education as profit with investment returns. It sees schools as "[markets] for technology, for testing products" for companies and charter schools (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2013, p. 36). Business capital attempts to reduce the costs associated with teaching and in doing so, oversimplifies the act of teaching. An alternative concept is that of professional capital. The authors identify three components of professional capital. First, *human capital*, that refers to the knowledge, skills and abilities of individuals; it is the qualifications, training, and experience that educators bring to their profession (ibid.) Second is *social capital.* This refers to the collective capacity of the professional community where relationships, networks and interactions between educators and their capacity to work together, serve to improve education and learning outcomes (Fullan et al., 2015). Third, *decisional capital* involves the capacity of those within the school system to make effective decisions in educational environments that are often complex and dynamic; it is the ability to adapt to change and challenges, engage in reflective practice, and respond and contribute to educational innovation (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012; Lee and Chin, 2017). Professional capital is the cornerstone to educational transformation.

Teacher Isolation and Individualism

Teaching by its nature involves a high degree of uncertainty in that every student and therefore every day in the classroom is different and unpredictable. Teaching has generally also involved a significant amount of isolation, as the daily tasks of teaching are conducted behind closed doors, and teachers have traditionally not been encouraged to collaborate or seek assistance and support from colleagues or administrators. The uncertainty that teachers experience along with a lack of positive feedback can exacerbate feelings of isolation. Teachers in isolated settings tend to be plagued with uncertainty in their roles due to their limited interactions with colleagues about methods of instruction, problem-solving, etc. In addition, ongoing changes in the demands placed on teachers mean extra time spent working alone trying to meet those demands (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Historically, schools have been characterized by a culture of individualism, with teachers often refraining from forming connections with their colleagues due to competitiveness, fears of judgement, and a prevailing lack of trust among staff members. The factors that can feed into this state of individualism include the physical barriers of individual classrooms, evaluations that are linked to rewards and ranking, growing pressures on teachers as demands escalate, and gradually diminishing time to undertake necessary class preparation. Unfortunately, schools characterized by individualistic cultures tend to have ineffective instruction that remains stagnant and fails to

improve student outcomes, leading to excessive workload, stress and burnout (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Social Capital and Collaboration

Leana (2011, p. 32) criticizes the traditional "ideology of school reform" which overemphasizes the importance of individual teachers' and principals' impact on the quality of instruction within schools. Leana insists that human capital and top-down solutions are overused in efforts to improve public schools "while greatly undervaluing the benefits of social capital and stability at the bottom" (ibid.).

Social capital is the degree to which teachers collaborate and seek out interactions and assistance from each other instead of trying to manage work responsibilities alone. Schools that succeed in attaining high levels of social capital tend to have high trust levels between teachers and improved student achievement (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Leana, 2011). Rather than expecting school principals to single handedly transform student outcomes, principals can support and encourage collaborative engagement and shared leadership among teachers such that teachers are sharing their experiences and knowledge and learning from one another (Sheppard & Dibbon, 2011).

In recent years, some schools have begun using more collaborative practices to try to transform individualistic cultures into more collaborative ones and to ultimately build their professional capital. The goal is not to eliminate individuality and to make everyone the same, but rather to harness creative ideas in the spirit of collaboration and innovation (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). In 1989, Rosenholtz's study of 78 American elementary schools determined collaborative school cultures lead to improved instruction and better results than do individualistic ones, and many studies have since confirmed these findings (Rosenholtz, 1991).

There are a variety of methods for encouraging collaboration within schools. Professional learning communities can provide a forum for teachers to learn from one another and explore methods to improve instruction and student success. Embedding processes for continuous improvement aids teachers in maintaining commitment and resilience in the face of challenges and changes, and the analysis of relevant data can assess the effectiveness of those improvements (Dufour, et al., 2010).

However, creating the type of collaborative school culture that results in improved instruction and student outcomes requires more than a casual effort at sharing with colleagues. In working towards building professional capital, one must not forget to build social capital. Getting to a place where teachers feel comfortable discussing their failures, asking for help and moving towards the development of a sense of collective responsibility for student success requires a foundation of trusting and respectful relationships between teachers and administrators. Professional development sessions and setting up communities of practice will not take the place of investing in interpersonal relationships. Building this trust involves caring for people, showing empathy for teachers, making allowances for personal needs and maintaining an informality between staff members that is relatable (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Bryk and Schneider (2003) emphasize the importance of developing all four elements of relational trust between all school stakeholders. Firstly, interpersonal respect involves genuinely taking others' opinions into consideration. Secondly, personal regard for staff members develops as staff members extend themselves beyond the limits of their job descriptions. Thirdly, staff must exhibit competence in their roles. And finally, staff members must demonstrate integrity in prioritizing the education and well-being of students. All of these factors contribute to improved

collective problem-solving, decision making and implementation of change, and ultimately to improved student outcomes (Bryk and Schneider, 2003).

Rosenholtz (1989) found that teachers in schools with collaborative cultures were far more likely to describe their administrators/principals as approachable and helpful than teachers in schools with isolated cultures. The administrators in the isolated schools chose to minimize the problems that teachers raised with them and didn't suggest or enact solutions. On the other hand, principals who seek out teachers' thoughts and opinions regarding problem-solving on school issues, not only make teachers feel valued, informed and included, but also benefit from the knowledge and expertise that teachers can provide, and it frees up time and resources for principals to devote elsewhere (Rosenholtz, 1991).

Certain kinds of collaboration are ineffective including "balkanization" which takes place when teachers remain in subgroups that are insulated from one another (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 115). To guard against this, measures need to be taken to ensure shared responsibility for all students. Teachers can also be moved around between different classes and groups, and shared projects and activities can be initiated to create more interaction between various groups of teachers. Teachers should be encouraged to actively engage in all aspects of school and student life, rather than solely concentrating on specific student groups with the expectation that they will simply carry out directives from above.

Other ineffective types of collaboration to be cautious of are "contrived collegiality" in which administrators impose formal highly regulated tasks for teachers to engage in together disguised as collegial collaboration (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 106). The term "coaching" can also be used as a way of simply ensuring that outside mandates are carried out as directed under the guise of collaboration (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 118). In addition, Sheppard and Dibbon (2011, p. 140) caution that terms such as "professional learning communities" can be used indiscriminately in an attempt to participate in current fads without fully understanding the concepts, researching the evidence or learning how to implement them.

A true collegial culture is created by engaging in discussions with staff about the benefits of collective responsibility, communication and maintaining the shared goal of student success. Collegiality cannot be forced, mandated, or brought about by applying pressure. Regular opportunities for open communication need to be provided for staff to develop genuine connections with one another. Over time, when staff are given the freedom to engage in authentic interactions, they will be more likely to produce and advance their own goals for the school and the students. Given the time for collective inquiry, teachers can discuss, argue, and find common ground on student needs and best practices (Dufour et al., 2010).

Contrived or "arranged" collegiality methods can sometimes be used as a first step towards the development of a collaborative culture; however, ideally, the arrangement is not put together with too much force or pressure, and a prior foundation of trust and respect among staff members is a necessity for a positive outcome when using these strategies (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 118).

Datnow (2011) stresses that capacity building within schools is important but does not involve a "one-size-fits-all approach" and that when introducing data use into schools (such as with student test results), there needs to be an element of freedom in the manner in which teachers choose to apply it (p. 157). Implementing too much control in the use of data as with other elements, detracts from the benefits received through exploration and collaboration.

Working to build a collaborative school culture and dismantle individualism is an important step towards supporting professional capital within schools. For most teachers,

evaluations can be shifted away from the realm of scrutiny and punishment and instead can be conducted in a manner that focuses on professional growth and development. In carrying out evaluations, administrators can model collaboration by seeking input and assistance from teachers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

As a positive school culture is nurtured and developed, teachers will ideally develop mutually supportive relationships that include behaviours such as looking out for each other when problems arise and sharing work when someone is out sick.

Pushing, Prodding, and Pulling the Professional Capital Agenda

Improving the effectiveness of the education system and its educators through sustainable change requires the investment in all three components of professional capital.

Pushing the Agenda

Proactive actions that promote professional development require an educational environment that values ongoing learning and skill development to stay in line with educational industry trends. To *push* is to "assert, pay attention, and intervene for more professional capital" (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2013, p. 39). This requires the ability for administrators and teachers to assess and identify where there are gaps in the skills and knowledge of their current school. This ensures professional development targets their specific needs rather than providing more of the same types of training. On a broader scale, it means pushing the "policy makers to invest" in professional capital, as well (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012, p. 149). Strategies for promoting ongoing learning require leadership commitment from all levels.

Pulling Resources Together

To advance the professional capital agenda, the integration of human, social, and decisional capital is crucial, involving the engagement of educators in the vision and development of professional capital for continuous improvement and growth within school communities (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2013). Enhancing human capital involves focusing on refining teacher skills, pedagogical approaches, classroom management, and educational qualifications. Social capital is advanced through interdisciplinary collaboration, such as collaborative professional learning communities, mentorship, and coaching. Decisional capital progresses by involving teachers in curriculum, policy, and resource allocation decisions.

To support the professional capital agenda, resources must be pulled together, encompassing financial and time allocations for teachers to attend conferences and workshops that facilitate continuous learning and collaboration. This includes investments in technology, devices, and learning platforms (Brown et al, 2021). Sustaining change in support of the professional capital agenda necessitates investment in its development. Effective leadership for advancing the professional capital agenda requires a transformational approach, combining planning, collaboration, and a commitment to ongoing improvement (Fullan et al., 2015; Wang et al., 2022).

Prodding for Change

Hargreaves and Fullan (2013) advocate for a strategic approach in advancing the professional agenda. Not everyone may be receptive to being pushed or pulled, and coercion should be avoided. Instead, a gentler approach, such as prodding or "nudging," may be required in order to advance the agenda forward (p.39). This involves guiding others toward better choices through positive language, affirmations, and the use of conceptual "anchors" like posters or paraphernalia that reinforce teaching skills and competencies (ibid.). Ideally, people should feel inspired and pulled towards the excitement and promise of the engagement and collaboration.

In their publication, *The Power of Professional Capital* (2013, p. 39), Hargreaves and Fullan present five international examples of the use of social capital in education to demonstrate professional capital cultures in practice:

1. Finland: curriculum development is a collaborative effort that includes schools and districts;

2. Singapore: considered the highest-performing country as per the Programme for International Student Assessment, Singapore teachers do not gate-keep ideas and share them openly in collaboration so all are privy to best-practices;

3. Alberta: in collaboration with government and policy-makers, the Alberta Teachers' Association has spent over half of its financial resources on professional development. The College of Alberta School Superintendents has collaborated with schools and districts to improve innovation. This has created an educational system where all levels have become critical to the development of education;

4. Ontario: teachers in Ontario work collaboratively on school data for the purpose of improving achievement scores by working together to look beyond the numbers and target children's needs; and

5. California: California teachers created change when their efforts to improve the school performance resulted in the California Teachers' Association allocating funds to pass the *Quality Education Investment Act*. This Act aims to improve the functioning in low-performing schools.

A Framework for Enacting Change

"It's time to invest and reinvest in your own and your colleagues' professional capital…And it's time to persuade, push, pull and nudge the public policy makers to invest in teachers' professional capital as well." (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2012a, p. 148).

In education systems, policy-makers, administrators, and teachers do not contribute equally to a school's professional capital. A study on professional capital in international schools in Asia found that leaders tended to exhibit higher professional capital than teachers. This was attributed to their higher levels of leadership skills, organizational management, broader networking, decisional capital, and policy understanding (Watts and Richardson, 2020).

Leadership roles in promoting change and advancing the professional capital agenda require an understanding of how leaders can inspire, guide, and support teachers in their professional competencies. Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, p. 154) assert that pushing, pulling, and prodding the professional capital agenda forward is as much a "bottom-up operation as a top-down" one. Teachers, as on-the-ground leaders, play a pivotal role in enacting change in schools. Refer to Table 1 for Hagreaves and Fullan's guidelines on implementing change across all groups (ibid., pp. 154, 163-164, and 174).

Luger (2012) characterizes Hargreaves and Fullan's concept of professional capital as a form of "school reform in a different direction" (p. 112). The approach to advancing the professional capital agenda involves empowering teachers and administrators to invest in themselves and their schools, starting from within and not relying solely on policy-makers or governments for reform. This shift allocates more power to teachers beyond their classroom responsibilities.

Hargreaves and Fullan (2012, p. xvi) identify teachers as "the heart of the quality [professional capital] agenda". They stress the importance of teachers leading and influencing their peers. This substantiates the need for school leaders and policy-makers to invest in teachers' skills and

knowledge while empowering teachers for self-reflection and self-investment. Policy-makers, in particular, are urged to "steer" rather than passively row, thus taking on an active leadership role.

Table 1. Guidelines for Enacting Change

Guidelines for Teachers (Bottom-Up)	**Guidelines for School Administrators**	**Guidelines for State, National and International Organizations (Top-Down)**
"Be a true pro"	"Promote professional capital vigorously and courageously."	"Know where you're going"
"Start with yourself"	"Know your people: understand their culture."	"Break your own mold."
"Be a mindful teacher"	"Secure leadership stability and sustainability."	"Obey the law of subsidiarity: push and partner, stimulate and steer."
"Build your human capital through social capital"	"Be aware of contrived collegiality."	"Redesign the professional career."
"Push and pull your peers."	"Reach out beyond your borders."	"Bring teachers back in."
"Invest in and accumulate your decisional capital."	"Be evidence informed, not data driven."	"Be the change."
"Manage up: help your leaders to be the best they can be"		"Pay people properly where they serve the greatest need."
"Take the first step."		"Get out and about more."
"Surprise yourself."		
"Connect everything back to your students."		

To push and pull the social capital agenda forward, fostering collaboration and learning among administrators and teachers is essential. Providing teachers with a voice in shaping policies, practices, and decisions that affect their work, classrooms, and students is emphasized. Involving teachers in decision-making fosters ownership and commitment to the school's goals and mission. This collaborative and professional culture, advocated by Brown et al. (2021),

Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), and Hargreaves and Fullan (2016), creates an ideal environment for improvement in educational learning and outcomes tailored to the specific needs of the school, its teachers, and students.

Conclusion

The implications of transforming teaching in schools and endorsing sustainable change requires empowering the teaching profession in a multifaceted approach that extends across all levels of the educational system. Investing in teachers' skills and knowledge, promoting collaboration and shared expertise, and empowering policy-makers and administrators to make effective decisions collectively contribute to improving educational outcomes. Advocacy to push, pull and prod the professional capital agenda is a responsibility of everyone in the school community. "In the end, it's best to pull whenever you can, push whenever you must, and nudge all the time" (Hargreaves and Fullan, 2013, p. 39).

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The Road

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Don't let the wonderings get closed down.
Don't let the questions stop ringing in your brain.
Don't let the day close without thinking about another way to offer an invitation.
Don't get sucked into the cynicism from the sidelines.
Don't get bleached out by exhaustion.
Don't be fooled by the voices of doubt.

Provoke a deeper dive
Disrupt a cemented assumption
Open to the blank page and sit in the quiet.
Sit in the quiet and listen.
Look up.
Look down.
Look through.
And then follow the road that guides you.

The Dynamics of Learning Circle in High School: Teacher and Students in "Equal Partnership"

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Abstract: *This is a narrative case study of a high school science class examine. The purpose of this study was to explore various ways that the learning circle (LC) can be used in high school science classes. The aim of the study was to examine the impact of the LC on teacher and student relationships and to explore whether perceptions of moving towards equal (shared) partnership positively influence participation and achievement (Wadhwa, 2016).*

Introduction

After teaching for more than 2 decades in my country (Nigeria) with remarkable achievements, I relocated to Canada, worked for a while, and decided to go back to school for a master's program in education to add value to my previous experiences. It was during this period that I got to know about Restorative Justice in Education (RJE) through colleagues. I had my reservations at first because of the title that has justice, thinking it has something to do with criminal justice and with my science background I felt it is of no relevance. Fortunately, I met with the professor in-charge for my questions and the rest is a story. The meeting was a turning point for me and before long,

I found myself participating in RJE professional development, took the master's course and the tremendous impact of a memorable teaching and learning experience. Therefore, the research was driven by this personal live experience with learning circle in a class and wanted to replicate the same in a science class, because I taught Basic Science/Biology in my country, Nigeria. Now in Canada, I came up with a plan to achieve this goal. Then, I was prompted to meet a primary 6 teacher during one of Dorothy Vaandering's professional learning series that I attended and requested a visit to her class to observe how she was engaging with LC. She consented and I was in her class 2hrs for 10 days. The experience was similar to the one I had in my Ed classes. The students were engaged in a safe space, they got support for curriculum expectations, interacted with one another and the teacher without being judged. The behaviour issues were easily managed through relational principles. After this experience in Primary/Junior school, I learned that LC was not so much used in High schools despite training (PD), so I was curious to carry out research on the topic.

The research focused on introducing the LC in a science class as a way of making classroom experience better for both teacher and students. The LC is a practice of Restorative Justice in Education, and it is specially designed to fill the gap of connecting the teacher and students for academic, social, and emotional expression. The research problem statement and questions helped to reveal reasons for why someone who is trained to facilitate RJ circle might have difficulties practising it and see how this act might change. The LC is a dynamic process that involves series of activities that can lead to students' active participation and eventually improve the academic performance. The process does not follow a fixed pattern, but it is organic and emerges based on the setting and the participants' experience (Boyes-Watson & Pranis, 2014). The LC is an avenue for practicing the RJ philosophy which believes that humans are worthy and interconnected (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). Hence, the focus is honoring instead judging and measuring. The word dynamic was used by one of the participants to describe the possibilities of the LC.

Seats Arranged into Circle

It is a powerful description that means that the LC is subject to change and can be modelled or planned to meet specific curriculum needs and instructional objectives. Besides, it has the potential of making equal partnership happen between the teacher and the student. A creative teacher can use it for introducing a topic, follow-up, test/exams reviews and much more (Riestenberg, 2012; Hopkins, 2011). There are resources available for effective practice that I recommend in this study. Apart from these resources, there are experts to consult with for support.

I proceeded with the research and came up with the following themes:

- The great beginning: rough and tough

Changing the room from a class arrangement of rows into circle was exciting for the teacher and surprising for the students. The idea of RJ circle practice was new, resulting in mixed reactions by the students especially in setting of guidelines for class/circle, use of talking piece, and including an energiser. Some of students were looking down, others laughed, there were side talks, but also authentic engagement by some. Change takes courage for both teacher and students, and it takes commitment to follow through with implementation.

- The LC: introduction and complications

The LC requires an introduction and results in complications because the practice is different from an existing tradition. In LC, the students sit with the teacher in a circle to discuss a curriculum topic or project, to reflect on their thoughts and feelings on or before the end of each class/topic using open-ended questions (Lewington, 2016). The introduction of the LC into science 1206 class for teaching initially looked strange, students not knowing what to do but conscious effort was made to take them through the process and participation improved with time as they feel safe and comfortable. Although the LC was successfully introduced through the support of the science teacher, it was used primarily for the knowledge-based topic, like the weather and not for the calculation-based topic, where I had limited input.

- The picture of a class without the LC

At a point during the study the module changed to a physics topic that I could not comfortably handle because it is out of my expertise. Things became complicated because neither the teacher nor the teacher intern knew how to use the LC for teaching mathematical/calculation-based topic, so the LC was no longer used for teaching. The preferred method for this topic was mainly transmission and demonstration with an occasional check-in/up. As a researcher, I became an observer-participant thinking of what to do differently. Are there ways of complimenting the method on ground? I therefore seized the opportunity of the check-up moments to interact with the students. I discovered that when I used the RJ framework open-ended questions, I recorded more responses and was able to hold the students accountable for their work than when I used a closed ended one like, can I help you? Or do you understand? The RJ framework questions (what is happening? What is the hardest thing? What are you thinking? etc) allowed the student to share real life examples that could then support their learning of the curriculum content.

- Dynamic LC: teacher and student in equal partnership

This remains a challenging aspect for both teachers and students in this study. Equal partnership allows the teacher to let go of power and control over the students that have been so conditioned to be teacher dependent. We talk so much about students taking ownership and an active role in their own education. This cannot happen until and unless we as their teachers give the students

more of this responsibility through training and support. The practical way of doing equal partnership was a newfound concept for educators that stood out for me in this study, which may interest teachers and educators.

