



Leadership Vibes

Volume 2, Issue 1

February 2023



UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Table of Contents

Introduction...3

Yvonne Chan

Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership and Policy Program
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
Coordinator, Centre for Leadership and Diversity

Research as Activism: Disrupting the Binary of the Researcher and the Researched...6

Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad

Assistant Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University

Challenging the Status Quo: Diversifying the Principalsip in Ontario Public Schools...12

Dr. Zuhra E. Abawi

Assistant Professor, Niagara University

Human Rights and Anti-Oppressive Frameworks: How They Diverge and Converge to Address Racism in Schools, and the Transformational Role of Educational Leaders...19

Shezadi Khushal

Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership and Policy Program
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

Muslim Women's Leadership: Theory and Praxis...26

Dr. Fella Lahmar

Research Fellow, The Open University

Anti-Asian Racism, Student Advocacy and Student Leadership...33

Jasmine Pham

Doctoral Student, Education Leadership and Policy Program
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

Research as Activism: Disrupting the Binary of the Researcher and the Researched

Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad

Assistant Professor, Wilfrid Laurier University

Research can be an intimidating word for students, staff, and faculty within the culture of post-secondary institutions. As graduate students and research assistants are mentored to conduct research ethically and effectively in areas of data collection, analysis, and publication, scholars grapple with research expectations in the form of outputs in journals, books, and other mediums. The discourse of “publish or perish” as a rhetoric has been normalized as part of research output expectations for scholars as they navigate the trajectory of becoming a tenured professor. Unfortunately, in many cases outputs- the sheer volume of it- instead of the impact of the research has become one of the major success indicators used to rank universities and their reputations. What is problematic about this approach? What are the implications for how leadership is perceived and enacted? Why has it not been questioned or disrupted? How does this perpetuate harm and exclude Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC), and other minoritized identities? How does this harm communities that do not access the research findings nor reap benefits from being research subjects? This article is intended to spark reflection and dialogue- as individuals and between institutions- to consider what is the purpose and role of research in higher education? In what ways do the binary of the researcher and the researched need to be adapted, subverted, and altered to value relationships with community to reduce harm enacted on local communities? What are the complexities navigating a higher education culture saturated with inequitable power dynamics, various forms of privilege, and prioritization of profit?

This article is intended to be more about questions to push us to pause, decolonize our imagination and spirits, unlearn, think innovatively and counter-hegemonically, and identify where we can commit to action short and long term (Battiste, 2013; Brown & Strega, 2005). It is meant to be a spark and point of departure rather than a destination. The central question explored are the following: What is the role of research as activism where it values and invests in equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI), and decolonization within a publish or perish culture in higher education? What

is the role of research in challenging the status quo, breaking down norms which serve as systemic barriers, and centering voices, perspectives, and lived experiences of identities from equity-deserving groups as counter-narratives to make institutions more equitable? Some examples from my journey as a researcher-activist will be shared as exemplars in coping with challenges, healing, finding community in different circles, and collaborating with community to advance research as activism: #KeepingItReal. We must stay true to our authentic selves within a neoliberal culture that places more importance on profits than relations.

I try very hard to embed activism in all components of my duties as an educator-activist. For many professors, their job duties include three components: teaching, research, and service to the university. Is this the ideal model? How did it become normalized and accepted as the norm? What is not prioritized that should be such as relationship-building with community? What may be missing from the equation? I am encouraging us to think about how can we challenge normalized models within higher education that have become hegemonic (Ahmed, 2021; Razack, 2002; Shahjahan, 2005; Tuck & Yang, 2012) and often unchallenged which promote research but not always in the best interests of community needs- unfortunately in many cases it is for the benefit of the researcher or the institution at the expense of harm to community.

In the remainder of the article, I will share some of the strategies I have adopted over the years to disrupt the normalized policies and practices in higher education that perpetuate harm. For example, as part of my teaching and research practices, I advocate for brave spaces instead of safe spaces (Eizadirad & Campbell, 2021). Brave spaces are a counter-narrative to the safe space discourse and language that is performative. There is no such thing as a safe space, and we cannot guarantee it as educators. Brave spaces seek to marinate the tensions that arise in the classroom to reap its benefits in terms of understanding gained by students. Brave spaces encourage calculated risk taking that fosters relationship-building and centering emotional and spiritual components of teaching and learning as a community of learners to explore alternative vantage points when social justice issues are discussed. This requires taking into consideration the unique positionality of learners and their needs and lived experiences. Brave spaces advocate for equity over equality to advance social justice via a pedagogy of engaging with pain and suffering (Eizadirad et al.,

2022). It is not a linear trajectory but one that holds potential for new beginnings that can be therapeutic and transformative. It involves indulging in feelings of anger, sadness, and most importantly uncomfortableness as it relates to race, sexuality, and other aspects of identity intersecting with lived experiences. Brave spaces sustain the conversation when it gets uncomfortable or diverted, focusing on shifting the critical analysis to systemic barriers and inequities versus attributing root causes of social issues to individual behaviour or genetics. Lastly, brave conversations facilitate exploring contrasting views within a framework that recognizes social issues are complex, nuanced, and require examination from multiple perspectives. The objective is seeking to understand versus seeking to judge and dismiss. In brave spaces, we stand on the shoulder of our ancestors and take moments to pause, learn together, and give gratitude as we work towards inner transformation and strategizing as a collective to better our communities through commitment to actions.

