

Annual Report for 2014-2015

Prepared by
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Our Mission

Established in 2005, the Centre for Urban Schooling (CUS) connects the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) to urban schools and communities. The Centre conducts research on and advocates for critical practice that is focused on how to better serve historically marginalized and racialized children and youth in public schools.

Our Research Program

Our research program includes projects in the areas of critical teacher education and development, critical practitioner research in urban schools, critical literacy and media studies, and critical youth participatory research. Members of the research team that have an asterix (*) after their names are graduate students.

Current projects (organized from oldest to newest projects)

1. Performed Ethnography for Critical Teacher Education

(2000-present/ongoing) (Tara Goldstein)

My performed ethnography program involves turning the findings of ethnographic research into a play script that can be read aloud by a group of participants or performed before audiences. Key activities in this program this year included a 3-hour play reading and discussion of my performed ethnography *Harriet's House* with Dr. Lee Airton's Family Studies students in the Bachelor of Education program (30 students) and a two-hour performance and discussion of my performed ethnography *Hong Kong, Canada* at TESOL 2015 (60 participants).

2. Collaborative Critical Practitioner Research (CPRC) Project with the University of Pennsylvania

(2009-present/ongoing) (Rob Simon, Will Edwards*)

The Collaborative Critical Practitioner Research (CPRC) Project connects teachers and graduate students in Toronto with colleagues at the University of Pennsylvania. Events this year include several video links that have allowed graduate students at the University of Pennsylvania and OISE share their research in progress and analyze data collaboratively.

3. **The Toronto Writing Project (TWP)**

(2014-present/ongoing) (Rob Simon, Will Edwards*, Shiny Balachandra*)

This year the team began the process of developing a **Toronto Writing Project** at the Centre for Urban Schooling as a local site of The National Writing Project. The National Writing Project has sites across North America and uses practitioner research as a vehicle for grassroots change efforts in classrooms, schools, and communities (<http://www.nwp.org/>). It is the largest peer-to-peer research-based professional development organization in the world. Activities this year include developing a set of core principals for The Toronto Writing Project.

4. **LGBTQ Families Experiences in Schools**

(2014-2019) (Tara Goldstein, Pam Baer*, Austen Koecher*, Michael Meth*, Tarra Joshi* [undergraduate student])

(Recommended but not funded by SSHRC in 2014-2015)

The goal of this research study is to examine the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) families in public schools across Ontario and provide knowledge and strategies to counter discrimination and harassment LGBTQ families face in schools. Activities this year included reading the literature about LGBTQ families' experiences in schools, analyzing four pilot interviews, conducting three new interviews using additional interview questions, beginning the transcription of our seven interviews.

5. **Understanding and Improving Black Student Achievement**

(Sept 2014-June 2015)

(Tara Goldstein, Rob Simon, Nicole West-Burns, Karen Murray [Toronto District School Board], Austen Koecher*)

As part of a collaborative team with the TDSB Teacher Learning and Leading and Early Years departments, West-Burns and Murray are leading 12 professional learning sessions directly involving participants who work in schools daily. Approximately 100 educators, from kindergarten and grade one classrooms are participating. West-Burns and Murray have also met with the 12 administrators, whose schools are part of the initiative, to support their learnings and understandings.

The content of the professional learning modules connects to the following three academic cornerstones:

- Understanding and Improving Black Student Achievement
- Understanding Early Years Equity Pedagogy Across the Curriculum
- Critical Practitioner Research

The component focused on understanding and improving Black student achievement works with the educators to strengthen their understandings of anti-oppressive frameworks and pedagogical practices that support more equitable classroom teaching and learning. Participants thus far have engaged in learning about and been invited to have conversations connected to such topics as privilege in schools; deficit versus asset-based thinking; culturally responsive and relevant pedagogy; and Africentric educational principles within a Canadian context.

The early years pedagogy has focused on such topics as positive identity development; how to discuss issues of racial identity in the early years classroom; effective use of texts to support building connections to students' lives; and other literacy and numeracy curriculum within a culturally responsive and relevant framework.

As part of the professional learning, participants are also learning how to become critical practitioner researchers in their own classroom spaces. They are beginning to question the "taken for granted" things that happen each day and from those "puzzling moments" they are developing inquiry questions and collecting data related to those questions to inform their thinking and their practice. The research on critical practitioner inquiry speaks to its potential to promote student achievement. By utilizing critical practitioner inquiry and facilitating the building of teacher inquiry communities, the team hopes to provide a context in which together educators build their collective understandings, efficacy and introspection which they believe will lead to better experiences and outcomes for Black students in schools.