- Shift in thoughts and feelings about the LC

There are certain shifts in thoughts and feelings about how teaching and learning is done and the appropriate settings for this. When the teachers were asked to share their thoughts and feelings, the following are some of the comments:

The teachers who was RJ trained but has not been using the LC before the study said,

"I was initially sceptical having the problem of time constraints and physical setting of the classroom but now my mind has opened a little bit and I am going to continue trying it in some of my classes."

The teacher intern who was experiencing a circle for the first time said,

"The kids get to be more involved with the lesson compared with the traditional method where the teacher does most of the talking."

For the student participants, the one who was experiencing the LC for the first time was initially sceptical and nervous but became more comfortable and confessed that, "LC is more interactive." The remaining two students with previous circle experience in elementary school had different opinions. While one was excited because of a lasting impact from her elementary grade that she brought into the study, she said, "I [think] here (the LC) we get to process the information more and then do the questions" and the other perceived the LC to be strange and childish [thinking it was meant to be for children and not grown-ups like her already in high school] but she later agreed that with the seating arrangement in circle, the LC is "a lot easier to listen." Finally, it is important to note that, the focus group students in the current research were asking if the LC would continue after the study and asking why it was not done in the other classes (like literature).

The response of these students is very instructive for administrators, teachers, and stakeholders to think about for practice. Firstly, it proved that the practice of LC can have a lasting impact on students when grounded in the RJ philosophy. The foundation needs to be properly laid. Secondly as part of covering the curriculum, like one of the students said, I also agree that students need that time to process information for deeper understanding. This is another way the students can identify with equal partnership in the class. Thirdly, these students who willingly volunteered themselves wanted the LC introduced in their other classes as well because they experienced that the level of interaction with the teacher improved, and they had more time to process information when sharing reflections. The practice sees talking and listening as a very important aspect of teaching and learning, which is found wanting in many traditional classrooms.

- Suggestion for future integration of the LC

Some of the reactions to the introduction of LC were an indication that little is known about it by participants. So, the place of knowledge and skills development cannot be overemphasized. It is important to note here that LC is more than a circle, as one of the students was thinking. Therefore, quality time should be spent on teaching the basics of the restorative justice for where the practice of LC is drawn for it to make sense. Also, the success of the LC depends on adequate

preparation of the teacher who is expected to carry the students along, both working together to achieve common goals.

- Insightful ending

  Based on my interaction with the students during the interviews and the focus group, in addition to regular academic activities in schools like the research indicated, high school students are more likely to welcome a pedagogy that will give attention to their social and emotional concerns. These include the students' attitude to research participation, the voices of high school students (teenagers) relating things they want to communicate to adults who care to know, identifying and accommodating students' needs such as using a new learning style and handling learning disabilities and mental health issues.

Discussion

One significant surprise of the study was my own deepening of learning as a researcher and a shift in my own thinking about equal partnership. I used to think that I knew what equal partnership was with the respect of sharing space, time, and power with students. To me like many other, it was all about relationship, being good, caring, and friendly to students. However, I discovered it is more than that when it comes to teaching the curriculum. Holding the students accountable for their learning is a very essential part of teaching. It is the equal partnership that describes how the power or dynamics of the LC, holds the students accountable for their work rather than the teacher telling or doing it for them. In other words, the equal partnership better defines the responsibility of the teacher and the students.

The teacher as a leader uses his leadership position to work with the students by providing the needed support for a specific expectation or task instead of measuring and judging the student and their work. On the other hand, the students actively take ownership for their learning freely without any feeling of discrimination or intimidation. The shift in my perception as a researcher has in a way changed my thinking about the research question to also include myself turning it to action research. I think I now understand what it means for a teacher to work with students rather than for them.

Due to limited time for the study, I discovered that it would take a longer study to record the impact on learning outcome the research question (#3) was modified to, "What is the impact of introducing the LCs on teacher and student?" The findings and results of this narrative case study revealed that the teacher and the students were impacted in various ways to encourage further research and the practice. Although the challenge of time constraints, reaching equal partnership, and inadequate prior knowledge and skills for practice were some concerns, after introducing the LC in the science class, the teacher participant acknowledged the potential of the LC for knowledge-based science topics but remained hesitant about its use for calculation-based topics. The three students experienced an improved level of interaction with the teacher and had more time to process information when sharing reflections and asked that it be introduced in their other classes as well.

The results also showed the dynamics of the learning circle to have the power to improve relationships, interaction, and emotional self-expression when both teacher and students are comfortable with the framework. This would be possible it seems as people are likely to be comfortable when treated as humans with honor, respect, worth, and dignity rather than as objects to be measured and judged for every action.

Research Summary and Conclusion

In summary, I found the RJE philosophy and practice of circle relevant in many ways. First, the philosophy that "humans are worthy and interconnected" is welcoming and relational. This understanding helps to connect well with people and the environment, especially as an international educator (immigrant). Secondly, the practice of circle is engaging, it gave me a voice among others in the classroom without any feeling of intimidation. Thirdly, the type of language and RJ question framework employed for conversation was very helpful for sharing thoughts, feelings, and life experiences. Last but not the least, I am more reflective about my way of teaching, and it helps me to see other ways of applying the principle and practice into my classroom.

The Picture of Teacher Teaching with Students Seated in the Circle

I am confident that the RJ pedagogy with the use of LC will make teaching and learning a memorable experience for teacher and students. The research presented a clearer understanding of a picture, pattern, and power of the LC, which briefly describe the key elements of the dynamics of the LC as an approach that potentially results in equal partnership between the teacher and the students. The picture refers to what comes to mind about the LC the visual image and the structure which include the physical circle, talking piece, the guidelines, and the activities. The pattern is about what is done in the circle grounded in a belief that respects all without discrimination. The power of the LC refers to the possibilities and transformative impact.

Although the short time used for the study was not enough to experience equal partnership between the teacher and the students as thought, it was a work in progress. I believe a longer study that allows familiarity with the class/school structure, culture, teacher, and the students would do. Finally, despite the challenge of recruitment of students, 3 students signed the consent/assent form to participate voluntarily and since the research design was not number dependent, I was able to generate enough data for analysis. Therefore, my sincere appreciation

goes to the research participants- teachers and students- the time the committed, and valuable contribution made to this process revealed significant understanding and was so important.

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From the moments of experience to the experience of moments

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> As I started to find answers to my questions, the questions have changed
> And
> As I started to embrace my fears, the fears have transformed into new shapes and colors
>
> Questions still beg the answers
> And
> Fears waiting to be overcome, but I have CHANGED!
>
> I am not the same person ... can't be. I no longer search for the answers
> And
> No longer run away from fears

Prioritization of Rural Youth in Nova Scotia: Understanding Rural School Success with Policy Gaps.

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Abstract: *During a 2020 qualitative exploration into rural school success in Nova Scotia and the prioritization of its rural youth in educational policy, case study methodology was used to conduct research using interview and text analysis methods. Factors of success and their key components that rural school personnel perceived as priorities in their buildings and the representation that rural school youth in Nova Scotia receive were explored from a developed conceptual framework using High-Performing High-Needs (HPHN) rural schools (Barely & Beesley, 2007; McREL, 2005a; Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation, 2019). Within this study, it describes the important roles that key components such as community support, student well-being, teacher and student retainment, performance pressures and lack of policy play in the future of rural school success in Nova Scotia. The study concluded that the lack of Canadian, more narrowly Nova Scotian rural education policy puts rural youth at a disadvantage in their quest to obtain a quality and equitable education in Nova Scotia. Recommendations were provided to narrow this policy gap and share strategies that rural school personnel deemed effective. These strategies were recommended as guidelines into best practices in policy development to ensure that youth in rural Nova Scotia and indeed other jurisdictions, have an equitable voice in their pursuit of an equitable and quality education. This article serves to collate and summarize this study, highlighting the status of rural education in Nova Scotia, pre-covid.*

Keywords*: Rural Education, Nova Scotia, Prioritization, Educational Policy, Rural Youth, Poverty and Vulnerability, Rural School Effectiveness, Policy Gaps.*

Introduction

It has long been recognized that education is key for the health and well-being of rural communities (Kannapel & Deyoung, 1999; Stern, 1994, Corbett, 2014b). When benchmarked against their urban peers, rural schools have always faced a complexity of issues. They are threatened with consolidation, teacher retention, access to equitable programming, high youth vulnerability rates, and economic despair (Arnold, Newman, Gaddy, & Dean, 2005; DeYoung, 1987). A published study on "*Young People and Family Farming"* stresses the need to prioritize rural youth in the political agenda by strengthening a comprehensive approach at the institutional level tailored to the needs and demands of rural youth (FAO and IFAD, 2019). The study concluded that there is a need to influence public policies to promote youth's attachment to rural areas by guaranteeing rights and services such as: health, social policies, education, communication networks (internet and infrastructures), tax incentives and other measures, including facilitating access to markets and productive resources.

Reflective of the necessity to address rural needs in education and the likely need for rural centric school reform, there are rural schools that actually exceed expectations in achievement. These high performing rural schools are striking exceptions to the pattern of low income/low performance (McREL, 2005). These rural schools counter the belief that low socio-economic status (SES) and rural context are a deficit; they exemplify the school effectiveness literature that background of the student body are sole determinants of achievement. These small rural schools, by many accounts "beat the odds" (Good & Brophy, 1986). In Canada, there seems to be a gap in the literature regarding rural school policy supporting achievement in rural schools. More specifically, in Nova Scotia, as this province currently does not have policy or strategy specific rural education. A case in point contrasting the perceived link between our conventional understanding of low SES and the rural context to student achievement; Nova Scotia was recently cited by Stats Canada (2019) as the only province where child poverty rates have *increased* while student performance was maintained and actually increased relative rankings in the PISA's (2019) reading, writing and Math tests. In this research, as a contribution to the apparent gap in current research surrounding rural educational policy development, performance in rural schools, and the prioritization of rural youth in Nova Scotia will be discussed.

Rural education research, both current and past, has emphasized its uniqueness and importance to the rural communities that they serve. A review of the literature review identifies and explores research regarding rural education in Nova Scotia in the area of prioritization of rural youth in policy development, as well as in research regarding characteristics of rural school success as a way to uncover factors that rural school personnel perceive as priorities in their buildings. The purpose of this exploration of rural education research is to discover if rural school youth in Nova Scotia are provided with equitable opportunities in their attainment of a quality education in this province.

Summarized Review of the Literature

A review of the literature explored the extent that current educational policy prioritizes rural youth in Nova Scotia, by providing contexts of rural education policy and policy development in Nova Scotia. The educational policy section also presented an overview of the

history in educational policy development (Mueller et al., 2008; Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development. Secretariat, 1974; Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development, & Council of Ministers of Education,1975; Canada, 1978), educational policy reform specifically in Canada (Burns,2017; Mayor & Suarez, 2019; Wallin et al., 2009; Brochu, 2014) and then more narrowly in Nova Scotia (Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, & Canadian Electronic Library, 2010). It also considered the lack of attention that rural youth currently receive in school reform in Nova Scotia and suggests gaps in rural education research in Nova Scotia. The conceptual framework (Appendix A) used in this study comes from the literature reviewed in this chapter.

Characteristics of Rural School Success

The literature review first sought to discover characteristics by discussing the classification of rural schools in this study, then by examining the context of Canadian rurality and rural education in Canada. Next rural school success was explored through the concept of High-Performing High-Needs rural schools, then equitable and quality education effectiveness reform. Finally, the literature review provided context to what school success looks like in rural Nova Scotia.

Rural School Classification

Schools were classified as rural from the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation of Canada's definition of rural. Rural being, "communities with a population of less than 1,000 and outside areas with 400 people per square kilometre" (SORC, 2015, p.65). For this study, rural schools were defined as schools whose location are situated in a rural community, as defined by Statistics Canada (2007) and the OECD (1994). Statistics Canada (2007) also defined rural as the population living outside settlements with 1,000 or more population with a population density of 400 or more inhabitants per square kilometre. The OECD (1994) defined a "predominantly rural region" as having more than 50% of the population living in rural communities where a "rural community" has a population density of less than 150 persons per square kilometre. In Canada, the census division has been used to represent "regions," and census consolidated sub-divisions have been used to represent "communities". In terms of educational policy development that serve communities that meet the above criteria, there is a shortage of reform, policy and framework into Canadian Rural Schools, so I wanted to highlight the question of how do we progressively evaluate rural school performance without proper policy and procedures which encompass the needs of rural schools? Next, I reviewed policy development and educational reform in Nova Scotia as a historical timeline over the last two decades.

Canadian Rurality

Active, productive rural communities are integral to Canada's sustainability and prosperity (Khan, 2011). Consequently, for rural communities to survive, prosper and be the innovative places and spaces that Canada requires, it is essential that those who live and work there have access to high-quality education, training and post-school options and pathways (Halsey, 2018; Corbett, 2014; Teghtmeyer, 2013; Bauch, 2001). From the literature, I have discovered that there are many ways to quantitatively and qualitatively define rural or rurality. The Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation (2019) suggests the concept of rural is quantitatively defined by distance or density between populations of people; and qualitatively contributes elements to what constitutes 'rural,' with a focus on the cultural and relational dimensions of places and people.

In Canada, terms are commonly used to denote locations and associated characteristics that are considered to be 'other than urban.' These include country, regional, the bush, remote, and isolated. Mulcahy (2017) uses more vernacular descriptions such as 'the back of beyond' and

'the sticks'. There is an old saying among rural development practitioners that if you know one rural community…then, you know one rural community. This speaks to the diversity of rural Canada that exists for any given degree of rurality. Thus, I have discovered that there is no single rural Canada, only the many manifestations of rural Canada, and this makes rural policy development incredibly challenging, but it needs to be done (Mulcahy, 2017).

Rural Education in Canada

Corbett (2014), in his essay, "*Toward a Geography of Rural Education in Canada*," suggested that rural communities occupy an essential place in the Canadian educational landscape. Given the economic, political, and cultural challenges they face, he advocated that rural schools may produce higher quality educational outcomes than are generally attributed to them based on traditional school effectiveness strategies (Corbett, 2014). In this same sociological study into the importance of rural education in Canada, this Nova Scotian Sociologist, rural advocate, and professor at Acadia University also suggested that "given the economic, political, and cultural challenges they face, rural schools may produce higher quality educational outcomes than are generally attributed to them" (Corbett, 2014, p.1). Current literature has also suggested there is little to no significant difference in educational outcomes for students (Bæck, 2016; Howley and Howley, 2004) from rural or urban schools (Srivastava and Joshi, 2011; Walberg & Walberg, 1994). The field of rural education in Canada is significantly underdeveloped (Corbett, 2014). Halsey (2018) suggested that little is known about the gaps in achievement; barriers or challenges, and their impact of educational outcomes; the appropriateness and effectiveness of current modes of education delivery; and the innovative approaches to support regional, rural, and remote students to succeed in school and in their transition to study further, training and employment. Much of this variability comes from the fact that Canada is one of the only developed countries that do not have a national education strategy (Halsey, 2018). Corbett (2014) also suggested that this is due to the vast demographics of Canada and that education in Canada is administered provincially, proposing that the country lacks collaboration and research put into rural school reform due to expense, bureaucracy and traditional adverse views.

Conceptual Framework

Data analysis will use the following conceptual framework of rural school success (Canada without Poverty, 2019; Barely & Beesley, 2007; McREL, 2005). The four key components (Leadership, Instruction, Professional Community and School Environment) are based on earlier research on High-Performing High-Needs schools. Factors of success are then explored that comprise these four components and the relationships among them.

The grouped by key components and their factors are:

Leadership: 1) shared mission and goals, 2) principal as a change agent, and 3) principal as instructional leader.
Instruction: 4) individualization of instruction, 5) instructional resources, 6) alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, 7) programs for special needs students, *8) Culturally responsive teaching* and 9) instructional supports for learning (such as academic policies and the organization of the school day).
Professional Community: 10) teacher recruitment, 11) teacher retainment, 12) professional development, 13) teacher collaboration, and 14) teacher involvement in leadership.

School Environment: 15) use of student data, 16) high expectations for all students, 17) parent and community involvement, 18) safe drug free school, 19) *Outside agencies,* 20) *Multi-Tiered Systems for Supports* and 21) *Social Emotional Learning*.

The shaded factors are the original factors used in the original HPHN study (McREL, 2005a). Factors 1, 6,7, and 10 were selected from the original Barely and Beesley (2007) study. *Factors 8, and 19-21* are new factors added based on current experience teaching in rural school in Nova Scotia and from a report on childhood poverty in Canada (Canada without Poverty, 2019). Site visits were conducted, interviews were tape-recorded, then transcribed into a word processing program to create a set of idea statements from transcriptions.

Methodology

The defining features of qualitative analysis, Lofland et al. (2006) suggest, are that findings arise through an inductive data-driven process, the essential analysis tool is the researcher, the process is highly interactive between researcher and data, and that it is pursued persistently and methodically. In order to first develop the qualitative case study, I qualitatively analyzed the interviews and school's Student Success Plan (SSP) data collected between the schools before, during and after site visits (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). The intent with the analysis phase was to "tell the story" of a group of rural schools that are facing pressure to achieve with rural youth who are underrepresented in the policies that drive our educational practices in Nova Scotia.

Results

The secondary research question of what do rural school personnel in Nova Scotia feel are priorities in their buildings was answered through the exploration of the factors of rural school success rooted in the concepts that frame this study. As identified in the conceptual framework (see appendix A), the attribute key components of rural school success are a) leadership, b) instruction, c) professional community, and d) school environment and were used to organize the collected data. In this section, findings from the interviews and the text analysis were provided to answer this secondary research question.

Interview Findings

The data from the participant interviews were analyzed to help answer the secondary research question; What do rural school personnel in Nova Scotia feel are priorities in their buildings? This was completed by using the factors of rural school success initially described by the success (see appendix A). The 21 factors of rural school success were ranked as priorities, the same way as in the Barely and Beesley (2005) study to discover what the Nova Scotia rural McREL (2005a) and Barely and Beesley (2007) studies. Factors were added from the 2019 report by the Canada Without Poverty Organization to address current experiences teaching in rural Nova Scotia to help develop a more up to date conceptual framework into rural school school personnel perceive as priorities in their building. The analysis methods used in this research study is mirrored from the data analysis methods used in the Barely and Beesley (2007) study, where they coded and analyzed their factors from interviews and focus groups to determine which factors were most important to the success of the schools in their case study (p.5). In this section the factors of rural school success were also recorded as frequencies and ranked as priorities in their buildings, rather than referenced or coded by respondent. The justification of using a frequency model to show the number of times a reference to a factor was made demonstrates the priority of that factor to the school personnel. The coded quantities table below (see table 1) shows the priorities in relation to which participants. The ranking of responses from the rural school personnel are then discussed using responses from the participants.

Table 1: *Interview Quantity Codes of Factors and Key Components*

Key Components	**Factors**	**Research Findings**		
		Administrators	**Teachers**	**SAC Members**
Leadership	1. Shared mission and goals	12	20	7
	2. Principal as change agent	29	19	17
	3. Principal as instructional leader	32	15	9
Instruction	4. Individualization of instruction	21	21	17
	5. Instructional resources	14	21	7
	6. Alignment of Curriculum, and assessment	29	21	23
	7. Programs for special needs students	11	28	5
	8. Culturally responsive teaching	9	17	17
	9. Instructional supports	18	27	9
Professional Community	10. Teacher recruitment	15	15	5
	11. Teacher retention	18	16	11
	12. Professional development	14	28	3
	13. Teacher collaboration	8	18	3
	14. Teacher involvement in Leadership	11	22	9
School Environment	15. Use of data	4	5	3
	16. High expectations of students	18	12	13
	17. Parent and community	16	24	37
	18. Safe and drug free school	10	6	3
	19. Outside agencies	23	13	29
	20. Multi-Tiered Systems for Supports	11	12	13
	21. Social Emotional Wellness and Learning	22	35	9

Note: *Numbers are based on the frequency each factor was discussed during the interviews by each participant group. These numbers were used to create the ranking of priorities.*

Content analysis of the open-ended responses as well as elaborations of the key components resulted in themes. Having semi-structured interviews, allowed me to interpret the context of the priorities while coding the responses and understand if the factors mentioned were perceived as a benefit or challenge in their building (Yin, 2004). Below (Table 1) is a quantity codes table of the interviews showing the number of times each of the key components was discussed during the interviews and by which participant groups.