Another way research serves as a medium for activism is its impact on individuals and communities. We must ask how does research help break down systemic barriers, particularly for minoritized identities, as they face a greater magnitude of inequities rooted in the history of colonial logic and white supremacy (Henry & Tator, 2012; James, 2012; Colour of Poverty- Colour of Change, 2019)? Barriers can be physical, spiritual, psychological, or financial. How do we mitigate inequality of opportunity? How do we mitigate harm and microaggressions? Whose voice is included as part of exploring innovative and counter-hegemonic solutions? Whose ideas are being listened to and who is being ignored and for what purposes? We must prioritize valuing lived experiences as a form of knowledge; lived experiences of ourselves, our students, other faculty, and community members directly impacted by the social issue we explore, examine, and discuss in research: #Strategize2Disrupt.

As an act of resistance and subversion (Eizadirad & Portelli, 2018), I am very conscious of the scholars I utilize in my classes as part of course readings. What is their positionality and lived experiences? What ideologies do they perpetuate? Citational practices historically have been very exclusionary, with voices of white men from the Western hemisphere dominating the discourse at the expense of exclusion to others who expressed similar ideas or were the original source of the idea being expressed. We need to change this trend. There are many great scholar-activists whose work needs to be further honored, amplified, and legitimized by being included

in post-secondary courses. Counter-stories are important as they are told from the perspective of those minorized by society and its oppressive systems. Counter-narratives challenge the myth and fallacy of metanarratives taken for granted without being questioned. Critical Race Theory is a great example of a theoretical framework that values counter-stories and lived experiences of those impacted by race and racism within a framework that examines intersections of power, privilege, and colonization. I extensively use Critical Race Theory in my research as a theoretical framework for analysis. This includes its usage in the following books I have been involved with: [*Decolonizing Educational Assessment: Ontario Elementary Students and the EQAO*](#) (2019), [*Equity as Praxis in Early Childhood Education and Care*](#). (2021), and [*The Power of Oral Culture in Education: Theorizing Proverbs, Idioms and Folklore Tales*](#) (forthcoming 2023).

In a culture where research is often associated with funding secured through granting agencies, how do we ensure the impact of the research is not “done” when the data collection or analysis is completed? How do we make community- the trust established to do the work authentically and the relationships that are built from the research process- an integral part of any research project and its next steps? How can we ensure the community gains access to the tools and the resources required to continue the work on their own? To facilitate this, we need to ensure that publications and other forms of knowledge mobilization are made available in formats accessible to the community. As researcher-activists, we must always ask, who will access knowledge in the way it is produced and in what ways? In the last few years, I have been very intentional in ensuring the issues I highlight in academic platforms such as in journals and books are also shared in more accessible mediums such as blogs, op eds, outlets for non-academics, and oral platforms such as podcasts. Below are some examples covering different topics:

The Conversation Podcast. (2022, December 7). How can we slow down youth gun violence? [Audio podcast episode]. <i>Don't Call Me Resilient</i> .
Eizadirad, A., & Stevenson, E. (December 2022). To resolve youth violence, Canada must move beyond policing and prison . <i>The Conversation</i> .
FookNConversation Podcast. (2022, November 16). Episode 42: Ardavan Eizadirad . [Audio podcast episode]. <i>FookNConversation-Talking About "Academicky" Stuff with Nicholas Ng-A-Fook</i> .
VoicEd Radio. (2022, October 13). Raw and uncut: Pain and suffering as critical pedagogy . [Audio podcast episode]. <i>A VoicEd Radio Exclusive Series</i> .

To conclude, we all have to do our part, so research is not something that feels intimidating but rather an enjoyable process that facilitates relationship building and helping communities thrive. Research must reap benefits for the people and the communities it studies and works with rather than perpetuating harm on the researched. Therefore, we must not see research and activism as two separate entities, but rather as part of the same continuum which can and should support one another: #ResearchIsActivism.

Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad (@DrEizadirad) is an Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University. He is the founder and Director of EDication Consulting (www.edication.org) offering equity, diversity, and inclusion training to organizations. He is also a community activist with non-profit organization [Youth Association for Academics, Athletics, and Character Education](#) (YAAACE) in the Jane and Finch community in Toronto.

References

- Ahmed, S. (2021). *Complaint!* Duke University Press.
- Battiste, M. (2013). Possibilities of educational transformations. In *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*. (pp. 175-191). UBC press.
- Brown, L. A., & Strega, S. (Eds.). (2005). *Research as resistance: Critical, indigenous and anti-oppressive approaches*. Canadian Scholars' Press.
- Colour of Poverty- Colour of Change. (2019). *Fact sheets*.
<https://colourofpoverty.ca/fact-sheets/>

-
- Eizadirad, A., Campbell, A., & Sider, S. (2022). *Counternarratives of pain and suffering as critical pedagogy: Disrupting oppression in educational contexts*. Routledge.
- Eizadirad, A. & Campbell, A. (2021). Visibilizing our pain and wounds as resistance and activist pedagogy to heal and hope: Reflections of 2 racialized professors. *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education*, 15(4), 241–251.
- Eizadirad, A., & Portelli, J. (2018). Subversion in education: Common misunderstandings and myths. *International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, 9(1), 53–72.
- Henry, F., & Tator, C. (2012). Interviews with racialized faculty members in Canadian Universities. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 44(2), 75–99.
- James, C. E. (2012). Strategies of engagement: How racialized faculty negotiate the university system. *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 44(2), 133–152.
- Razack, S. (2002). *Race, space, and the law: Unmapping a white settler society*. Between the Lines.
- Shahjahan, R. A. (2005). Mapping the field of anti-colonial discourse to understand issues of indigenous knowledges: Decolonizing praxis. *McGill Journal of Education/Revue des sciences de l'éducation de McGill*, 40(2), 213–240.
- Tuck, E., & Yang, K. W. (2012). Decolonization is not a metaphor. Decolonization: *Indigeneity, Education & Society*, 1(1), 1–40.