Countering Normative Discourses of Community
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During this inaugural year of *Critical Intersections*, we have moved toward invigorating a community of critical scholarship at OISE/UT, one that connects students and faculty across the institutional and philosophical affiliations present in our faculty of education. This conceptualization of community suggests that we have a capacity to imagine and work toward better futures across difference, to follow our unique academic pathways, and realize both individual and collective goals. Despite our journal’s aspirations for supporting such a community of critical scholars, we remain aware of the contingency of these aims. Embedded within a universalizing discourse of modernity, the notion of community implies a capacity to transcend the persistence of difference and create a pluralized, democratic public space. Addressing the limits of such thinking, Audre Lorde (1984) wrote: “Community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist” (p. 113). As Lorde’s comments suggest, the notion of community can obscure aspects of difference and tensions between and among diverse experiences and social positions.

The various problems with normative understandings of community resonated with us as we followed developments in the recent case of Trayvon Martin in the state of Florida. On February 26th 2012, Martin, an unarmed black teenager, was shot and killed by George Zimmerman, a member of the local neighbourhood watch program, having been perceived as a personal threat, or perhaps a threat to Zimmerman’s community. Reflecting on the outcome of the case, namely the acquittal of Trayvon’s killer, sociologist Lisa Patel (2013) posed the question: “What does the acquittal of Zimmerman have to do with educational research?” She noted that Trayvon Martin had a 3.7 GPA and a college scholarship. We might add, what does this circumstance have to do with how we imagine educational communities? In a democratic, meritocratic educational system and community, Trayvon should have had every opportunity to realize his potential. However, his untimely death and the controversy surrounding the acquittal of his killer remind us that we do not live in a post-racial world. Moreover, these circumstances exemplify the myth of equal opportunity in educational communities.

Even though the Canadian context is different than the American context, the political and material dimensions of this case illustrate the challenge of imagining community as a space of equality or productive multiplicity. Chantal Mouffe (2010) argued that conflict and agonism are inherent in pluralist democracies. She noted that “the constitutive character of social division and the impossibility of final reconciliation” under modern democratic conditions means that “people cannot be envisaged as ‘one’” (p. 15). Within this frame, maintaining a conversation about educational communities in which raciality, sociality, and legality are beyond the pale of education is a narrow and
short-sighted perspective. School systems are where children learn about ‘legitimate’ ways of being in a community, provoking us to wonder both how bodies like Trayvon Martin’s came to be understood as suspicious, and where his killer learned that he had a right to do away with someone he felt threatened by. Sara Ahmed (2000) wrote about how bodies are rendered strange through mundane, everyday processes of inclusion and exclusion. One of the examples in her writing is drawn, interestingly, from the neighbourhood watch program. She argues that a “stranger is not *any*-body that we have failed to recognize but *some*-body that we have already recognized as a stranger, as ‘a body out of place’” (p. 55, italics in original).

As graduate students engaged in finding ways of imagining better futures, we suggest the importance of complicating that which we imagine for our educational communities. The idea of ‘making a difference’ in this social context and condition, whether through research or practice, is a complex aspiration. Central to critical engagement with this idea is the need to acknowledge and address the marginalizing social structures, discourses, and practices that continue to influence our school systems and communities. Otherwise, what is the value of a practice that does not talk about racial oppression and its connection to capitalist colonialism (both historic and ongoing), and its role in reproductions of hegemony? Making our ways forward, whether in the academy or in the field, we should not overlook the need to rethink notions of educational community. This endeavor entails both a scholarly and a social responsibility.

The articles in this issue echo these concerns about notions of community, and the limitations that these orientations come up against. For instance, Olivier Bégin-Caouette’s article explores the transnational partnerships of globally networked learning environments (GNLEs) and the possibility to allow students and educators to build mutual understanding and enhance learning experiences within these contexts. His paper explores the effect of these networked learning environments on students’ intercultural sensitivity and educational outcomes, and suggests that power imbalances and issues relating to differences in linguistic, technological, and social resources can undermine the potential of GNLEs as alternatives to the current globalization "master-discourse."

Similarly, Catherine Kates and Heejin Song challenge dominant and marginalizing perspectives on community in their respective articles. While examining different topics, both Kates and Song analyze the underlying discourses of the ‘hidden curriculum’ in education. Examining the public discourse surrounding the Ontario Accepting Schools Act, passed in 2012, Kates explores conceptions of inclusion articulated by political parties in the province, as well as the opposition to these orientations to inclusion faced by the Catholic Church and School Board. Through her analysis, Kates exposes the homophobic and heteronormative discourses prevalent in Ontario schools. For her part, Song addresses the dominance of English as an International Language (EIL) as reflected and represented in national television programming in Korea. Applying critical discourse analysis, she illustrates how unequal power relations among global languages are reproduced when American English and Anglophone culture is positioned as a global standard and norm.

In the last article of this issue, Emerald Lee highlights assumptions underlying cognitive psychology, particularly concerning how language relates to thinking processes. Inquiry in the field of psychology tends to require thinking and related cognitive processes to be operationalized in measurable and observable terms. However,
drawing on the work of Martin Heidegger, Lee suggests that aspects of thinking are irreducible to language. She complicates the idea of teaching thinking, particularly because written and oral language dominates pedagogy and interaction between teachers and students. Asking readers to think otherwise about teaching thinking, Lee raises an interesting question: if language cannot comprehensively represent thinking processes, how can thinking be taught?

In addition to these articles, this issue contains an opinion piece by Doron Yosef-Hassidim that engages with a particularly challenging circumstance within OISE’s scholarly community. In particular, this piece reflects on the recent arrest of Dr. Ben Levin, an OISE faculty member, on serious charges. Without commenting specifically on the case, Yosef-Hassidim raises critical questions about the nature of the connection between a scholar and his or her research, and the implications of personal issues on the interpretation of scholarship.

Taken together, the papers in this issue point to the need and the opportunity to push at and challenge both practical assumptions and theoretical understandings of community. Through ongoing critical reflection and practice, we might achieve the dual aims of improving scholarly inquiry and contributing meaningfully to the communities to which we belong.

References