Presentation of the Interview Data and Emergent Theme

The presentation of the data and results for the study will depict a detailed description of findings according to the structure of the conceptual framework to understand participant perceptions and provide detailed evidence used to answer the secondary research question. First, I will present the data answering the research question, "What do rural school personnel in Nova Scotia feel are priorities in their buildings?" by ranking the quantity codes from Table 1.

Next, the results of each key component of rural school success are presented from the conceptual framework as a way to organize the data. Finally, I presented a synthesis of findings as they relate to answering the research questions. The top five factors perceived to be very important by the participants (see Table 2) were parent and community involvement (quantity code of 77), alignment of curriculum, instruction and assessment (quantity code of 73), social-emotional wellness (quantity code of 66), and principal as a change agent, as well as, outside agencies (each with a quantity code of 65). In the next section, the four key components (leadership, instruction, professional community and school environment) are used to frame the participants' conceptions of rural education and the perceptions of the prioritization of rural school youth in Nova Scotia. Whether the factor was perceived as both a benefit and challenge are still significant to the priority of the factor in the participants' buildings. Anecdotes were used in the original body of research as a way to highlight and provide evidence of importance to each ranked factor of success.

Leadership. In terms of leadership, essential considerations are given to the amount of successional planning given to rural schools. Administrators also discussed the importance of the dynamics of change in providing strong instructional leadership, increasing student achievement, while developing a positive school culture takes time and is met with intense dips.

The Principal as a change agent was highly ranked as a priority in the buildings; many of the teachers discussed the amount of support they receive from their administrative teams. It was suggested that rural school administrators will facilitate experiences and opportunities to their staff and students because they develop a climate in the school of trust and knowing their teachers' and students' interests. Participants mentioned that there are fewer opportunities for rural students, so when one arises, they make sure that they take advantage. The participants also discussed school culture and the importance of the role of the administrators in creating a positive learning environment.

Instruction. Alignment of curriculum, teaching and assessment was passionately discussed throughout the participant groups and ranked as the second highest priority in the rural schools. Teachers stressed the importance of having strong instructional practice, having to be creative with providing and scheduling courses to accommodate their students in their small schools, and having to create their own programs to meet the needs of the students in their community. Numerous curriculums, teaching initiatives, and assessments were discussed. Many of the participants provided evidence of programs that they have received after the larger schools in their area were done providing them.

Table 2" *Ranking of Priorities in Rural Schools by Sample Population*

Rank	Factor
1	Parents and Community
2	Alignment of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
3	Social Emotional Learning and Wellness
4	Principal as a change agent / Outside Agencies
5	Individualization of Instruction
6	Principal as Instructional Leader
7	Instructional Supports
8	Teacher Retention / Professional Development
9	Programs for Special Needs Students
10	Culturally Responsive Teaching
11	Instructional Resources / Teacher Involvement in Leadership
12	Shared Mission and Goals
13	Teacher Recruitment
14	High Expectations of Students
15	Teacher Collaboration
16	Safe and Drug Free Schools
17	Use of Data

Strong instructional practice was also an important topic of discussion during the interviews and the concept of mentorship. Participants of all personnel roles from schools mentioned that their schools were, what many described as landing schools where young teachers receive their permanent contracts. Because this happens so often, many participants described their "in house" mentorship programs that they try to offer young teachers, which in hopes, becomes a retention strategy to keep these teachers from leaving. The administrators try, whether themselves or an influential teacher leader, on staff to mentor the new people in their building on their instructional strategies and programs that they use in their school.

Professional Community. Although the factors from this key component placed lower in the priority ranking, teacher recruitment and retainment and professional development were also cited as necessary in the development of strong successional rural school planning. The topic of substitute teachers was another issue of further discussion.

School Environment. For the school environment, this key component ranked as the highest priority in the participant's buildings. Factors such as social-emotional wellness and learning, parent and community support, and outside agencies were deemed as the most significant priorities in rural school buildings.

Text Analysis of Schools' Student Success Plans

A rational text analysis of the schools' Student Success Plans (SSPs) was also used to help answer the second research question in this thesis, "*What do rural school personnel in Nova Scotia feel are priorities in their buildings*?" From this analysis and based on the previously mentioned framework on Student Success Plans (SPPs) from the literature review each school used the provincial template and developed three goals; literacy, numeracy, and a safe and inclusive learning environment goal. Each goal is derived from the priorities that leadership staff have found through data collection such as provincial assessments, common regional

assessments, surveys and staff professional development goals. Coding of ideas generated in the schools' SSPs was collected, like in the participant interviews, and placed into common categories based on the four key components of rural school success (leadership, instruction, professional development and school environment) and their factors (Barely & Beesley, 2007; McREL, 2005a; Canada Without Poverty, 2019). The generation of rural school priorities using school goals and action plans based on the same conceptual framework as the interviews (Table 3) is summarised below.

Table 3: *Text Analysis of Student Success Plans, Factors, Key Components &Research Findings*

Key Components	**Factors**	**Research Findings of SSPs**
Leadership	1. Shared mission and goals	a. SSPs present a published account of the school's mission statements. b. Present strategies and evaluations of goals.
	2. Principal as change agent	a. Principal has autonomy to make changes to SSP. b. Principal consults to develops goal. c. Principal's responsibility to create, implement, evaluate and monitor goals.
	3. Principal as instructional leader	a. Principals develops and heads school-based teams to accomplish goals.
	4. Individualization of instruction	a. Increase use of number talks and mental math instruction in Mathematics. b. Provide further opportunities for cross curricular instruction in number sense.
	5. Instructional resources	a. Use provincial writing rubric (Analytic Scoring Rubric for writing). b. Creation of common approaches to writing research assignments. c. Use of three-part workshop model in Mathematics with focus on time-to-teach, time-to-practice, and time-to-share. d. Explore, model, share and implement best instructional strategies for listening and speaking to improve problem solving abilities. e. Use Google Forms and Google Classroom to collect and analyze data to support student engagement and inform next steps for teaching.
	6. Alignment of Curriculum, teaching and assessment	a. Creation of common formative assessments in both instruction and assessment of literacy and numeracy goals. b. Creation of common exemplars for writing school wide. c. School wide writer's and reader's workshops.

		d. Creation of conventions and common benchmarks to establish consistent writing expectations. e. Increase opportunities for students to create story maps to improve problem solving ability in Mathematics.
	7. Programs for special needs students	a. Explore effective technology application to support assistive technology reading. b. Explore and implement best instructional strategies used to differentiate instruction and assessment.
	8. Culturally responsive teaching	a. Support outdoor learning projects. b. Provide guest speakers with multiple diversities. c. Place-based/Outdoor education school cohort.
	9. Instructional supports	a. Provide opportunities for team and co-teaching teaching. b. Provide coaching and mentoring opportunities for staff both within school and regionally.
Professional Community	10. Teacher recruitment	a. N/A
	11. Teacher retention	a. N/A
	12. Professional Development	a. During Collaborative Learning Teaming, teachers will learn best practices in outdoor education, environmental education, risk management and first aid. b. Staff use school-based in-services and Collaborative Learning Teaming times to in the planning and implementation of school goals.
	13. Teacher collaboration	a. Use collaborative approach to improve classroom management and engagement strategies. b. Use collaborative approach to develop Outdoor Learning Place-based Educational opportunities both on school ground and local community.
	14. Teacher involvement in Leadership	a. Create school-based teams to work on school goals.
School Environment	15. Use of data	a. Use provincial assessment data to explore next steps in school goals. b. Use of provincial Survey Measure for Safe and Inclusive results. c. Use of regionally developed assessment data to support Mathematics programming.
	16. High expectations of students	a. Regional use of 70% proficiency measure on Provincial Assessments.

	b. Use of common formative and summative practices both school-based and regionally.
17. Parent and community	a. Provide free store/community cupboard for basic hygiene items, non-perishable foods items and clothes.
18. Safe and drug free School	a. All staff will promote positive behaviour referrals. b. Use of restorative justice practice approach at all levels of school to increase engagement.
19. Outside agencies	a. Use mathematics and instructional coaches to support instructional strategies used through schools. b. Provide increased access to School Plus facilitators and Mental Health workers to support well-being in students. c. Provide increased access to local community employers to enhance place-based pilot.
20. Multi-Tiered Systems for Supports	a. All staff will engage in Red dot/Green dot monthly goal setting. b. Utilize Outdoor education initiatives to support "red dot" students.
21. Social Emotional Learning	a. Promotion of mental, physical, and emotional well-being of students. b. Explore and implement strategies for supporting student resiliency and regulation. c. Build positive relationships with students that encourages academic risk taking and problem solving across curriculums. d. Implement PATHs curriculum, focusing on resiliency.

Presentation of the Text Analysis Data and Emergent Themes

An analysis of the schools' Student Success Plans (SSPs) revealed many of the priorities in their buildings. The use of the conceptual framework in the text analysis served to organize and collate the priorities described in the documents using the 21 factors of school success, not to inform the ranking from the participant interviews. The text analysis served to illustrate how the rural schools were determining, developing a plan to further student achievement, and how they evaluated their goals. If the goals were deemed important enough to be included in the schools' SSPs, then they were deemed as priorities in the building.

Discussion and Concluding Thoughts

It is beyond the scope of this study to assess the student academic performance of rural schools in Nova Scotia as it relates to achievement or scores. Instead, it was the intention of this study to explore the prioritization that rural youth receive in policy development as a way to describe characteristics of what a successful or effective rural school in Nova Scotia looks like based on

the priorities in their buildings. I have presented findings that revealed the relationships with qualitative case study attributes, and answered each of the research questions. This research study provided many characteristics of what a successful rural school could look like in Nova Scotia if given prioritization. In this concluding chapter, the primary research question is highlighted using both the answers to the secondary research questions, as well as implications for policy, practice, and theory development. Limitations to this thesis and recommendations for future research and policy development are then investigated. Finally, the researcher's thoughts and reflections are revealed, and conclusions are made. What Characteristics Describe a Successful Rural School in Nova Scotia?

Many priorities were revealed through the participant interviews and text analysis of the schools' SSPs using the key components from the conceptual framework of this study. The secondary research questions revealed that many the factors to a successful rural school in Nova Scotia fell under the School Environment key component. The importance of parent communication, community partnerships, and the involvement that both parents and communities have on their rural schools is a true factor of rural school success. These factors were also reflected highly in the literature surrounding rural education. Other factors of rural school success in Nova Scotia that illustrated the importance of the school environment were student well-being, and the significance of coherent work by outside agencies to support students.

Under Professional Community, factors such as student and staff retention, and professional development were also important to the programming success of rural schools in Nova Scotia. Professional development, leading to quality instruction, was another factor in rural school success. Instruction as a key component to rural school success was also highly prioritized. Discovery into the concept of student retainment as a factor to rural school success occurred during the study when many of the participants disclosed the challenges that they had to keep rural students in their home community school. Rural students, if supported, seek programs that their home community school is unable to provide for them by transferring to central or urban schools that do. There is currently a research gap in this area, so further research into this concept could be explored from this finding.

Under the key component instruction, the alignment of curriculum, teaching, and assessment was the second-highest prioritized factor, suggesting the importance of daily operations such as curriculum and their importance to rural communities. Participants presented both the benefits and challenges to successfully providing quality instruction to their schools. This study's findings also correlated with the early McREL (2005a) study, which discussed that although individualized instruction and opportunity to learn undoubtedly shape the effectiveness of classroom instruction, this study also revealed through the schools' SSPs that the goals and expectations for learning were clear to students and their communities, but lacked longevity thinking. Leadership plays an extensive role in planning and programming quality instructional programs, and maneuvering through their many benefits and challenges was also revealed as indicators to success in these two rural Nova Scotia schools. The principal as a change agent and as an instructional leader were also factors highly influential to the success of long-term planning, which was revealed as another contributing factor of rural school success. All schools reported a high turnover rate with their current administration. Participants revealed that as a result they rely heavily on their teacher leaders as mentors. This correlates with Anderson's (2008) transformative model of teacher leadership of creating open and trusting channels of communication on staff, which spills into the rural communities that these schools serve. In this

case, however, teacher leaders are being used out of necessity, not pedagogical beliefs. This is another area of research to be further explored from this thesis. Two main priorities also appeared evident under this key component: the challenges of the small rural principal's role, and how they overcome student vulnerability to help students to increase their achievement.

Policy Gaps and Representation and Their Influence on Rural School Success

In terms of policy gaps and representation, the analogy of a sinking ship is appropriate. Current programs and initiatives are being used as plugs in the challenges that rural schools face in this province. Many of these programs are not bound by policy, meaning that once established, the government can eliminate them as they see fit without any consultation with the school administration or community. Initial funding is provided to get programs running, then once the program is established the funding dries up, removing the plug. Schools are left to absorb the costs of these successful initiatives, such as some of the programs revealed through this study. Also, having fewer representatives from regions creates adversarial relationships between these governing bodies, rural schools, and their communities. A rural school policy framework will make governing bodies, rural schools, and the communities accountable to the vulnerable and overlooked populations that they serve in this province.

This exploratory study offers only the first steps in definitively understanding the unique factors that support success in rural schools in Nova Scotia. To describe or provide a definition of rural school success in this province would be premature and beyond the scope of a qualitative study such as this. In the next section, implications of these results are examined to provide an understanding of rural school success with policy gaps in Nova Scotia.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy and Theory

An implication that was revealed from this study is that Nova Scotia currently does not have a rural education strategy. However, it is also one of the only provinces that currently does not have a rural youth or rural education advocacy or consulting council, even though rural schools make up over 40% of the province. There is clearly a line drawn between being from centralized regions such as Halifax or not (Corbett, 2014). Students growing up in a rural community with little social capital and financial resources face adversity, compounding the vulnerability indicators and SES issues they might already face at home. This places even further pressure on rural school achievement, as rural schools in this province are currently challenged with providing their rural students with an equitable and quality education that compares them with their urban or centralized counterparts within their same region without benefit of their programs and services. The literature review provides an overview of the current scenario for the rural youth of this province, with above average rates of childhood poverty and vulnerability, little to no representation on provincial advisory boards and political platforms, and no policy to protect resource and service delivery. This research study has demonstrated indicators to what a high-performing high-needs rural school looks like in Nova Scotia. It also discussed current indicators of rural school success, gaps in policy and in theory behind successfully educating rural school youth and keeping them in their home community schools, in hopes of dissuading further outmigration.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research and Policy Development

The main limitation of this research reflected the very nature of the complexity in rural education. This study was only able to represent a snapshot of a particular point in these schools' representation in a policy that currently does not exist. One limitation of selecting case study design centers on generalizability (Yin, 2014). The decisions made by the researcher surrounding the context of the study, number of participants, number of documents reviewed, and interviews

reflect this challenge of its generalizability. The focus was on gaining a deeper understanding of rural school personnel's perspectives of the priorities in their building, and seeking the current extent educational policy prioritizes rural youth in Nova Scotia. Another delimitation was the use of a small sample size. Limitations that accompany on-site one-on-one interviews, priority rankings could be much different with a larger sample size. Using a survey of priorities may have allowed for an increase in the sample size of the study, but it was the thick, rich context in the priorities in the building, and discussion surrounding representation and policy development through on site, one-on-one interviews that were needed by the researcher to discuss the uniqueness of rural school matters. While multiple data sources provided ample evidence and the one-on-one interviews allow for a deep rich context, the study would have been more fruitful if data collection occurred using a larger sample from the same schools or other schools.

This was primarily a qualitative case study that sought factors that describe rural school success and the prioritization that rural youth receive in educational policy in Nova Scotia. Due to the rapid turnover of administrators and staff in the small rural schools studied, many participants could not reflect a real sense of their school's success without comparing themselves to their urban or centralized counterparts. This paints a picture of the current staffing and longevity planning challenges that rural schools in Nova Scotia are facing. It is hard to create a baseline of rural school success in the province when there are gaps in policy, little exploratory research, and little longevity planning. Reviewing what other provinces are doing would help develop our own policy, but further surveying and consultation of rural schools and their communities across Nova Scotia needs to occur, to create that baseline, before we can even begin.

Additional Areas of Research

Additional areas of research include looking at achievement rates (such as graduation rates, post-secondary migration patterns, provincial assessments, etc.) to develop literature describing what it means to be an effective rural school in Nova Scotia. Researching two-way regression models of school reform could also enhance the current method of accreditation or evaluation to which rural schools are currently bound. Further longitudinal research that involves revisiting these schools after the development of a rural education strategy would also provide greater understanding of the long-term impact educational policy has on prioritizing rural youth and rural school success.

Another area of further research could be exploring how small rural schools can most effectively program plan to retain students in their home community and prevent them from transferring to other more centralized schools since current funding for programs is tied to enrolment. A gap in the research of home community student retention was also revealed in this study. Another area of research into longevity planning during high administration and staff turnover could be an examination of the influence that retired educators often called, out of necessity, to act as substitutes are having on rural schools in Nova Scotia. Currently, retired teachers in Nova Scotia are permitted to substitute for 100 days before their pensions are affected, due to shortages in the substitute teacher workforce.

Concluding Thoughts

As a rural school researcher, it is hard to describe what a successful or effective rural school looks like in Nova Scotia, only what it could look like based on what other provinces throughout Canada are doing for their rural school youth and what the current research described in this study demonstrates. For decades, as a province, we have accepted mediocrity and have continued to place wet band-aids on the open wounds of our vulnerable rural populations. As a province,

we currently have a baseline of inattention to the needs of rural education and its rural youth. We can only imagine what we, as a province, could do for our rural youth with proper representation, advocacy and accountable policy development. It is incumbent on us as a province to ensure equity and quality across the public education landscape, providing a level playing field for all, no matter how large or small the school, city or town.

Evidence revealed through this study illustrated that rural schools offer many positive benefits to students and their communities. These schools are at the heart of their communities in a way that is not possible in a suburban or an urban setting. In this thesis submission, I have created arguments and recommendations regarding the value of rural schools in this province, education funding, recruitment and retention of both teachers and students, longevity planning, learning resources and programming, support for vulnerable populations and exemplar policies and frameworks for the development of our own rural education strategy. In closing, I urge the government to champion the value, benefits, and importance of rural and small schools in this province. Perhaps the primary lesson to be learned here is that the theoretical conceptualizations of how rural areas are represented and thrive have yet to be refined. Policy developers still have much to learn about the dynamic nature of what it means to be living in rural Nova Scotia**.**

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Standing on the edge and feeling by Khatereh Maryam Bahmanpour (July 2022)
Memorial University

Standing on the edge,
Feeling all and none,
Knowing everything and nothing.

Unsaid goodbyes, betting for utter.
Unasked questions, begging for answers.
Unrevealed stories, begging to reveal.

Found in the ocean; lost in the wood Lost in the ocean; found in the wood.
Fluid like the running water, solid like a stubborn rock.
Witness all the changes paralyzed by what I have seen.

Navigating the Interconnectedness: Classroom Assessment and Restorative Justice in Education

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Acknowledgments: *I could not find enough words to express my gratitude to my thesis supervisors Dr. Dorothy Vaandering and Dr. Andrew Coombs. Thank you for your continuous support and guidance during the research. Also, special thanks to all participants of this research. Your perspectives are invaluable for this research.*

Abstract: *This study investigates the interconnectedness between the assessment approaches of current and future teachers and their implementation of restorative justice in education (RJE) in Newfoundland and Labrador context. Utilizing a two-phase triangulation mixed-method research design, the research explores their perspectives on classroom assessment and RJE. In phase 1, 83 teachers were surveyed and in phase 2, 7 teachers were interviewed to deeply explore their approaches to classroom assessment and RJE. This research uncovers (a) current and future teachers' approaches to classroom assessment and RJE were not statistically significantly different between groups, (b) two groups' understanding of classroom assessment and RJE were quite different, (c) both groups agreed on the lack of knowledge about RJE but did not have similar perspectives on classroom assessment. The findings offer valuable insights for redesigning teacher education programs, enhancing professional development opportunities, and educational policies in the province.*

Keywords: *Classroom Assessment, Restorative Justice in Education, Classroom Teachers, Teacher Candidates, Assessment Literacy, Inclusive Classroom*

Introduction

What is the role of recognizing the socio-cultural connection between classroom assessment and RJE? Are teachers aware of this? Do teachers know about the relationship and

interconnectedness of classroom assessment and RJE? Is teaching experience an important factor to understand this? To find answers to these questions, this research was conducted to explore the relationship between current and future teachers' approaches to classroom assessment and RJE in Newfoundland and Labrador. Findings of this study show an important and mutual relationship between classroom assessment and RJE and its role for the development of inclusive education in classrooms.