West-Burns and Murray were trained in critical practitioner research by attending Professor Rob Simon's course in practitioner research in the fall of 2014.

6. Post-9/11 Muslim Youth in Schools Research Project

(January-March 2015) (Tara Goldstein, Noor Baig*, Leena Halles* [undergraduate students])

Activities included a literature review of research about the experiences of Muslim Youth in Schools post-9/11. The most engaging research articles will be used in my Equity, Activism and Education course at New College and my Anti-Discrimination Education course in the MT program.

7. The Youth Participatory Action Research Project (yPAR) Project with University of Toronto Schools Students

(Just funded March 2015) (Rubén Gaztambide)

8. Addressing Injustices: Teachers and Adolescents Coauthoring Social Justice-Oriented Literacy Curriculum

(Just funded in March 2015 through an Early Researcher Award from the Ontario Ministry of Research and Innovation) (Rob Simon)

Our Post-Doctoral Fellowship Student

Gillian Parekh

A recent graduate from the doctoral program in Critical Disability Studies from York University and Research Coordinator at the Toronto District School Board, Gillian Parekh is currently working as a SSHRC postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Urban Schooling with **Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández**. Gillian's research includes critical perspectives on special and inclusive education, social reproduction and structural organization of education institutions, and students' experiences of social citizenship, belonging and exclusion in school. Drawing on critical disability and citizenship theory, Gillian's work employs a framework of analysis that centralizes students' experience of inclusion, recognition, and shared power as an indicator of structural equity in schools. Her postdoctoral plans involve expanding her analysis across student demographic characteristics and program placements as well as explore why students' sense of social citizenship erodes over time, particularly as students approach graduation.

Our Events

Our events program includes events in the areas of critical teacher education and development, critical practitioner research in urban schools, critical literacy and media studies, and critical youth participatory research.

April 2015

Talk for CUS Associates and graduate students with Australian scholar, Jo Lampert

Jo Lampert is an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Education, School of Cultural and Professional Learning at the Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane Australia. She is also the Co-Coordinator the National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools project (ETDS) and will be speaking about the project at our get together.

March 2015

FREE YOUR MIND: A HIP HOP Education STEMposium

CUS was a co-sponsor for this event, which brings together students, educators, Hip Hop academics, and the GTA's finest Hip Hop education workshop facilitators

February 2015

Conference Panel Presentation@ The 36th Annual Ethnography and Education Research Forum Inequality, Poverty, and Education: An Ethnographic Invitation

The CUS panel presentation was entitled *Critical Practitioner Research Across Urban Contexts: Inquiries into Supporting the Learning of Racialized and Historically Marginalized Students* and involved panelists: **Robert Simon, Nicole West-Burns, Karen Murray, Airyn Stephens*, Austen Koecher* and William Edwards***.

Film screening and discussion of *After Night*
(Project leader Rob Simon)

In 2013, 30 youths and teachers in Toronto created an exhibition of paintings in response to the book *Night* (1960), a record of Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel's experiences in the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps. The artworks included triangles painted on book pages in colors and patterns the artists chose to represent their visions of diversity and solidarity with victims of intolerance.

The 25-minute documentary film *After Night* tells the story of this project from the perspectives of the people involved in it.

November 2014

The book launch of **Kathleen Gallagher's *Why Theatre Matters*** –was co-sponsored by The Centre for Urban Schooling and The Centre of Media and Culture in Education.

October 2014

A public screening and talk by New York filmmaker **Sam Zalutsky** on *The Promised Land*, a film about experiential holocaust education was co-sponsored by The Centre for Urban Schooling and The Centre of Media and Culture in Education.

A public poetry performance and talk by renown children's author, poet and educator **Lesléa Newman** on homophobic bullying and violence in schools was sponsored by CUS.

Our William Waters Scholarships in Urban Education: 2014-2015

In 2014-2015 two \$8,000 scholarships to promote excellence in teaching in the urban classroom to **Ahmed Ahmed and Dargine Rajeswaran**

The successful applicants were experienced teachers entering a full or part-time Master's program with an interest in questions of social justice and school success for students from economically disadvantaged neighborhoods attending underperforming schools.