Classroom assessment

Classroom assessment practices are essential components of standards-based education models in Canada (DeLuca et al., 2021). This model emphasizes student knowledge, skills, and performance measures. High-quality assessment practices, fostering problem-solving and reasoning skills, are crucial for achieving outcomes aligned with these models (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yuan, 2012). The use of such practices enhances student learning (Hattie, 2012). Given the pivotal role of assessment in standards-based models, developing teachers' assessment literacy is essential, encompassing understanding assessment concepts and their application in educational decision-making (DeLuca, 2012; Stiggins, 2002; Wyatt-Smith, Klenowski, & Gunn, 2010). Recently, classroom assessment has focused heavily on students' metacognitive, problem-solving and cognitive skills (Earl, 2012). The goal is to improve *how* students learn, in addition to *what* they have learned in classrooms. To achieve this goal, both formative and summative assessments are introduced to the classrooms by school district and provincial policies (e.g., Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2022; NLESD, 2017). Teachers' understanding that assessment is a dynamic, context-dependent social practice highlights the significance of high-quality assessment (Willis, Adie, & Klenowski, 2013). Socio-cultural values play an important role in teachers' assessment literacy, interacting with other elements like task performance, collaboration, personal beliefs, and decision-making. Hence, understanding students' cultural backgrounds and accepting relational well-being is vital for equitable classroom practices (Vaandering, 2012). RJE further supports a socio-cultural perspective, emphasizing the interconnectedness of teachers and students and acknowledging the impact of beliefs on relationships (Evans & Vaandering, 2022). Understanding how RJE helps teachers align their values and beliefs with assessment practices is crucial for creating inclusive classroom environments.

Restorative Justice in Education (RJE)

In the late 1970s, restorative justice was introduced into the Western criminal justice system and then spread into education in the late 1990s (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). RJE underlines the significance of interconnected relationships between students and teachers, prioritizing the respect for the dignity and worth of all individuals and fostering inclusive classroom environments (Evans & Vaandering, 2016). The beliefs, cultural backgrounds, and personal experiences of educators significantly shape their understanding and implication of RJE in classrooms. RJE has three core questions related to critical reflection on the values and beliefs (Evans & Vaandering, 2016):

- Am I honoring? This question asks if I honor people by accepting them for who they are.
- Am I measuring? This question asks if I am measuring whether or not people fit my assumed expectations rather than their own progress.

- What message am I sending? This question asks if I consider how my engagement with people is perceived by them. Do they see me as empathetic and accepting of them with unconditional positive regard?

Unfortunately, RJE is not sufficiently integrated into Canadian teacher education programs, typically offered as a surface-level course (Hollweck, Reimer, & Bouchard, 2019). To address this gap, a restorative professional learning program, developed by Vaandering (2015), actively engages participants with RJE's philosophical foundation, principles, practices, and implementation process. This two-week program, designed for mid-career teachers, has evolved into a comprehensive four-day training and mentoring initiative in Newfoundland and Labrador, facilitated by Relationships First Newfoundland and Labrador (RFNL). This program provides educators with the opportunity to deepen their understanding and implication of RJE by connecting with experienced mentors and building a community of educators actively engaged in RJE in the province.

Educational Context in Newfoundland and Labrador

Limited research and publications on classroom assessment and RJE in Newfoundland and Labrador exist, yet recent shifts in assessment policies and restorative justice initiatives by the district and provincial government show their importance. The Assessment, Evaluation, and Reporting policy aims to improve student academic achievement through formative and summative assessment, and self-assessment (NLESD, 2017). Over the past 13 years, RJE practices have been gradually introduced in the province, with some schools or teachers incorporating them (Memorial University, 2020). Collaborative efforts with organizations like Memorial University, Relationship First NL, and Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association involve integrating restorative justice into schools through courses, workshops, and resources. The Provincial Government's recent $600,000 investment in Relationships First NL (Executive Council Justice and Public Safety Education, 2022), signifies support for RJE. Therefore, the province remains a crucial context for research in this field.

Theoretical Framework

This research was led by the intersection of relational theory and social constructivism as both point out the active and dynamic processes of learning through relationships and the role of the learner. Relational theory emphasized the role of relationships among people; Relational theorists recognize that not only do human beings enter into and live in a range of relationships that influence and shape the course of their lives directly or through socialization, but that relationship and connection with others is essential to the existence of the self" (Llewellyn & Llewellyn, 2015, p. 7). As a learning theory, social constructivism focuses on the role of learning during learning process (Fosnot, 1996; Steffe & Gale, 1995). Social constructivism facilitates learning by emphasizing interactions with the socio-cultural environment and the learner's experiences (Proulx, 2006). So, learning is linked to social interactions and the community of knowledge in which the individual participates (Richardson, 2003). Learners' backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences play a vital role in shaping the dynamics of relationships between learners and teachers during the learning process. The importance of these relationships is mentioned in both relational theory and the principles of social constructivism.

Considering the critical role of classroom assessments in teaching and learning processes, it is more than students' responses on academic work and teachers' feedback on them; it is a multilayered, complex relational exchange process between teachers and students (Schwartz, 2017). Willis et al. (2013) identifies assessment through socio-cultural context by highlighting

emotional elements and context of classroom activities. As a result, it can be understood as a relational practice (Schwartz, 2017) and social constructivism (Shepard, 2000).

RJE can also be understood through relational theory and social constructivism since it emphasized the relationships among all people (Vaandering, 2016). As The Ripples of Relationships diagram shows how relationships are connected within the school setting, it can be said that teachers' own beliefs and experiences are significant to built relationships with students (Vaandering & Voelker, 2018).

Figure 1. Ripples of Relationships. Reprinted from *The Little Book of Restorative Justice Education* (p. 68) by Evans & Vaandering, 2016, Skyhorse Publishing.

Implications and Limitations-Similar Yet Different

Both current and future teachers share similar approaches and perspectives when it comes to understanding classroom assessment and RJE. Despite current teachers having more practical experience in the classrooms, both groups surprisingly exhibit comparable understandings. This unexpected finding is attributed to the well-established pathway guiding future teachers from teacher education programs to school districts, as revealed in our study.

On the contrary, although current and future teachers share similar approaches to classroom assessment and RJE, their perceptions of the connections between them differ. Current teachers identify a more unified and complex understanding of this relationship while future teachers demonstrate a fragmented understanding of the relationship among classroom assessment dimensions and between classroom assessment and restorative justice. A reasonable explanation for this difference is related to teaching experience. Current teachers have a great deal of hands-on experience in the classrooms, however, future teachers mostly focus on theoretical foundations of teaching and requiring additional hands-on experience in classrooms. In sum, teaching experience enables current teachers to understand the relationship between classroom assessment and RJE.

Fostering Further Knowledge: Unveiling the Path to Discovery

Despite differences in understanding the relationship of classroom assessment RJE, both current and future teachers mentioned a lack of knowledge regarding RJE practices and their integration into classroom assessment. Even as educators and researchers stress the significance of ongoing professional development opportunities in both classroom assessment and RJE, it is crucial not to overlook the broader impact on teaching and learning, encompassing the influence on classroom dynamics and relationships among teachers and students. This study contributes a valuable insight into educators' perspectives on classroom assessment and RJE, adding to the growing

body of evidence underlining the importance of the relationship between them. In sum, enhancing the relationship between classroom assessment and RJE is essential for creating inclusive classrooms and improving classroom practices by respecting students' socio-cultural contexts.

Limitations

While this research explores valuable findings, several limitations were identified. First limitation is about the recruitment process and sampling. The participants were not randomly selected; hence, teachers who are already interested in classroom assessment and RJE participated in this research. The use of purposive sampling was chosen for accessibility and practicality but may have influenced the generalizability of the results to the broader population of current and future teachers in the province. Also, current teachers were recruited only from one school district in the province.

Additionally, the study faced demographic and grade level imbalances, with smaller sample sizes for future teachers compared to current teachers and focusing on primary / elementary levels, potentially impacting the diversity of perspectives. Future research should aim to address these limitations by incorporating more comprehensive sampling methods, encompassing teachers from different school districts and ensuring a more balanced representation across grade levels and demographic groups.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study delves into the relationship between classroom assessment and RJE practices among both current and future teachers in Newfoundland and Labrador. Despite the similar approaches observed in both groups, differences emerge in their understanding of the connections between classroom assessment and RJE. Current teachers share a more unified and intricate understanding, while future teachers display a disjointed understanding, potentially attributed to varying levels of teaching experience. The study emphasizes the importance of teaching experience in fostering a nuanced understanding and connectivity between classroom assessment and RJE. Despite these differences, a common point emerges, a shared lack of knowledge about restorative justice integration into assessment practices. This calls attention to the need for ongoing professional development to enhance teachers' understanding and implication of both classroom assessment and RJE. The study contributes valuable insights into teachers' attitudes, emphasizing the important relationship between classroom assessment and RJE for creating inclusive classrooms and classroom practices.

This study provided a unique academic and personal experience for me as a researcher, offering valuable insights into the perspectives of current and future teachers regarding classroom assessment and RJE. The research revealed a deeper understanding of how both groups perceive the connection. Surprisingly, both current and future teachers expressed support for the idea that classroom assessment and RJE interconnected. As a researcher, I anticipated that future teachers would have a more nuanced understanding of the relationship, considering their exposure to educational theories and their roles as learners. Yet, current teachers have a more complex understanding of this relationship.

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To Know

Jan Buley (January 2024)
Memorial University

From learner faces to learner hearts,
we try to weave the cloth of community;
Connection--Connections--

As if world peace depends on it
As if world sanity depends on it
and whatever part of this profession
can shepherd from the sidelines,
we must do it.

I say we must do it,
but what we must do
is to know the world:
to be part of the world
to know the chaos and the conflict
to own the messes we make
to see the mistakes we have made
To knit ourselves into the spaces and places,
Into the stories and questions,
To listen and to learn.

Preventing Violent Extremism through Terror Management Theory: Insights from Boko-Haram Insurgency in Nigeria

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Abstract: *This paper examines the problem of terrorism in Nigeria, offering insights into the government's strategies for addressing the heinous acts of terror committed by*

individuals who often rationalize their actions with religious justification. Violent attacks against Nigerian nationals often stem from various underlying religious, economic and political issues. Governments in Nigeria often employ traditional countermeasures, encompassing military, intelligence and economic approaches. Notwithstanding the government's endeavours to use these conventional approaches to counter acts of terrorism, Nigeria's societal structure continues to be significantly damaged and exhibits no indications of amelioration. In order to tackle the persistent terrorism in Nigeria, this paper considers implementing a proactive approach that goes beyond conventional techniques, highlighting the significance of emphasizing "soft power" measures that address the root cause of terrorism. Following this perspective, I argue for a psychoanalytic approach rooted in terror management theory. By thoroughly examining the underlying psychological motivations and subliminal fears that drive individuals to engage in acts of terror, this research paper furnishes essential insights crucial for the prevention and effective response to emerging signs of terrorism. Thus, policymakers and security agencies can effectively disrupt the cycle of violence by implementing customized interventions that directly address the underlying causes. This contribution plays a significant role in global efforts to combat terrorism, ultimately leading to a more secure society worldwide.

Keywords*:* Fear, terror management, boko haram, extremism, radicalization

Introduction

Drawing from my personal experience as a frontline soldier in the Nigerian Army, the focus of my research primarily revolves around comprehending the underlying factors that contribute to radicalization and violent extremism. Specifically, I examine the profound consequences that stem from the worrisome increase in cultural and religious intolerance within Nigeria. The Institute for Economics and Peace ranked Nigeria as the third most terrorized country globally (GTI, 2019). This ranking provides insight into the severity of the terrorism situation in the country. However, there has been a significant improvement in Nigeria's global ranking for 2023, where it now stands as the eighth most terrorized country out of the ninety-three countries that were analyzed. The 2019 report provides further details on the number of combat-related deaths caused by the group. According to the report, “there have been 35,000 combat-related deaths across the Lake Chad Basin region since 2009 and an additional 18,000 deaths in Nigeria specifically since 2011” (p.16). The Global Terrorism Index (2014) has identified ISIL and Boko Haram as two highly notorious terrorist organizations that have established a significant presence in Nigeria. What is truly shocking is the magnitude of their impact, as these two groups alone account for a staggering 51% of all fatalities related to terrorism worldwide. In Nigeria, there is a pressing need not only to tackle religious extremism but also to bring awareness to the emerging instances of diverse stereotypical intolerance and homicides. Within the framework of this paper, it is imperative to highlight these specific forms of intolerance.

The youth in Nigeria are becoming increasingly intolerant, which has had a significant impact on the LGBT community, leaving them in a state of vulnerability and marginalization. The troubling situation faced by the LGBTQ+ community in Nigeria involves the recurrent harassment and dehumanization of gay couples. The prevailing belief in Nigeria, as well as in Africa as a whole, is that homosexuality is in direct conflict with the cultural and moral principles that define the continent (Adebanjo, 2015). The Nigerian youth have been experiencing a surge in acts of

violent extremism, which is not only confined to the adoption of radical ideologies but has also taken a disturbing turn with the emergence of kidnapping, ritual killings, and cultism, thus adding another alarming aspect to this phenomenon. As described by Igbinovia (1988), the term "ritual killings" pertains to a particularly gruesome type of criminal homicide where the assailants remove vital organs from their victims to use them in sacred rituals. The victims of these ritual killings are often young women who are frequently targeted. Many university campuses in Nigeria are grappling with the emergence of cultism, which has led to numerous reported killings as a result of cult activities. The formation or affiliation of cult groups by young people serves the purpose of carrying out acts of harassment, intimidation, and fear-mongering. The situation becomes concerning when rival community cult groups are involved in a conflict, as the number of deceased individuals rises to alarming levels.

As we explore the underbelly motivations behind these acts of terror, we are confronted with some fundamental questions that revolve around three key points. 1) What are the reasons behind terrorists resorting to killing and frequently engaging in suicide bombing? 2) What motivates individuals to join cult gangs and, sometimes, dedicate themselves to ritualistic killings in pursuit of money or other desired forms of success? Finally, it is essential to raise a crucial question that aims to delve into the root causes of the prevalent homophobic hate and sporadic acts of violence that are specifically directed towards the LGBT community in Africa, with a particular focus on shedding light on the situation in Nigeria. The questions presented in this study are intricately intertwined with the fundamental principles of the terror management theory. By employing the Terror Management Theory as my theoretical framework, I aim to go beyond the traditional understanding of these perplexing phenomena and shed light on the existential dynamics beneath them

Terror Management Theory

Although terror management theory is commonly associated with Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (1991), its roots can be found in the earlier works of Ernest Becker (1971, 1973, and 1975). Terror Management theory (TMT), which anchors on psychoanalytic theory, asserts that the primary driving force behind human behaviour is the awareness and fear of mortality. TMT unravels the intricacies of human nature, viewing it from an existential standpoint and employing psychoanalytic observation to construct a comprehensive theory encompassing the multitude of subconscious elements that contribute to human behaviour (Devraj-Kizuk, 2014). The main idea conveyed in TMT is that individuals who possess a sense of self-worth and purpose in life are better equipped to cope with anxiety and maintain their overall well-being, especially when confronted with the reality of mortality (Juhl, 2019). Devraj-Kizuk (2014) explains that to overcome our fear of death and reject the limitations of our physical existence, we immerse ourselves in the symbolic realm, thus attaining a triumph over our mortal bodies. According to Becker (1973), this process leads to the cultivation of what he refers to as a sense of symbolic immortality. Human development involves forming individual values and beliefs and cultivating personal goals, dreams, and aspirations as one navigates through life. At the core, individuals are naturally inclined to recognize and prioritize the crucial elements that shape their being. These can encompass a broad spectrum, ranging from religious convictions and artistic pursuits to professional aspirations, personal relationships, familial bonds, patriotic emotions, or commitment to a specific cause. Consequently, they integrate these diverse factors to cultivate a comprehensive personal perspective or worldview, a cognitive representation of what is righteous and virtuous in the world.

The central postulate of TMT revolves around the notion that individuals construct personal worldviews to cope with their existential dilemmas. These worldviews allow individuals to focus their thoughts and efforts on attainable goals that can ultimately result in a sense of symbolic immortality (Devraj-Kizuk, 2014, pp. 58-59). The correlation between the degree of deviation from one's worldview and the intensity of anxiety and instability experienced is inherently logical, with individuals feeling more anxious and unstable as the gap widens, while the closer individuals are to fully manifest their cherished set of ideals, the more self-esteem they are likely to feel. According to TMT, self-esteem can be understood as the extent to which an individual successfully realizes their worldview (Devraj-Kizuk, 2014; Shen, 2006). Thus, death-anxiety, symbolic immortality, worldview and self-esteem are some of the existential matrices undergirding terror management theory.

Through an in-depth exploration of the field of terror management theory, we can gain a valuable and critical perspective, which enables us to better understand the underlying motivations that drive worldview irredentism. The insights provided by this theory illuminate the repetitive nature of power demonism across various eras in human history, exposing the pivotal role fear and anxiety play in sustaining this vicious cycle of violence. In the context of violent extremism and terrorism, TMT proposes that the act of eliminating individuals who are perceived as a threat to one's worldview serves as a means of safeguarding and preserving that particular worldview (Hayes et al., 2008). In order to have a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies surrounding TMT, it is crucial to conduct a thorough examination of how three interrelated conceptual matrices, which include worldview/culture, the existence of threats/fear, and the concept of death, contribute to the perpetuation of acts of terror. Frequent exposure to these conceptual themes tends to provoke a survival response or a feeling of dread, leading to the development of a compensatory defensive response in individuals. This response aims to achieve three primary goals: safeguarding and upholding their sense of self and existence while perpetuating their cultural worldview. Taking a psychological approach, it becomes evident that the fear of death, evil, or mortality is a powerful motivator, compelling individuals to take drastic actions to defend and maintain their beliefs. Solomon et al. (1991) identified these factors as the underlying driving principle supporting the terror management theory.

TMT thoroughly investigates the intricate dynamics that ensue from the collision between the conflicting forces of finiteness and infiniteness, the yearning for everlasting life or immortality, and the profound awareness of the unavoidable fate of mortality. Hayes et al. (2008) provide valuable insights into how individuals grapple with their desire to live and their acknowledgment of mortality. When confronted with conflict, individuals may experience heightened anxiety, and this emotional response can have a substantial impact on their ability to work toward and accomplish their goals effectively. Despite this, individuals must make a conscious effort to overcome their anxiety in order to remain involved in activities that hold purpose (Hayes et al; 2008). According to TMT, acknowledging death's inevitability can be effectively managed through various mechanisms. These mechanisms include an increased focus on building self-esteem, engaging in acts of heroism, and a more substantial commitment to cultural norms, values, and religious beliefs (Chatard et al., 2011). Through his examination of the Terror Management Theory, Solomon (2008) provides valuable insights into the fear of death and the human quest for immortality, offering a deeper understanding of these concepts. He explains that self-awareness is considered to be one of the defining characteristics of human beings, as it sets us apart from other living beings. We not only possess the gift of life, but we also possess the ability to comprehend and acknowledge our existence. While the experience of self-awareness can evoke a

profound sense of awe and joy, it can also give way to an overwhelming sense of dread when one fully comprehends the inescapable reality of death, which can strike unexpectedly and with no predictable or controllable circumstances.

TMT posits that humans face an existential dilemma defined by a sense of anxious consciousness. Constructing beliefs about reality is a crucial strategy individuals employ to navigate this dilemma effectively. The beliefs that provide meaning serve a vital role in various aspects, as they not only offer explanations for cosmologies and the unknown but also provide guidelines for acceptable conduct and hold the promise of immortality. In a study conducted by Vail (2019), it was found that humans often struggle with the concept of their impermanence and attempt to ease this discomfort by perceiving themselves as having a certain permanence. The ability of humans to construct and actively embrace cultural worldviews is of utmost importance, as these worldviews serve as a foundation for their sense of order, significance, and meaning in life. Highlighting one of the core principles of TMT, van Kessel and Burke (2018) and van Kessel et al. (2019) explain that when humans are constantly confronted with existential fear with no mitigation, it can negatively impact their cognitive abilities and hinder their effectiveness in various tasks. Humans, in response to the fear of their mortality, have developed a psychological system that functions as a defence mechanism to keep thoughts of death from their consciousness. Humans tend to cope with the fear of death by creating and maintaining cultural worldviews and by nurturing their self-esteem. When individuals maintain faith in their cultural worldview and self-esteem, they can experience a profound sense of continuity in their lives, whether literal or symbolic.

The depiction of religion as a cultural worldview is evident when we closely examine the specific context of this paper. From the perspective of terror management theory, it is a highly effective approach to engaging with the inherent limitations of human beings. Friedman and Rholes (2007) have discussed in their research and theoretical writings that religion could serve a significant role in managing and addressing terrorism, an idea that has been explored previously. Research has found that affirming religious beliefs before thinking about death can effectively reduce the adverse effects of mortality salience (MS), especially for individuals who have a stronger religious inclination (Jonas and Fischer, as cited in Friedman and Rholes, 2008). I explain this phenomenon using the *mortality salience* (MS) and *anxiety-buffer* hypothesis (Hart, 2019). According to Hart, the MS hypothesis posits that when individuals with self-esteem and worldviews capable of countering existential insecurity are exposed to reminders of the cause of that insecurity, death, they will reinforce and enhance their self-esteem and worldviews. The anxiety-buffer hypothesis suggests that boosting self-esteem and worldviews, which serve as protective factors against death anxiety, can significantly enhance individuals' psychological resilience, whereas undermining these factors can potentially increase their vulnerability and a need to defend it (Hart, 2019, p. 67).

TMT: Evolution, Religion and African Ontology

In the realm of historical archaeology, a vast amount of evidence substantiates the notion that humans, throughout history, have consistently manifested their profound desire for eternal life through numerous artifacts. In their study, Vail et al. (2019) found that humans, throughout history, have not only been responsible for creating relics and artifacts, but they have also demonstrated a deep longing for intangible spirits that transcend the confines of the physical body. The emergence of this desire for supernatural religious concepts has coincided with the development of communal living, symbolic thinking, language, and self-consciousness (Vail et al., 2019, p.259). Although the primary purpose of religion is to alleviate the fear of death, it has also played a significant role

in providing individuals with spiritual solace, offering a glimmer of hope for eternal life, and boosting their sense of self-worth. According to Friedman and Rholes (2008), religious belief systems that exhibit steadfast conviction and provide concrete representations of the afterlife are argued to be the most effective in providing a solid defence against existential concerns (p.38). Throughout history, people have widely embraced incorporating spirituality into their daily lives. According to Zukerman (as cited in Vail & Soenke, 2019), there is a noticeable increase in the number of individuals who are choosing to reject religion; however, research indicates that a significant majority, approximately 85% of people worldwide, still maintain their religious beliefs (p.259). TMT's perspective aligns with the view that religion serves as a dual source, providing individuals with both meaning and purpose and fostering a belief in the existence of an afterlife or a higher power. Not only does the belief system assist individuals in managing the fear of death, but it also furnishes them with a comprehensive framework through which they can comprehend the purpose and significance of life, bestowing them the consoling hope of an everlasting existence transcending mortality.

According to Crabtree (2009), religion plays a crucial role in our everyday lives, impacting us in both advantageous and disadvantageous ways. As Vail et al. (2019) noted, religion will continue playing a significant role in society due to its capacity to unite people in religious communities and foster a strong social identity. One of their key arguments is that religious creation stories serve as a valuable framework for individuals to grapple with their mortality. By presenting a spiritual cosmogony that incorporates notions of supernatural immortality and agency, these narratives offer a means for humans to reconcile and make sense of their limited time on Earth. Despite the heartless manifestation of an insatiable appetite for violence displayed by certain religious adherents, such as the Boko-Ham insurgents, religion continues to maintain a deep connection with Indigenous African ontology. At the core of African/Indigenous ontology is the fundamental belief that our very existence is indebted to a divine Being, and it is through the realm of spirituality, we establish a profound connection with this supreme entity. In many parts of Africa, there is a widespread belief that the contemplation of mortality or a fear of death is a powerful motivation for individuals to seek purity, as it is considered a necessary condition for achieving eternal life or an afterlife.

Many studies have provided evidence that TMT holds substantial implications for both human consumerism and epicureanism, highlighting the various ways in which mortality salience is dispersed and projected (Solomon et al., 2004; Arndt et al., 2004a, 2004b, Maheswaran & Agrawal 2004; Rindfleish & Burroughs 2004 and Jounghwa et al.; 2007).

According to Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (2004), humans are inclined to be consumers. The principles of TMT suggest that individuals who undergo an increase in anxiety regarding mortality often exhibit a more intense inclination toward pursuing hedonic goals (Hedonia). These goals predominantly involve the quest for pleasure, the avoidance of pain, and an inclination to allocate a more significant proportion of their financial resources towards expenses associated with clothing, entertainment and other luxuries (Ryran & Deci, 2001; Ryitz & Staudinger, 2017; Thrash, 2021). Thus, when people are reminded of their mortality, they intensely desire high-status luxury items such as Lexus cars and Rolex watches. Solomon (2008) notes that individuals experience a decrease in their levels of death anxiety when they actively participate in activities that involve counting or handling money. Jounghwa et al. (2007) argue that our consumption behaviour is not exclusively motivated by our fundamental physical survival needs; if individuals only made consumption choices based on rational decision-making that stemmed from biological necessity, there would be no space for excessive consumption or the

display of wealth through conspicuous consumption, suggesting that humans desire money and materialism for factors other than rationality and biological need. They conducted a study in which they found that individuals exposed to thoughts of their mortality displayed an increased tendency to engage in materialistic consumption. Their study employed terror management theory (TMT) as a conceptual framework to explore the factors that drive individuals to engage in hedonic consumption and materialism. Their research focused on exploring the effects of mortality salience on this behaviour. According to the study's findings, it was observed that individuals who were exposed to thoughts of their mortality displayed an increased tendency to engage in materialistic consumption.

Through further exploration of this context, we can see that mortality salience paves the way for a new conceptual space in which eudaimonic well-being can emerge. Niemiec (2014) describes eudaimonic well-being as the subjective experience that arises from living virtuously, ultimately resulting in a profound sense of self-actualization. Becker (1973) noted that the notion of death remembrance can be characterized as a metaphorical "immunity bath" that bestows individuals with the gift of everlasting existence" (p.12). The fear of death compels mortals to take on responsibility and become more accountable to the purpose of divine creation. Religious teachings consistently emphasize and reinforce the importance of this duty and responsibility. Countering a broad generalization that associates the fear of death with evil and materialism, as proposed by TMT, makes it extremely important to highlight this exception. Although the fear response is typically activated when our survival is at risk or when we are reminded of mortality, it is interesting to note that numerous Indigenous Africans derive inner strength from reflecting on the inevitability of death.

In the quest for everlasting life, individuals often adopt a range of actions to attain immortality, both in this world and beyond, including but not limited to acts of kindness, practicing hospitality, embracing forgiveness, engaging in prayerfulness, and undergoing various spiritual purifications. Engaging in these actions can contribute to the potential for positive immortality projects and guarantee the existence of future generations of humans and our connections with non-human entities. As stated by Wallin (2013), if death is not seen as a finality, the concept of death becomes meaningless. His argument suggests that death is not a complete cessation of existence. By mentioning this caveat, we emphasize the importance of conducting a comprehensive analysis of TMT in its broader context. From this analysis, it can be inferred that individuals may adopt a subconscious approach to material acquisition or develop a shopping addiction to shield themselves from anxiety. However, the opposite may be the case in societies where spirituality or religion plays a significant role in shaping perspectives on life. Thus, the idea presented by TMT may not universally apply. The inclination towards spirituality and the afterlife is prevalent in African kingdoms, nations, and many regions of Asia, where individuals seek solace and a sense of sublimity in the face of death anxiety. The transference of anxiety and despair has become so pervasive among Nigerian youths that they have resorted to practicing voodoo spirituality and rituals in an attempt to alleviate their despair and seek solutions to their problems.

Boko-Haram, a Defining Case for TMT

By conducting a comprehensive analysis of the intricate connections present in the field of TMT, we can obtain valuable knowledge regarding the ongoing problem of religious extremism and the subsequent wave of terror imposed by the Boko Haram Islamic sect in Nigeria. Over the past decade, starting from 2009, Nigeria has experienced a significant transformation that starkly contrasts its long-held reputation as a deeply religious nation. Despite the teachings of both Christianity and Islam, peace has become elusive in the country. Due to the disturbingly high

occurrence of terrorist attacks in Nigeria, which frequently involved shootings, beheadings, bomb blasts, and kidnappings, the Nigerian population has become desensitized to these violent incidents, causing them to be no longer considered breaking news. Soyinka (2007) notes that fanaticism has a significant impact on the dissemination of fear, emphasizing that the language employed during religious debates has the potential to incite hysteria and is rapidly emerging as the most potent means of causing harm in contemporary society (p.76). Through a careful examination of Russel's (1957) analysis of religion as a mega-machine of fear, individuals can acquire significant and valuable insights into the deep-seated existential motivations that fuel the rise of violent extremism in Nigeria. Religion, according to Russel, is

> based primarily and mainly upon fear. It is partly the terror of the unknown and the wish to feel that you have a kind of elder brother who will stand by you in all your troubles and disputes. Fear is the basis of the whole thing—fear of the mysterious, fear of defeat, fear of death. (Russel, 1957 p. 22)

Although Becker's (1975) analysis of historical demonism may not have fully considered the influence of religion, the conclusions derived from it strongly suggest that when demonism is intertwined with religious frameworks, its impact on collective memories and burial sites of humankind has been far-reaching and significant. The impact of this surpasses the toll of deaths caused by prevalent issues such as anxiety and societal despair, including suicides, which are unfortunately all too common. Religion firmly establishes its power to rescue and liberate the lost soul seeking salvation. While it may be accurate in some instances, throughout history, we have consistently observed religious devotees perpetuating the dangerous act of dehumanization. Friedrich Nietzsche (as cited in May 2009) expresses strong criticism of the role of religion and raises concerns about its ability to bring moral reforms and long-lasting peace for humanity. According to Friedrich Nietzsche, religion is criticized for its role in devaluing our world and promoting a focus on the supernatural and a higher existence. Nietzsche's critique of morality is exemplified through the parable of the madman, wherein he expresses his discontentment with the institution of religion, famously proclaiming the *death of God.* Anti-religion enthusiasts frequently utilize the cynical aphorism, often taking it out of context. Nietzsche uses this aphorism to highlight the pervasive decline in spiritual awareness and the abandonment of godly virtues not only within society at large but also among religious leaders, who are seen as becoming monstrous in their influence over humanity. The absence of God in the hearts of individuals leads to a decline in their inclination to think positively about others, suggesting that without the presence of God, people are more likely to entertain negative or harmful thoughts about their fellow human beings. In response to his frustration, Nietzsche longed for the appearance of an overman/superman who could introduce a new system of values that aligns with the principles of being "faithful to the earth."

Nietzsche's aphorism seems to apply to Jamā’at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-J (Boko-Haram), an Islamic sect. The main goal they have is to establish an Islamic caliphate in Nigeria, and they are entirely dedicated to accomplishing this objective by carrying out jihad, which mainly entails focusing on non-Muslims as their targets. It is important to note that their actions have had consequences not only for non-Muslims but also for a large number of Muslims. According to Buhari (2020), it is unfortunate that the reality is that a significant majority, around 90 percent, of the victims of Boko Haram have been Muslims. Since 2009, the Global terrorism report has documented a staggering loss of over 18,000 lives. Boko Haram, the murderous extremist sect

from Nigeria, has unleashed a wave of terror and caused countless deaths, embodying the fear that seeks to bind and obscure the world. Ultimately, their actions foster an environment devoid of compassion and humanity. The repugnant inclination of religiously devout individuals to commit wicked acts in the presence of opposing beliefs serves as a striking and conclusive example that reinforces the assumption made by TMT. This assumption suggests that men, to safeguard their worldview, engage in defensive compensatory actions, which can include the enactment of death and destruction. According to Solomon (2011), the concept of human destructiveness is proposed as an intrinsic component of the human condition, suggesting that it is an inherent trait that coexists with the human experience of being alive. In his study, Cook (2018) explores the tactics employed by Mohammed Yusuf, the founder of Boko-Haram, as he analyzes how the doctrine of fear was utilized to rationalize participation in acts of violence as a means of seeking retribution and spreading their ideology through the act of proselytization. Mohammed Yusuf said:

> It does not escape any Muslim, upon whom Allah has bestowed understanding, the severity of the Jews' and Christians' enmity towards the Muslims. They will never stop their onslaught on Islam and Muslims day and night. They have taken different measures and attempted to find every means to wreak havoc on the Muslims. They want to remove the Muslims from their religion of truth towards the abyss of misguidance. They fought Muslims with weapons for many years during the time of colonial rule. Then, they came to teach the lessons of skepticism in the minds of Muslims about their religion, their Quran and their Prophet Muhammed. (Mohammed Yusuf, p.17)

By expressing *fear* and reflecting on *mortality*, the former leader of Boko Haram strengthens the evidence obtained from earlier research, suggesting that individuals who rely on their cultural worldview as a means of protection from thoughts of death may experience increased awareness of these thoughts when their cultural constructs are undermined. The significance of individuals' convictions is underscored when they firmly believe in their religious worldview as an absolute reality, leading to a more pronounced impact of this effect. Although I acknowledge the importance of political and economic factors in contributing to the rise of extremism, it is crucial to undertake a thorough examination of the interrelationship between TMT and the mechanisms of radicalization, extremism, and terrorism. This analysis offers us an exclusive opportunity to explore innovative approaches to counter the menace of terrorism, surpassing the customary methods of politics, economics, and military campaigns. Given each participant's diverse perspectives and worldviews, it is crucial to have a deep understanding of the complexity of finding solutions to terrorism, as it is far from a straightforward task. If TMT is not placed within its appropriate context, it may be perceived as a worldview. One way to prevent TMT from being perceived as a worldview is to examine it critically within specific situational contexts. To ensure that potential conflicts are effectively addressed, handling and resolving the intricate dynamics of inter-group cultural conflicts with great care is of utmost importance. It is essential to carefully consider the actions taken to address these conflicts, as failing to do so may unintentionally lead to feelings of hopelessness or, in more severe cases, existential despair.

TMT has the potential to mitigate prejudices that may arise due to differences in worldview, in addition to its significant role in tackling intergroup conflict. The framework provided by TMT is precious as it allows us to effectively manage our despair and confront the anxiety we experience regarding our worldview. Recognizing the presence of a conflict of interest and differing worldviews is the crucial first step in finding a resolution. According to Sega (1994),

it is crucial to acknowledge and comprehend that we are merely a tiny entity within the expansive worldview of Earth. Nevertheless, despite being small, we must constructively influence humanity and future generations. TMT practitioners must recognize and promote the accountability of individuals for the effects their worldviews have on our collective humanity. This accountability encompasses not only ordinary individuals going about their daily lives but also those in various roles and professions. The TMT theory highlights the importance of understanding that hatred and violence cannot be solely attributed to demonic despots (Solomon, 2011). Ibrahim Shekarau, along with a small group of Boko Haram leaders, is widely attributed to be responsible for the relentless and dehumanizing attacks in Nigeria. If his followers adopt a more tolerant worldview, the impact of the carnage's tone could be significantly diminished. Without a broad-minded and accepting audience, terrorism will undoubtedly encounter significant challenges in its struggle to survive. To tackle this issue, TMT recommends fostering and promoting a mindset emphasizing tolerance's significance is crucial. Suppose we consistently remind ourselves and one another about the importance of tolerance. In that case, we can decrease the need for defensive actions to safeguard our worldviews from potential threats (Solomon, 2011, p.3). In light of the prevailing atmosphere characterized by radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism, the role of TMT becomes increasingly significant as it helps shape governments' responses to these heinous and cowardly acts.

Previous research conducted by Solomon (2011) strongly supports the idea that terrorist motivations frequently stem from feelings of low self-worth, which can be a result of either actual or perceived humiliation. The absence of self-esteem or self-worth can become evident in two separate stages, occurring both prior to the process of radicalization and throughout one's involvement as a combatant in acts of terrorism. Ignoring extremists can have profound psychological consequences, as it can result in feelings of shame and humiliation within the individual. Consequently, these emotions can instigate a heightened threat towards one's religious beliefs. Thus, Individuals can use defensive compensatory actions to negotiate and protect themselves. Merleau-Ponty's (1962) argument reminds us that our senses should not be seen as separate entities or mere fragments of information but as interconnected aspects of our perception. Rather than separate entities, they are deeply intertwined with our physical beings and dynamic relationships. We must recognize and embrace our inherent sensory and emotional nature, as they play a vital role in our existence within the world, and we must not undermine or overlook their significance. To combat and counter violent extremism effectively, it is crucial that the government not only assert its authority but also place utmost importance on the larger objectives of peace and humanity, avoiding the excessive exercise of power and authority.

Boko Haram Discourse and the Matrices of Terror Management

The year 2002 marks the emergence of Boko Haram. Mohammed Yusuf founded this militant group and went on to become a prominent force under his spiritual leadership until his demise in 2009. In the year 2009, Boko Haram went through a significant transformation, evolving from its original state into a violent jihadist movement. This transformation occurred due to intense clashes between the group's members and the security forces, ultimately shaping their ideology and tactics. The clashes between the group and state security ultimately led to the untimely demise of the founder. He was publicly executed right outside the police headquarters, which garnered a significant amount of attention (HRW, 2015). In the aftermath of the intense clashes, a report released by the Red Cross revealed the shocking discovery of 780 bodies that had been found on the streets of Maiduguri. These bodies were then disrespectfully laid to rest in mass graves (Red Cross report, 2009). The clashes that occurred prompted Boko Haram, with Abubakar Shekau at

its helm, to undergo a profound transformation and eventually emerge as the notorious violent jihadist movement that is widely known today (Zen, 2019). Despite the significant influence exerted by Muslim fundamentalists in Boko Haram's formative years, the group's initial intentions were not inclined toward violence. Except for the Kannamma crisis in 2004, the sect peacefully carried out its activities for a span of seven years leading up to 2009. The group consistently tried to establish peace by extending overtures to the government on multiple occasions; however, their attempts were disregarded, leaving the conflicts unresolved (Walker, 2012). There is no doubt that the experience of rejection was highly embarrassing, causing not only a loss of faith and hope but also revealing a vulnerability in their previously perceived protective facade. The peace and negotiation initiative of the group before 2009 can be understood from the incident narratives of Murtada as cited in Shuaibu & Salleh (2015) below:

> The present Boko Haram crisis started in 2009; at that time, there was new government legislation for motorcycle riders to wear helmets. The government of Borno state gave the police the order to enforce the use of the helmet as part of the operation "flush out." The members of the sect went out on motorcycles for a funeral without wearing a helmet. The police stopped the sect for breaching local law. As a result, there was a clash between the police and the sect members. Consequently, the conflict led to the death of four members of the sect. Around eighteen of the members were injured. Yusuf became angered and wrote his famous tirade entitled 'An Open Letter to the Federal Government' in which he threatened the government and urged them to respond within forty days with the view to a resolution between the government and the group. If not, then the 'jihadi' operation will begin in the country in which only Allah can stop it. Consequently, after forty days, the ultimatum elapsed, and the government did not respond to the situation; according to some analysts, the group members started preparing strategies and plans for war. After this incident, the leaders of the sect continued preaching about Jihad and army confrontation (p.92)

The incident report above undergoes analysis using the TMT matrices, which incorporate mortality salience, shame/humiliation, and self-esteem/self-worth.

Mortality Salience: A clash erupted between the police and the sect, leading to multiple casualties. Among the victims was Mohammed Yusuf, the sect's leader, who tragically met his fate through a summary execution. The leader's death set off a chain of events that eventually led to a conflict between the police and the sect members, ultimately resulting in the devastating loss of multiple lives belonging to the sect. With their leader gone and the tragic loss of several members, the group now finds itself in a state of palpable fear and the looming threat of destruction. Consequently, a compensatory defensive action arises among them because of the emergence of a psychological phenomenon known as mortality salience

Shame and Humiliation: Following the violent clashes, The Red Cross released a distressing report revealing that a shocking number of 780 bodies had been found on the streets of Maiduguri. The sect displayed a profound sense of shame and humiliation as they witnessed their fellow sect members being laid to rest in mass graves. One important lesson that we can take away from this experience is that treating all individuals with respect, even in challenging situations, is an essential aspect of our humanity. The application of peace initiatives often needs to be strengthened by avoiding the mistaken use of adversarial approaches, which can reproduce violent consequences.

Loss of Self-Esteem/Self-worth: To resolve conflicts, the group attempted to reconcile with the government, but regrettably, their sincere peace offerings were utterly disregarded, leading to a profound sense of loss regarding their self-esteem and self-worth. If the peace overtures made by disputants are consistently ignored, it becomes increasingly challenging to achieve peace and reconciliation. By considering how our actions can affect people's emotions, we can work towards developing a more compassionate and considerate approach when interacting with individuals with contrasting worldviews.

By conducting a simple thematic analysis, it would be evident that the Islamic group's members developed a strong focus on the awareness of mortality, resulting in a deep sense of fear regarding their possible destruction. The members of the sect found themselves faced with reminders of mortality, which served as a constant reinforcement of their impermanence. As a result, they embraced the article of Jihad as a compensatory action, seeking a sense of immortality. Unfortunately, the government continues to ignore them, ultimately leaving them vulnerable to the expected and unavoidable consequences of the immense power wielded by the federal military. Not only are they facing the imminent threat of annihilation, but their religion/worldview and pursuit of immortality are also being challenged, making their mortality an even more pressing concern. Greenberg & Kosloff (2008) posit that "to maintain psychological security despite the awareness of personal mortality, humans must maintain faith in cultural worldviews. These worldviews provide ways for humans to believe they are significant enduring beings in a world of meaning rather than mere animals fated only to obliteration upon death"(Greenberg & Kosloff, 2008, p.1881).

The Nigerian authorities' decision to disregard the peace offerings made by the Islamic sect was not only shame-inducing but also had a detrimental effect on the sect's self-esteem and worth, tearing it apart. Extensive research has consistently shown that shame is strongly associated with various negative psychological states, including but not limited to anger, irritability, resentment, and aggression (Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Stuewig et al; 2010). Based on anecdotal accounts of school shootings, Stuewig et al. (2010) suggest that shame may serve as a root cause of specific acts of violence. According to the authors, individuals who experience intense feelings of shame and guilt may be more prone to engaging in aggressive behaviour. Based on research, it has been found that the ability to anticipate and respond to life-threatening situations is considered a subjective indicator of human intelligence, as indicated by the occurrence of massacres where individuals who were unable to resist were targeted. (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006 p.817). Activating compensatory defensive action is the sole means by which they can preserve and restore their psychological security, pride, and worldview, all of which are in jeopardy. Nigerian authorities considered Muhammad Yusuf, the founder and leader of the group, to be dangerous. However, it was his murder that sparked the violent uprising, which is now known under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau (St-Pierre, 2015). This event is considered one of the root causes of the ongoing terrorism in Nigeria, resulting in the loss of more than 18,000 lives.

If the government had prioritized actions that promoted the self-esteem and self-worth of the militant group, what impact would that have had on the situation? Solomon et al. (2015) suggest that "self-esteem keeps the physiological arousal associated with anxiety in check, and it is felt deeply in our bodies" (p.45). The potential impact of feeling worthy of ourselves is that it can lessen our death anxiety. On the other hand, when self-worth is undermined, the situation is quite the opposite. When it comes to the Boko-Haram incident, there is no denying that the act of killing the sect members and subsequently burying their bodies in mass graves is incredibly dehumanizing. Research shows that dehumanized group members self-exclude from the moral

community and feel no obligation to apply moral standards that are reserved for the *fully human* (Castano & Giner-Sorolla, 2006) and that "dehumanization of a target increases aggressive behaviour and is related to other aspects of moral disengagement" (p.805).

While it may appear that adopting a TMT approach centred on sufferance and tolerance diminishes power and authority, it holds the potential to restore and mend the strained relationship between the extremist sect and the federal government. Terror Management Theory (TMT) has demonstrated that individuals' efforts to deal with the awareness of their mortality can have detrimental consequences for both the individual and society at large (Vail et al., 2019). According to van Kessel (2020), recognizing and transforming TMT into a means of liberation is paramount. To effectively address brewing radicalization and violent extremism, it is crucial to recognize the threat and employ strategies that prevent triggering feelings of humiliation, thoughts of death, and low self-worth in individuals' subconscious minds. It is essential to adopt approaches that minimize harm to others. Solomon et al. (2015) note that one effective way to ensure respect and foster a sense of self-esteem and self-worth is by addressing the personal anecdotes of both groups and individuals.

A Critical Approach to TMT

While I approach TMT from a theoretical standpoint and acknowledge its value in offering various perspectives for navigating the world, particularly in addressing anxiety and violent projections, I strongly advocate for a critical approach that establishes a clear vision for how TMT should be practically engaged. Although there are many assumptions in TMT, it is essential to remember that they cannot simply be used as a one-size-fits-all approach in every context. Following Vaandering (2010), if a critical TMT is followed, it would entail adopting a holistic approach that enables the interrogation and examination of various contexts. This approach aims to enhance the awareness of practitioners and researchers in the field, providing them with the necessary knowledge to navigate through different crises based on historical, ontological/axiological, and cognitive epistemological milieu. When Solomon, Greenberg, and Pyszczynski (2015) propose placing our psychological eggs in different baskets, they are implying the importance of actively engaging with various strategies to enhance our ability to respond effectively to existential threats for ourselves and others. In order to determine which basket is the correct one, it is necessary to examine and investigate the prevailing sense of fear thoroughly. TMT can open up possibilities that are tailor-made for specific situations. It operates within a framework that strongly emphasizes the influential role of emotions and personal and intercultural experiences. Vivekananda (1893), in *The Bliss of Discerning Wisdom*, suggests that prioritizing the transcendent over theory is essential. He believes that while the intellect can undoubtedly inspire us in positive ways, it is the heart - a realm of emotions and compassion - that the world desperately requires. As a result:

> When there is a conflict between the heart and the brain, let the heart be followed because intellect has only one state, reason, and within that intellect works and cannot get beyond. It is the heart which takes one to the highest plane, which intellect can never reach; it goes beyond the intellect and reaches what is called inspiration (Vivekananda, 1893 p. 332)

To help society avoid the vulnerability of radicalization, extremism, sectarianism, bigotry, and fanaticism, TMT argues for acceptance of difference by orienting and priming on values that accept rather than reject others. Therefore, adherents of different religions must embrace harmony by assimilating and accepting the freedom of the other and yet preserve their individuality and growth, fostering spirituality. As part of our mortality project, Greenberg & Kosloff (2008) suggest

that "we bring up our children to sustain faith in worldviews that place a high value on tolerance and appreciation for others' uniqueness (p. 1891). In the face of radicalization and violent extremism, the *commanding height* of conflict management and response should be TMT values that advance relationships to restore and promote acceptance and harmony. At the level of religious communities, houses of worship must be a place of meaning, well-being for its members, service for humanity, and building interpersonal and intercultural relationships. The relationship is the future of humanity because of its capacity to reshape the chaotic affordances of the present world. Our highest security is a healthy community (Graham, 2008). The essence of the community is brought to life by relationships as an underlying terror management schema that brings meaning into our lives. Graham (2008) articulates that

> when we speak about a person who has come into conflict in life, it is impossible to talk about them without referring to the absence of positive emotional articulacy and healthy life-affirming relationships. Radicalization, violent extremism, terrorism, and other forms of inter-ethnic conflicts "are about the denigration, the deterioration, and ultimately the neglect of relationships" (Graham, 2008 p. 4).

Fear, an innate reaction in humans, plays a vital role in ensuring our survival and the continuity of our species through its ability to help us identify and react to possible dangers. Fear, as a robust phenomenon, allows us to reflect and reevaluate our actions, ultimately guiding us away from the path toward an apocalyptic realm of terror and horror. Acknowledging that fear can have a positive side brings me joy. According to Terror Management Theory (TMT), individuals who are aware of how the fear of death impacts their behaviour can consciously choose to engage in acts of kindness and find meaning in their own lives and in their communities. The TMT project brings about a sense of hope in this direction.

The Reversible Politics of Fear

I am concerned that the evolutionary attribute of fear, which once served as a vital survival mechanism, has now transformed into a detrimental inclination towards self-destruction and has intricately woven itself into a fear-inducing system, which is further perpetuated by the mechanisms of globalizing and hegemonic ambition of Western powers. Fear has transformed into a symbolic representation of various political transactions. Mastering the *politics of fear* has become an act of statecraft, especially for leaders who embody power to gain supremacy and dominance. The Western powers find a sense of heroism by instilling fear in others through the accumulation of weapons of mass destruction. However, when other countries acquire similar powers of mass destruction, it evokes a sense of fear and a chilling reminder of death.

The metaphor discussed in this context can be reversed, leading to the emergence of global competition aimed at achieving superiority. As a result, the continuous escalation of revenge can lead to more extreme forms of violence, ultimately hindering the achievement of global world peace (Pyszczynski et al., 2008, p. 322). As Pyszczynski et al. (2008) notes, we often fail to realize how the Western appetite for dominance and empery encourages "antagonistic attitudes in the words and actions of terrorists who speak of cleansing the world of "infidels" and refer to America as the "Great Satan," (p.320). Globally, establishing a justice framework that operates from top to bottom can catalyze inspiring feelings of security and confidence. Thus, a path to peace may begin when political and religious world leaders start emphasizing our commonalities as human beings (p.322).

Conclusion

In order to save the Earth from an existential threat, all individuals, including ordinary people, must demonstrate a deep commitment. Through this shared commitment, we can forge a path towards a renewed comprehension of a sustainable Earth, where peace and the well-being of all beings, including our non-human relations, take centre stage. This commitment is eloquently explained by Sagan (1994) in his renowned *pale blue dot* speech below:

> The Earth is a tiny stage in a vast cosmic arena. Think of the rivers of blood spilled by all those generals and emperors so they could become the momentary masters of a fraction of a dot in glory and triumph. Think of the endless cruelties visited by the inhabitants of one corner of this pixel on the scarcely distinguishable inhabitants of some other corner. How frequent their misunderstandings, how eager they are to kill one another, how fervent their hatred. This point of *pale light* challenges our posturing imagined self-importance, and the delusion that we have some privileged position in the universe. Our planet is a lonely speck in the great enveloping cosmic dark. In our obscurity – in all this vastness – there is no hint that help will come from elsewhere to save us from ourselves. For the moment, the Earth is where we make our stand. It has been said that astronomy is a humbling and character-building experience. Perhaps there is no better demonstration of the folly of human conceits than this distant image of our tiny world. It underscores our responsibility to deal kindlier with one another and preserve and cherish the pale blue dot, the only home we have ever known (Segan, 1994 YouTube)

The act of terror has the power to unleash devastating consequences, potentially resulting in an apocalypse that would render the earth ungovernable, unliveable, and, in the worst-case scenario, on the brink of destruction. The ability to manage predisposing factors of terror is not only a necessary leadership quality but also a skill that must be developed by ordinary citizens in order to prevent the self-annihilation of humanity. The Terror Management Theory (TMT) provides valuable insights into the scientific understanding of the complex dynamics that underlie acts of terror and violence. This tool has proven to be highly beneficial in effectively addressing conflicts without causing harm or escalating the situation. When the intellectual wrappings of TMT are removed and replaced with a framework that highlights the importance of relationships and global connectedness, there is a certainty that more powerful effects will emerge, thus giving rise to the anecdotes that render the world ungovernable. No matter where it occurs, terrorism has far-reaching global consequences and influences. Hence, we must acknowledge terrorism as a worldwide issue and, in response, implement measures and initiatives that exemplify principles of fairness, justice, and equality. These actions should not only affirm the self-worth of individuals but also respect the dignity of those who possess perspectives or ideologies different from ours. I anticipate this as the initial step towards a transformed earth.

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If tomorrow comes. I will show you

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If tomorrow comes,
When we come together again,
I will show you.

The beauty of the sunrise when everything feels dark,
The brightness of the sky,
When everything feels gloomy,
The clarity of clouds when everything feels vague.

The transience of the wind,
When everything feels constant,
And the simplicity of life,
When everything feels complicated.

When we come together again
If ever there is a chance; I will show you,
The secret and beauty of each and every moment.

When we come together again,
If ever there is a chance.

Can NGO's Promote Social Justice and Equity: A case study of rural Ghana

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Abstract: *This research explores the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in promoting educational equity in rural communities in the Gomoa West District of Ghana. The study investigated issues such as strategies employed by NGOs to promote educational equity in rural communities, impact of NGO interventions on the educational outcomes of rural communities, challenges faced by NGOs in promoting educational equity in rural communities as well as sustainable model to aid NGO's in promoting educational equity in rural communities of Ghana. The investigation was purely qualitative study. The participants were NGO staff, community and opinion leaders, teachers, and students. Interview guide protocol was adopted to gather the information from the participants. In all eight participants were interviewed. The study confirms that the GNOs apply different strategies in promoting of educational equality in the rural communities of Gomoa West District of Ghana.*

Introduction

According to that report UNESCO (2015), most of the NGOs work to alleviate poverty, improve social welfare, and develop civil society. As a result, the NGOs have become more dependent on

international donors leading to an explosive growth in local NGOs in many countries including Ghana cited in (Eliasu, 2017). More and more, a UNICEF (2014) report noted that donors use international and local NGOs for education service-delivery in both formal and non-formal sectors.

During the last decade, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) have been increasingly tapped to implement development programs in Ghana. In the context of decentralization in Ghana NGOs are creating new spaces for civil society involvement in education (UNO, 2015). Education for All (EFA) meetings in Johannesburg and Dakar in 2013 recognized the vital role NGOs play in promoting universal and equitable quality of basic education. The EFA discussions have heralded NGOs' new roles as alternative education providers, innovators and advocates; policy dialogue partners and donors have begun to engage in technical and institutional capacity-building programs for local NGOs.

Most countries in Africa including Ghana with a donor-supported program for the education sector have NGOs playing a significant role in basic education (Eliasu, 2017). This trend can also be found in the education sector especially in basic education sector where most major donor agencies have increased the resources allocated through NGOs to improve access to basic education. NGOs in Ghana have not limited their education activities to service-delivery. They are also involved in lobbying and advocating for educational reforms, working individually and through networks to participate in policy dialogue in many African countries including Ghana (Eliasu, 2017).

A myriad of justifications and assumptions can be found throughout the development literature as to why NGOs in Ghana should play a growing role in the education sector, many that mirror the argument to increase the role of NGOs more in the basic sector of education. NGOs work at the community-level thus affecting social change where others cannot. NGOs can represent and catalyze civil society, an element many consider critical for sustainability and democratization (Bishop & Noguera, 2019).

Education is crucial for personal development, social progress, and economic growth. However, access to quality education is a challenge in many developing countries, particularly in rural areas. The Gomoa West District in Ghana is one of the many rural communities in the country where access to quality education is limited, affecting the academic performance of students, and ultimately hindering their socio-economic development. NGOs have been actively involved in promoting educational equity in rural areas of Ghana by providing resources, infrastructure, and support to enhance teaching and learning. The purpose of this research is to explore the role of NGOs in promoting educational equity in rural communities in the Gomoa West District of Ghana.

During the most recent decade, NGOs have progressively been associated with executing development programmes (Dilevko, 2018). They play a critical role in service delivery and have been deemed as strategic affiliates of the public sector (Adu-Baffoe & Bonney, 2021). It is no doubt that a lot is required to explain such a sudden shift of attention from the state apparatus to NGOs as the panacea for alleviating our development challenges (Calix Figueroa, 2021). It is worth noting that the sudden recognition of NGOs role in development could largely be attributed to the global recognition of the urgent need to eradicate poverty (Dilevko, 2018).

Despite efforts to improve education access in Ghana, rural communities like Gomoa West continue facing disparities. Though NGOs have been promoting equity, their impact is unclear. The core issue is determine inputs to yield desired educational outcomes for all children. Globally, NGOs have long operated to supposedly further quality education. However,

interventions seem ineffective or misguided given poor examination performance. This research therefore explores NGOs role in promoting rural educational equity in this district, whether they have significantly helped quality and access. Overall, have NGO fulfilled their mission here and what explains continued educational deficiencies?

The main purpose of the research is investigate the Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Promoting Educational Equity in Rural Communities in the Gomoa West District of Ghana.

Literature Review

Educational equity means that each child receives what it needs to develop to its full academic and social potential (Levinson et al., 2022). Ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants in our educational system; removing the predictability of success or failures that currently correlates with any social or cultural factor. Interrupting inequitable practices, examining biases, and creating inclusive multicultural school environments for adults and children; and, discovering and cultivating the unique gifts and talents and interests that every human possesses (Katz-Amey, 2019). Ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants in our educational system; removing the predictability of success or failures that currently correlates with any social or cultural factor; Interrupting inequitable practices, examining biases, and creating inclusive multicultural school environments for adults and children; and discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents, and interests that every human possesses (Sturgis & Casey, 2018).

Educational equity, also known as equity in education, is a measure of achievement, fairness, and opportunity in education (Alcott et al. 2018; Levinson et al. 2022). The study of education equity is often linked with the research of excellence and equity. Educational equity depends on two main factors. The first is fairness, which implies that factors specific to one's personal conditions should not interfere with the potential of academic success (Buchholtz et al., 2020). The second factor is inclusion, which refers to a comprehensive standard that applies to everyone in a certain education system. These two factors are closely related and depend on each other for an educational system's success.

Educational equity's growing importance is based on the premise that a person's level of education directly correlates with their quality of life and that an academic system that practices educational equity is thus a strong foundation for a fair and thriving society (Banwo et al., 2022). However, inequity in education is hard to avoid because of inequities in socioeconomic standing, race, gender, and disability. Educational equity also operates in a historical context.

To the extent that quality education remains crucial, the Dakar Framework for Action set at the World Education Forum in 2000 established an ambitious six plan Education for All (EFA) goals to be achieved by 2015. In relation to the goal of achieving access to education. There has been an improvement in net enrolment ratios with more children enrolled in school during the last decade in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).

However, among the poorest children the chance of completing primary education still remains low. The inability of most children in developing countries to get access to better quality education impedes the fulfillment of their right to quality education, which is enshrined in the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC, 1989). According to UNCRC (1989), children have the right to quality education and these rights and other rights of need are to be protected and promoted in all circumstances. The Government of Ghana has shown enormous commitment to the achievement of “Education for All” (EFA) through its poverty reduction strategy. Central to the Government of Ghana’s (GoG) Poverty Reduction Strategy (GPRS) is the provision of quality education.

In addition, through the GPRS, the GoG affirmed its commitment to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. The Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) has four thematic areas outlined in its Education Strategic Plan (ESP), which was meant to achieve the MDGs. These are equitable access, quality of education, educational management, and science and technology. One of the policy goals under the quality of education is to improve the quality of teaching and learning for enhanced pupil/student achievement. The international community (Education Sector Performance Report, 2004) has acknowledged the comprehensive nature of Ghana's education strategy.

Theoretical Framework

The Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education theories by Robeyns (2021) which the research relied on stresses the need to involve all partners or stakeholders assisting in education in designing programmes and activities. These stakeholders include the NGOs, the pupils, parents, and teachers in order to ensure social justice and parity in basic education.

The Capability Approach and Social Justice in Education theories by Akala (2019) envisages that when both girls and boys are treated equally at home and at school and given equal opportunities in policy implementation in basic education, girls are capable of closing the disparity gap which has existed in Africa for decades. Kimhur (2020) defines capability as a person's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being; it represents the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be. Thus, capabilities are opportunities or freedoms to achieve what an individual reflectively considers valuable.

The significance of this idea rests on its contrast with other ideas concerning how we decide what is just or fair in the distribution of resources. For example, some ideas about distribution rest on what an outsider determines is the best to create maximum opportunities or achieve appropriate outcomes for say, different kinds of schools or pupils. The capability approach thus offers a broad theory to conceptualize and evaluate individual well-being and social arrangements in any particular context or society. It is not a complete theory of justice, but it deals with questions of the balance between freedom and equality that have characterized work on social justice since the late eighteenth century. Parrouffe (2020) asks the core question, "Equality of what?" As he explains, all egalitarian theories that have stood the test of time pose the issue of equality of something, for example, of income, welfare levels, rights, or liberties. In education, this question emerges in sociological work on how to theorize and analyze the provision of equivalent learning opportunities for both girls and boys.

There is nothing to show that men have capabilities more than women, but the question then is why there is disparity in educational opportunities and attainments? The choice of the space in which to assess equality determines what equality we prioritize. We could prioritize equalizing education in every country and thus place equality in education in the space of evaluation (Walker et al., 2019).

Walker argues that what we should equalize is not resources, for example, a strict ratio of teachers (both male and female) to pupils, or a certain amount of expenditure per capita on each pupil, (both boys and girls) and not outcomes, for example, that every child leaves school with a particular qualification.

The author writes that what should be equalized are human capabilities, that is, what people are able to be and to do which the author thinks both men and women have equal capabilities in education and in all sectors of the economy. Crucial to this is the process for people to come to decisions about what they have reason to value in education, or any other aspect of social action. Thus, the expansion of human capability involves "the freedoms people

actually enjoy choosing the lives that they have reason to value" (walker et al., 2019). People should be able to make choices that matter to them for a valuable life. The notion of capability is essentially one of freedom; the range of options a person has in deciding what kind of life to lead.

Therefore, women should not be left behind as second-class citizens in any country (Duda-Mikulin, 2023). Capabilities might then also be explained as actions one values doing or approaches to living one's values. In assessing the global social justice in education, Duda-Mikulin, (2023) further argues that there is the need to consider not only international patterns of access to education and very narrowly defined achievement in education, but also the distribution of other aspects of education deemed valuable, particularly, given the complex global class, especially, gender and ethnic inequalities. He explained that the Millennium Development Goals have their targets as well as the Education for All (EFA). The concerns are not whether the targets have been met or whether targeting is the appropriate approach in basic education, but the concern is whether there is social justice in education. He explained that the Millennium Development Goals have their targets as well as the Education for All (EFA). The concerns are not whether the targets have been met or whether targeting is the appropriate approach in basic education, but the concern is whether there is social justice in education.

The question is, are these targets having any social relation with all the stakeholders - parents, teachers, pupils, and the NGOs? In explaining social justice further, Caliskan (2020) again provided a very useful way given the complexity of the diverse societies in the world to think about social justice in education. He added that investing in education for boys and girls is justified by its benefits not for them but for society. This approach does not look at whether a girl or a boy has been discriminated against in the provision of education because according to Caliskan (2020), education is not for an individual, but it is for the larger grouping - the community, the nation, and the future generation.

Cox et al. (2020) concluded that gender inequality in education could not be fully addressed by any single approach; the complexity and import of social justice suggest that all the stakeholders in education - the parents, teachers, pupils, and the government and all relevant stakeholders like the NGOs must complement each other for policy and practice. This theory is crucial to the research since the research is based on educational equality in the research area. Provision of educational resources can be the means, but not the intrinsic end of human wellbeing and not an end to disparity in enrolment of education.

In the current research taking the various variables thus strategies, impact challenges and designing a model the research develops a conceptual framework. Taking the activities of the NGOs in the promoting of equal education, there is the need for the adoption of strategies; these strategies if properly implemented would impact on the process while imparting on the process there may be possible challenges.

Framework Model

Models help to establish facts and predict or explain why things happen or do not happen. The adoption of a model or part of it in research depicts a theoretical framework. The espousal of two or more models in a single research depicts a conceptual framework (Ngulube 2018).

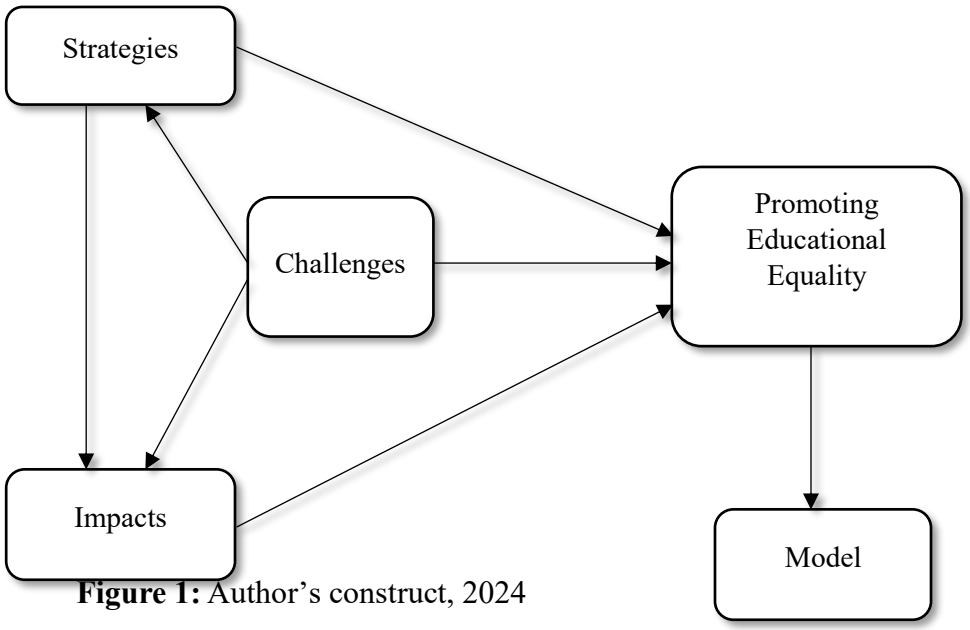

Figure 1: Author's construct, 2024

To over the challenges there must be measures to reduce or maximize the obstacles in the process of promoting equal education or provision of equality with respect to education. In this regard, a model that stipulates the step-by-step approach to the achievement of educational equality would be developed. The conceptual framework shows the relationship between the variables thus the independent (strategies, impact, developing a model and the dependent variable thus promoting educational equality.

Methodology

The nature and target population of the research, the researcher would be using a descriptive survey. The research would adopt qualitative research methods for data collection and analysis. The research would utilize exploratory and descriptive research designs. These methods help in providing extra information where limited information exists and also help in identifying gaps in existing literature (Mengist et al., 2020). In qualitative research, exploratory studies often involve questions that seek to understand a phenomenon, generate hypotheses, or explore a topic with limited prior research. Exploratory qualitative research method would be employed in the research due to its flexibility. This method involves exploring other avenues of obtaining data without any strict restrictions and applications as in the case of quantitative research method (Mahdi et al., 2020).

Exploratory design relies on conducting in-depth interviews, case studies and pilot studies. The descriptive design also helps in investigating a social phenomenon without explicit expectations. The research will use a qualitative research approach, which is suitable for exploring complex social phenomena and the subjective experiences of individuals. The research will use semi-structured interviews to collect data from key stakeholders such as NGO staff in the area under research, community and opinion leaders, teachers, and students.

The group members in whom a researcher desires are referred to as the population (Casteel & Bridier 2021). The research would target NGO staff in the area under research, community and opinion leaders, teachers, and students. These stakeholders would be selected due to their experience or exposure or benefits from the operations of the NGO's on promoting educational equity in the area under research.

This research utilized the purposive sampling methods to select respondents who provided vital primary data on the topic for analysis. The research has a purpose, thus in investigating the role of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) in promoting educational equity in rural communities in the Gomoa West District of Ghana. Purposive sampling technique would be adopted to select the participant. In all ten (10) participants thus community and opinion leaders, NGO staff, teachers, and students. The purposive sampling would be adopted to select participants because of their relevant knowledge and experience on the role of NGOs in promoting educational equity in rural communities in the Gomoa West District.

A mixed methods approach combining semi-structured interviews and literature review provider's rich, multi-perspective data to address the research questions on NGO strategies and impact on educational equality. The interviews capture on the ground insights to complement the broader literature review

Thematic analysis is used to analyze the interview transcript to identify patterns and themes. The transcripts are read closely to become familiar with the data and notice themes. The data is coded by developing statements that capture concepts to be grouped into categories. The codes and categories form overarching themes that synthesize the essence of the data. The process organizes the data from low level inductively from the data and driven by the research questions. The analysis aims to provide an insight interpretation to address the research aims.

Discussion and Analysis

In all, eight (8) participants were interviewed. Out of which five (5) were females and three (3) were males. One (1) was a community and opinion leader. Two (2) were staff of NGOs. A community member. 2 teachers, and 2 students. Their ages ranged between 16 and 35. One was a Muslim, and the rest were Christians. Their educational levels were High School and 1ST Degree. Six (6) were married and 2 were singles. This composition aided in providing a more holistic and an in-depth analysis of the topic.

Strategies employed by NGOs to promote educational equity.

With respect to this objective, only NGO staffs were interviewed. NGOS represents the NGO Staff interviewed. NGOS1 represents the first NGO Staff interviewed and NGOS2 is the second NGO Staff interviewed. The participants were asked whether the NGOs employ strategies to promote educational equity in rural communities.

NGOS1 indicated that: *'Yes, NGOs employ several strategies to promote educational equity in rural communities.*

NGOS2 echoed: ''There are several strategies of promotion of educational equity that NGOs employ.''

Participants were also asked to mention and explain any of the strategies employed by NGOs to promote educational equity in rural communities.

According to NGOS1: "We *offer literacy and numeracy classes for younger children in the community to help them prepare for school.*

NGOS2 mentioned that: *'One strategy employed by NGOs to promote educational equity in rural communities is to target children in the communities based on their parents' income and provide them with support for their education. This support includes providing books and stationery, as well as offering literacy and numeracy classes for younger children to help them prepare for school. NGOs also work to support parents in their efforts to educate their children."*

A further question was asked that, to what extent would you agree that the strategies employed by NGOs to promote educational equity in rural communities is effective and Why?

NGOS1 noted: *"The strategies employed by NGOs to promote educational equity in rural communities have been effective to a significant extent. The support provided by the NGOs has helped beneficiaries to pursue education and acquire skills that can help them to fend for themselves. For example, one beneficiary was able to enter senior high school with the help of the NGOs' support, which has also encouraged her mother to help her siblings to pursue education."*

NGOS2 on the other hand indicated: *"Some beneficiaries have completed their apprenticeships and are now able to support themselves. The NGOs' social and emotional campaign, which involves getting to know the children by their names and making them feel loved, has helped the children to feel cared for."*

Impact of NGO interventions on the educational outcomes

Participants who were interviewed in respect to this objective were only students and teachers. T1 represents the teacher interviewed whiles S1 is the student interviewed. This question is to explore whether there is any effect from the NGO interventions on the educational outcomes in your communities? Explain with cases to justify your claim'

T1 responded thus: *'There is a positive effect of NGO interventions on educational outcomes in the community." Specifically, "the NGO organization CAMFED, which focuses on girls' education and empowerment in rural Africa, has shown positive effects on educational outcomes in the Gomoa West district. Girls who receive support from CAMFED are more likely to complete secondary school and achieve higher academic performances compared to their peers."* The interviewee also mentioned that their own school was not exempt from the positive impact of NGO interventions. While they do not provide specific cases, the interviewee's statement suggests that the positive effects of NGO interventions are not limited to a particular school or community, but rather are a broader trend observed in the district'. Overall, the interviewee's testimony suggests that NGO interventions can have a significant impact on educational outcomes in rural communities, particularly in promoting girls' education and empowerment.

S1 alluded: *'NGO interventions have had a positive impact on educational outcomes in the communities. Due to their support, students who were no longer attending school are encouraged to start schooling again."…"Moreover, the NGO interventions have led to a gender balance in education, with more females attending school than males. This is because NGOs*

provide more support to females in the community than males". However, the respondent also mentions that some children take things for granted and do not take their learning seriously due to the support of NGOs. Therefore, while there are positive effects of NGO interventions on educational outcomes, there may also be some unintended consequences. The following are the opinions of respondents when asked, 'What are some of the NGO interventions on educational equity in the communities?'

T1 mentioned: *"There are several NGO interventions on educational equity in rural communities".* These include: 'Vocational training and skills development, Remedial education and academic support, Scholarship and financial support, Infrastructure development. And Teacher training and capacity building. These interventions aim to address various challenges faced by rural communities in promoting educational equity, such as limited resources, lack of staff infrastructure, and limited government support by providing support in these areas, NGOs can help improve access to education and enhance the quality of education in rural communities.

S1 added:*"Some of the NGO interventions on educational equity in the communities include providing school uniforms, books, sandals, and sometimes money for the upkeep of the students. These interventions enable the children to have the necessary resources to attend school."* The opinions of the interviewees on the question, 'Any difference in the gender balance because of the promotion of educational equity? State and justify whether low or high in your communities are as follows. In response:

T1 said: *"There is a difference in the gender balance in the community due to the promotion of educational equity by NGOs. Specifically, the female population is now higher compared to previous years".* However, the interviewee does not provide specific data on whether the gender balance is low or high in the community. It is also important to note that the interviewee's testimony is based on their personal experience and observations and may not necessarily reflect the overall situation in the community. Overall, while the interviewee suggests that NGO interventions have had a positive impact on promoting gender equity in education, more data and research would be needed to determine the extent of this impact and whether the gender balance is low or high in the community.

S1 however stated: *There is a difference in the gender balance in the communities due to the promotion of educational equity by NGOs. The females in the community who attend schools are more than the males. This is because NGOs provide more support to females in the community than males. Therefore, the gender balance in education is high in the communities where NGOs promote educational equity'.*

Challenges faced by NGOs in promoting educational equity.

The interviewees for this objective comprised of a Community/Opinion Leader, Student, NGOs staff, and a Teacher. OL represents the Opinion Leader, S2 is the Student, NGOS1 is the NGO staff, and T1 is the Teacher. The respondents were asked, 'Do the NGOs face any challenges in your communities in promoting educational equity? Yes or NO.? Explain your answer'.

OL answered in the affirmative: *'Yes, NGOs do face challenges in promoting educational equity in rural communities in the Gomoa West District." The challenges include cultural practices that do not prioritize formal education, the perception that there are no employment opportunities for*

educated individuals, and language barriers. However, the interviewee suggests that involving local people who have benefited from NGO programs in promoting education can help in addressing some of these challenges".

S2 also said: *'The NGOs face challenges in promoting educational equity in the communities, in that, parents tend to relinquish all their responsibilities to the NGOs." … "This means that the parents do not take an active role in the education of their children, and instead, rely solely on the support provided by the NGOs. This can be a challenge for the NGOs as it may lead to a lack of parental involvement in the education of their children." …* "*Therefore, the answer to the question is YES, the NGOs face challenges in promoting educational equity in the communities".*

According to NGOS1: *"NGOs do face challenges in promoting educational equity in rural communities. Specifically, NGOs often struggle with funding for their programs. However, despite these challenges, NGOs have been effective in promoting educational equity in these communities."*

T1 articulated: ' Yes*, NGOs do face challenges in promoting educational equity in their community. Some of the challenges that NGOs face include cultural barriers and resistance from local communities. For example, NGOs may face opposition from local leaders or community members who are skeptical of their interventions."*

For the question, 'What are the challenges faced by NGOs in promoting educational equity in rural communities? List and explain', the following were the various responses:

According to OL: *"NGOs face several challenges in promoting educational equity in rural communities in the Gomoa West District'. These challenges include cultural practices: Historically, formal education was not a priority in some communities, and this mindset can still persist today. Some families may prioritize other activities or responsibilities over education, which can make it difficult for NGOs to promote educational equity." ..."Perception of limited job opportunities: Some people may believe that there are no employment opportunities for educated individuals, which can discourage families from investing in their children's education". ... "Language barriers: In some communities, there may be a language barrier that makes it difficult for NGOs to communicate with families and promote the importance of education." ..."Difficulty in convincing people: Even when NGOs are able to communicate with families, some may be resistant to the idea of formal education. This can make it challenging for NGOs to promote educational equity."*

Overall, these challenges can make it difficult for NGOs to promote educational equity in rural communities. However, involving local people who have benefited from NGO programs in promoting education can help to address some of these challenges.'

S2 opined that: *"One of the challenges faced by NGOs in promoting educational equity in rural communities is that parents tend to relinquish all their responsibilities to the NGOs."* This means that the parents do not take an active role in the education of their children, and instead, rely solely on the support provided by the NGOs. This can be a challenge for the NGOs as it may lead to a lack of parental involvement in the education of their children. … *"Another challenge*

faced by NGOs in promoting educational equity in rural communities is that some children take things for granted and do not take their learning seriously. This may be due to the fact that they are receiving support from the NGOs and do not fully understand the value of education." To minimize these challenges, NGOs can advise parents to take their responsibilities of educating their children seriously and also advise the children to be studious. This can help to ensure that parents are actively involved in the education of their children and that the children understand the importance of education.

NGOS1 was of the view: *'Specific challenge faced by NGOs in promoting educational equity in rural communities, is funding. NGOs often struggle to secure the necessary funds to support their programs. Despite having sponsors or supporters from various countries, NGOs still need additional funds due to the economic situation in the communities they serve. Parents or guardians of the beneficiaries are encouraged to contribute what they can to support the programs, but some may not fully understand the importance of their contribution. Overall, the funding challenge can limit the scope and effectiveness of the programs that NGOs can offer to promote educational equity in rural communities.'*

T1 Mentioned: *Limited resources, lack of staff infrastructure, limited government support, and cultural barriers. NGOs may struggle to secure funding and resources to implement their programs or may face opposition from local leaders or community members who are skeptical of their interventions. Additionally, rural communities may lack basic infrastructure such as electricity, internet access, and transportation, which can make it difficult for NGOs to implement their programs effectively. Finally, cultural barriers such as gender norms and traditional beliefs about education may also pose challenges for NGOs seeking to promote educational equity in rural communities.'*

Below are the responses to the question, 'What measures or suggestions can be implemented to minimize the challenges faced by NGOs in promoting educational equity in rural communities?'

According to OL:*'Several measures or suggestions can be implemented to minimize the challenges faced by NGOs in promoting educational equity in rural communities. These include: "Involving local people: NGOs can involve local people who have benefited from their programs in promoting education. These individuals can serve as role models and advocates for education within their communities."Using local languages: NGOs can use local languages to communicate with families and promote the importance of education. This can help to overcome language barriers and make it easier for families to understand the benefits of education."Providing vocational training: NGOs can provide vocational training programs that help to prepare students for employment opportunities. This can help to address the perception that there are no job opportunities for educated individuals."… "Collaborating with government agencies: NGOs can collaborate with government agencies to promote education and address some of the challenges faced by rural communities. This can help to create a more supportive environment for education.*

Overall, these measures and suggestions can help to minimize the challenges faced by NGOs in promoting educational equity in rural communities. By involving local people, using local

languages, providing vocational training, and collaborating with government agencies, NGOs can help to create a more supportive environment for education in rural areas.'

S2 also stated: *'NGOs can take the following measures or suggestions to minimize the challenges faced in promoting educational equity in rural communities:*
"Advise parents to take their responsibilities of educating their children seriously.
"Advise children to be studious and take their learning seriously."
''Provide education and awareness programs to parents and children on the importance of education and the role of parents in their children's education".
"Encourage parental involvement in the education of their children by organizing parent-teacher meetings and other activities."
"Provide training and support to teachers to improve the quality of education in rural communities".
"Collaborate with local authorities and community leaders to promote education and raise awareness about the importance of education in rural communities".
... By implementing these measures, NGOs can help to minimize the challenges faced in promoting educational equity in rural communities and ensure that children have access to quality education'.

T1 also added: *'There are several measures that can be implemented to minimize the challenges faced by NGOs in promoting educational equity in rural communities. These include:*
'Government support and collaboration with NGOs to help them promote educational equity in the district." … "Community support and engagement with NGOs so that they will be able to get the necessary resources and support to implement their programs effectively." … 'Provision of enough infrastructure by the government to help the kids learn, such as electricity, internet access, and transportation'.

By implementing these measures, NGOs can overcome some of the challenges they face in promoting educational equity in rural communities.

Sustainable model to aid NGOs in promoting educational equity.

The respondents were only NGO staff. This question was to ascertain whether the NGOs use any framework or regulations to control or regulate their activities in promoting educational equity in the communities? Yes or No. Please state it clearly.

NGOS1 stated: *No, there is no framework documented that am aware of "however we work with regulations as specified by the government agency responsibility. … "However base on experience most NGO's have adopted conventions or public opinions issues to engage in their operations"* Another question was also quizzed on the adoption of any model to aid in promoting educational equity in rural communities of Ghana? Yes or No. Suggest if any. *'Unfortunately, No'. Am not aware of the existing of any model.' … Generally, NGO's follow the conventions of other NGO's to execute the operations and services to the community in question"*

Implications and findings

The NGOs employ strategies like targeting children based on parent's income and providing educational support to promote equity. This confirms past research that NGOs support those unable to provide education, especially for girls. The interventions have positively impacted

outcomes, leading to more gender balance in education. However, some unintended consequences exist, like students taking support for granted.

The major challenges NGOs face include culture practices deprioritizing education, perceptions of no employment opportunities, language barriers, and difficulty convincing people. This aligns with past research citing cultural norms and beliefs as impediments. Addressing this by engaging beneficiaries can help overcome challenges.

The NGOs follow government regulations but lack specific models guiding their operations. Recommendations include government collaboration and support, community engagement to access resources, and infrastructure provisions by government. Following examples of successful NGOs can also help overcome challenges in promoting educational equity.

Conclusion

The research found NGOs have a positive impact on promoting girl's education, empowerment, and achieving gender balance in rural Ghanaian communities, through some unintended consequences exist like students taking support for granted. It identified challenges faced by NGOs including cultural practices deprioritizing education, perception of no employment opportunities, language barriers, and beliefs hinder NGO operations. To address these challenges, the research suggest Implementing measures like government support and collaboration, community engagement with NGOs, and infrastructure provisions, the research underscores the vital role of NGOs in Promoting educational equity in rural Ghana, provides insights into maximizing their impact and overcoming operational challenges, and highlights their positive influence on girls education, empowerment and gender balance despite some unintended consequences. Also, with respect to the strategies employed by NGOs to promote educational equity.

The following were recommendation are suggested:

- NGOs should continue to employ strategies that promote educational equity in rural communities.
- NGOs should tailor their programs to the specific needs of the community by working closely with community and opinion leaders, teachers, and students.
- NGOs should prioritize the promotion of girls' education and empowerment.
- NGOs should create awareness among parents and community members about the importance of education and the benefits of sending their children to school.
- With respect to the challenges faced by NGOs in promoting educational equity, the following suggestions were made:
- NGOs should collaborate with government agencies to promote education and address some of the challenges faced by rural communities.
- NGOs should involve local people who have benefited from their programs in promoting education.
- NGOs should use local languages to communicate with families and promote the importance of education.
- NGOs should provide vocational training programs that help to prepare students for employment opportunities.
- In connection to the impact of NGO interventions on educational outcomes, the study made some suggestions:

- Future research should focus on exploring the long-term impact of NGO interventions on educational outcomes in rural communities in Ghana.
- NGOs should continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of their programs on educational outcomes to ensure that they are effective.
- NGOs should collaborate with other organizations and stakeholders to share best practices and improve the impact of their programs.

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The Death of Leadership: The Bureaucrat awakes alone (A reflection)

Kirk Anderson (February 2024)
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I was sitting in my boat, steaming along.
The water was a little choppy,
but no worries,
the boat has weathered many storms as it is.

Felt some water on my feet, a little uncomfortable,
but my feet had been a little wet before,
Maybe time to check: maybe a committee,
but wait a bit.

Water is just below my knees now,
a little chilly and rocky too,
hearing voices outside my boat,
not sure what that's about.

Water is above my knees now, a little uncomfortable,
the boat is slowing, hands from outside are grasping the rail, asking how to get in.
Working on it I thought, but the committee has not met yet,
so wait, I suggested.

Voices all around the boat now, asking why don't I respond,
we are drowning says some,
I understand as I am wet to my butt too I say,
and the committee is deliberating soon,

Up to my neck now,
the boat has stopped and drifting,
at least the voices have stopped!
Now I can get back to it: what was I doing?

Leadership for Diversity: Culturally Responsive Leadership

Nicole Gandossi
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Abstract: *We are seeing significant changes in Canadian schools today as they are becoming more diverse regarding: culture, race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, abilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, socio-economic status and behavioral and social-emotional functioning. Educators are expected to be responsive to their students in a variety of contexts and need to use a plethora of strategies to meet this goal in our diverse school communities. In response to these challenges and opportunities the question of how administrators/school leaders can better foster a school climate that embraces and supports diversity? To answer this question, this paper is going to explore and discuss the following concepts: Leadership, Diversity, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), and Culturally Responsive Leadership.*

Leadership for Diversity: Culturally Responsive Leadership

"Change is the one persistent phenomenon in life and in organizations; thus, schools experience change often" (Gorton & Alston, 2023, p.183). One significant change we are seeing in Canadian schools today is they are becoming more diverse regarding: culture, race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, abilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, socio-economic status and behavioral and social-emotional functioning.

Educators are expected to be responsive to their students in a variety of contexts and need to use a plethora of strategies to meet this goal in our diverse school communities. Kampen (2020) states that "*A school culture where people embrace diversity in the classroom can positively impact the school community. When this happens, a school creates a safe, supportive and purposeful environment for students and staff which, in turn, allows students to grow-academically and socially."* (Para 1)

So, with this in mind: How can administrators/school leaders foster a school climate that embraces and supports diversity? As an attempt to answer this question, this paper is going to explore and discuss the following concepts: Leadership, Diversity, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), and Culturally Responsive Leadership.

Leadership

This section of the paper is going to discuss the concept of leadership, both some possible definitions of leadership and what makes an effective leader in schools. Furthermore, this section will briefly explore some possible reluctance factors contributing to the decline in aspiring school administrators.

Cowley (1928) defined leadership as, "The leader is the one who succeeds in getting others to follow him [or her]" (as cited in Gorton & Alston, 2023, p.12). In addition, Alston (2002) states, "Leadership is taking risks, making mistakes and learning from those mistakes. Leadership provides the very foundation for a sound educational program. When leadership is right, people are inspired to do their best" (as cited in Gorton & Alston, 2023, p.12). Inspiring school staff to do their best is imperative when supporting student learning. I have heard the following statement countless times throughout my career as an educator, "Administration can make or break a school". How can one person make or break a school? Now, I do not want to

simplify this notion because it is incredibly complex and many factors contribute to how an administrator affects the school climate and culture, as well as the morale of the staff and how this impacts students' achievement.

In my experience, I can think of one administrator who has the skills, knowledge and characteristics that encompass an effective administrator and school leader. Not only were they a kind, funny, compassionate, friendly, supportive, genuine and an honest human being; but they were also a true professional, well-spoken, competent, and knowledgeable about policies and high-leverage instructional practices, had high-expectations for staff and students, and were action-orientated. I thought of this administrator when I read what Kouzes and Posner (1995) found that, "leaders perceived as effective are honest, forward-looking, inspirational, and competent" (as cited in Gorton & Alston, 2023, p.23). This school leader encompasses all these qualities and more.

They inspired me to learn more and try new things in my classroom. They cared about the staff and students, and this was clearly shown every day by their visibility within the school and in their interactions with all the people within the building. This principal inspired me to do my best. I keep track of what school they are practicing in each year because I hope to work with them again at some point in my career. This is the type of administrator I would like to become one day.

In Nova Scotia, we are experiencing a decline in the number of aspiring school administrators and an increase in what Anderson (2011) calls "reluctant leaders" (p.384). Anderson defines reluctant leaders as teachers trained in school leadership and possessing the qualifications, and attributes needed to assume leadership who are not applying for the principalship (p.384). Moreover, Anderson (2011) states, "The literature suggests that reluctance factors seem to be increasing and may be associated with growing negative perceptions of the role of principalship" (397). Why is this important to note? Greenfield (1986) emphasizes that we must understand more deeply about administrative careers. Who administers our schools? What motivates them to climb the ladder of administration? What happens to them as they do? (p.76).

Additionally, it is equally important for us to understand why aspiring school administrators are reluctant to enter or stay in the role of principal. Anderson et al.'s (2011) findings suggest some reluctance factors: inadequate training for principalship, the need for some form of transition training, being forced to serve as a vice- principal before becoming a principal, demands associated with leadership in a collaborative context, feeling isolated, not having clear exit options, inadequate compensation, increased work-load, concerns about not being able to effectively do the job (pp. 392-395). I

I consider myself an aspiring school administrator and I admit that I have experienced all of these reluctance factors, which has stalled my entry into school administration.
Moreover, some other potential reluctance factors could be based on what Pollock, Hauseman, Wang (2019) found, that principals and vice-principals are experiencing work intensification in five areas: longer work hours, increasing work pace, fewer resources, increase in day-to-day workload, and an increase in additional work. Work intensification not only threatens school leader recruitment and retention, but also the well-being and performance of both students and staff (Pollok, Hauseman, & Want, 2019, p.2). Lastly, Pollock and Hauseman (2019) found that the high-volume of email, increased workload, extension of the workday, increased expectation of shorter response time, and the blurring of boundaries between work and home are some examples of work intensification administrators are experiencing and could be potential reluctance factors.

Diversity

This section of the paper will briefly define and explore the concept of diversity and possible effects on school climate and student learning. Kampen (2020) defines diversity simply as, "everything that makes people different" (para 3). Additionally, The Oxford Learners Dictionaries (2023) defines diversity as, "The practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and or different gender, religions etc." (3rd definition). Our student populations are more diverse now than ever before. This increase in diversification in our schools can bring elements that can positively impact school culture and student learning, as well as bring challenges that must be problem-solved swiftly and efficiently. In fact, Wenner and Campbell (2017) state, as schools become more diverse, both the student population and teacher population, researchers need to explore the ramifications of these changes (p.139).

The following observations are based on my own work experience as an educator. Increased diversification in the student population has positively impacted our schools. First, working in diverse and inclusive classrooms has made it necessary for educators and school leaders to reflect on their personal ideologies and biases, as well as their teaching practices. In our schools we have many students with a variety of academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs. In order to meet all these needs, it has been vital for educators to adapt their instructional and assessment practices, in order to engage students in learning opportunities and support their progress. Additionally, a diverse and inclusive learning environment provides opportunities for students to work with other students that embody different strengths, challenges, beliefs and ideas. This builds collaborative skills, develops empathy, and encourages students to think critically.

Increased diversification in the student population in schools has also created some challenges. Sometimes learning about differences and learning to embrace them can be more challenging for some students, depending on their home-life, cognitive abilities, and background. Conflicts can arise between students and staff, which may require additional support people to help problem-solve (guidance counselors, school psychologist, mental health professionals, social-workers, educational program assistants, English as additional language teachers etc.).

I feel this is one of the major challenges in supporting diversity and inclusion in schools in Nova Scotia, we do not have enough of these additional support people working in schools. For example, our School Psychologist is only at our school 4 days per month because of their job assignment and all the schools they are supporting. These additional people are essential in supporting and fostering a school climate that embraces diversity because their services are necessary to ensure we are able to meet the needs of all our students. When students' needs are met, they feel safe, cared about, and are more likely to take risks in their learning. Quite frankly, this is not happening due to the lack of funding in education in our province. So, how can we build capacity with the people we have in the building in order to foster a school climate that embraces diversity? Becoming culturally responsive practitioners is one big step in the right direction.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

This section of the paper will define and examine Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as an effective approach in fostering a school climate that embraces and supports diversity.

Over the years, the reading data in Nova Scotia has shown significantly more of our students of African and Indigenous descent are not meeting grade level reading benchmarks compared to White students. Hammond (2015) argues that Culturally Responsive Teaching is one of the most

powerful tools to support dependent learners in developing cognitive skills for higher order thinking. In addition, it uses the brain principles from neuroscience to support learning effectively, and helps students close the achievement gap (p.15).

Hammond (2015) defines Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) as, "An educator's ability to recognize students' cultural displays of learning and meaning making and respond positively and constructively with teaching moves that use cultural knowledge as a scaffold to connect what the student knows to new concepts and content in order to promote effective information processing. All the while, the educator understands the importance of being in a relationship and having a social-emotional connection to the student in order to create a safe space for learning." (p.15)

Table 1: The Four Practice Areas of Culturally Responsive Teaching

• Awareness	• Identify and acknowledge their own socio-political lens • Increase and be mindful of their cultural lens • Manage their own emotional social-emotional response to student diversity
• Learning Partnership	• Establish authentic relationships with students that builds trust and respect • Use the trust bond to support students to rise to higher expectations • Emotionally intelligent and specific feedback to students • Hold students to high standards while challenging them
• Information Processing	• Understand how culture impacts brain information processing • Create learning opportunities, so it builds student's brain power in a culturally compatible way • Use brain-based information processing strategies familiar to oral culture
• Community Building	• Classroom integrates cultural elements and themes that are responsive to students • Use cultural practices to create an intellectually and socially safe space • Set up routines that set up for self-directed learning and build independence

(Hammond, 2015, pp. 18-20)

The framework of (CRT) is divided into four core areas and are connected through the principles of brain-based learning (Hammond, 2015, p18). Mastering the following Culturally Responsive Teaching practices helps teachers support students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, especially marginalized groups.

To briefly synthesize, Culturally Responsive educators are aware of their point of positionality, mindful of their cultural lens and build positive relationships with their students. They use this as a foundation to support students in their learning. Furthermore, they develop and implement culturally responsive learning opportunities for their students and create safe and productive learning environments where all students feel represented and safe. These practices help foster a school climate that supports and embraces diversity. So, how can being culturally responsive translate into leadership? What does this look like in schools? The next section of the paper will attempt to address these questions.

Culturally Responsive Leadership

This section of the paper will consider Culturally Responsive Leadership and how this approach can foster a school climate that embraces and supports diversity. Pollock, Cameron and Wang (2019) found 91.8% of principals and 83.4% of vice principals in Ontario believe their job makes a meaningful difference in their school community (p.1). So, how can we utilize this level of self-efficacy to foster and embrace a school climate that supports diversity? Cranston and Jean-Paul (2022) state, fostering community and building trusting relationships among racially diverse school communities is more important now than ever for educational leaders who are committed to supporting learning for all students in the midst of uncertainty (p.1313). Moreover, Terrell and Lindsey (2008) have advocated for a special type of leadership they call culturally proficient leadership in which one must understand their own cultural assumptions in order to lead effectively in diverse settings (as cited in Wenner & Campbell, 2017, p.139-140).

Using a Culturally Responsive approach as a school leader can foster a school climate that embraces and supports diversity through being reflective, culturally aware, and building positive relationships. The Leadership Academy defines a culturally responsive leader as "*One who recognizes the impact of institutionalized racism on their own lives and the lives of the students and families they work with and who embraces their role in mitigating, disrupting, and dismantling systemic oppression. To embody this definition means to work personally, interpersonally, and institutionally*." (Rice-Boothe, 2022, para. 6).

Additionally, Cranston and Jean-Paul (2022) write, "*Educational leaders, working in diverse cultural landscapes, need sophisticated understandings of the concept of culture as a learned and adaptive response to contextual needs*" (pp.1329-1330). In order to become a culturally responsive leader, one needs to commit to continuously engaging in this cultural self-reflection, in both their professional and personal realms. Cranston and Janzen (2017) state that, *"…while content and pedagogy should embrace human rights' values and encourage participation and critical thinking, one of the goals of teaching for human rights is to become aware of one's own complicity within structures and systems that violate human rights.*" (p.13).

Likewise, Cranston and Jean-Paul (2022) suggest that school leaders need to be given formal opportunities to learn about epistemologies and ontologies that are different front the dominant one they hold through a process that is designed as mutually respectful and reciprocal knowledge exchange that can lead to new understandings (p.1330). Furthermore, Riehl (2000) identifies three tasks that determine whether an administrator is prepared to respond to diversity and show multicultural leadership: fostering new definitions of diversity; promoting inclusive instructional practices within schools by supporting, facilitating, or being a catalyst for change;

and building connections between the school and community (as cited in Johnson, 2014, p.148-149).

Effective leaders are individuals who lead by example and "When leadership is right, people are inspired to do their best" (as cited in Gorton & Alston, 2023, p.12). So perhaps, another element to being a culturally responsive leader is building capacity within the school by inspiring others to become culturally responsive teacher leaders. For example. Wenner and Campbell (2017) define teacher leaders as, "*teachers who maintain K-12 classroom-based teaching responsibilities, while also taking on leadership responsibilities outside of the classroom"* (p.140). Additionally, Anderson (2004) defines teacher leadership in his study as, "*teacher leadership means to set directions and influence others to move in those directions. It is a fluid, interactive process with mutual influence between leader and follower*" (p.100). Furthermore, "They are not always formal leaders, nor do they always aspire to be, but they do have influence" (Anderson, 2004, p.101).

Inspiring educators to become culturally responsive teacher leaders in their buildings will help build capacity and foster a school climate that embraces diversity. Being Culturally Responsive is similar to what Wenner and Campbell (2017) refer to as developing, "*critical consciousness*" (p.158). Wenner and Campbell (2017) argue that teacher leaders develop critical consciousness, they consider the problems related to diversity and equity within schools and society more broadly by considering the roles social and historical activity had in creating these problems. Furthermore, this "*critical consciousness*" leads to teacher leaders taking action to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students (p.158-159). I believe "*critical consciousness*" begins with understanding people have differences and being open to learning more about those differences. Learning more about differences builds compassion and empathy in individuals and fosters a safe and connected school climate. When students feel safe in school, they are able to reach their full potential socially, emotionally, and academically.

Conclusion

In conclusion, student populations in Canada are and continue to become more diverse in regard to: culture, race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, abilities, sexual orientation, gender identity, socio-economic status and behavioral and social-emotional functioning. Moreover, it is expected that educators are responsive to their students' social-emotional, academic and behavioral needs. This paper briefly explored and discussed the following concepts: Leadership, Diversity, Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT), and Culturally Responsive Leadership, while attempting to answer the question: How can administrators/school leaders foster a school climate that embraces and supports diversity? Becoming a Culturally Responsive Educator/Leader is an ongoing process which requires a strong level of commitment to being open to; reflecting, adapting, and shifting our thinking daily. It is complex and necessary.

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The Editors concluding comments: An 'Ending Piece"
By Jan Buley

An "ending piece" can be an opportunity to look in the rear-view mirror and highlight something that has happened. Perhaps it is a chance to reflect back over a period of time or look closely at an event that has taken place. Words can illuminate what has happened, why something occurred and offer further questions about it perhaps. Words can take a reader to surprising places. Photography, like text, can also be a fabulous way to capture endings and events. A photograph catches that moment in time when a child took his first baby steps in a kitchen or a birthday celebration for someone who had reached ninety years of age. These are snapshots in time—endings and beginnings.

That's essentially what this edition of The Morning Watch is. It's the culmination and ending of a process that has resulted in this celebrated edition. And yet, it's also a beginning. It's the beginning of a new time for this publication. As an editorial team, we began with baby steps—thinking about the kind of focus we would like to offer to readers, and then sharing thoughts about how we might get there. We pondered research articles and we reached out to student authors in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University and beyond. We looked back at where we've been, and we dreamt about where we might like to go with this journal. We considered other writing sources and styles, and we liked how poems provided an innovative lens for the learning and teaching profession.

We have stretched the vision for The Morning Watch, and we look forward to future plans: a collaborative edition with the Newfoundland-Labrador Teaching Association's Bulletin, and an issue that highlights strategies and ideas for Indigenizing the Academy and the Pan-Arctic. Additionally, we hope to feature an annual publication of some remarkable graduate student writing again.

So, although this is technically an 'ending piece' for this issue of The Morning Watch, it's really not an ending at all. Every ending is a new beginning. It is our hope that this issue has provided you with a vibrant platform to think about the teaching and learning profession and to question pedagogical practices and research. We also hope that this journal creates a place of common grounding, where educators can learn with and from each other. Please consider sharing your story and research: a community, after all, is built on collective contributions.

From 50 years ago (1973) to 50 years from now (2073): There is much more to come!