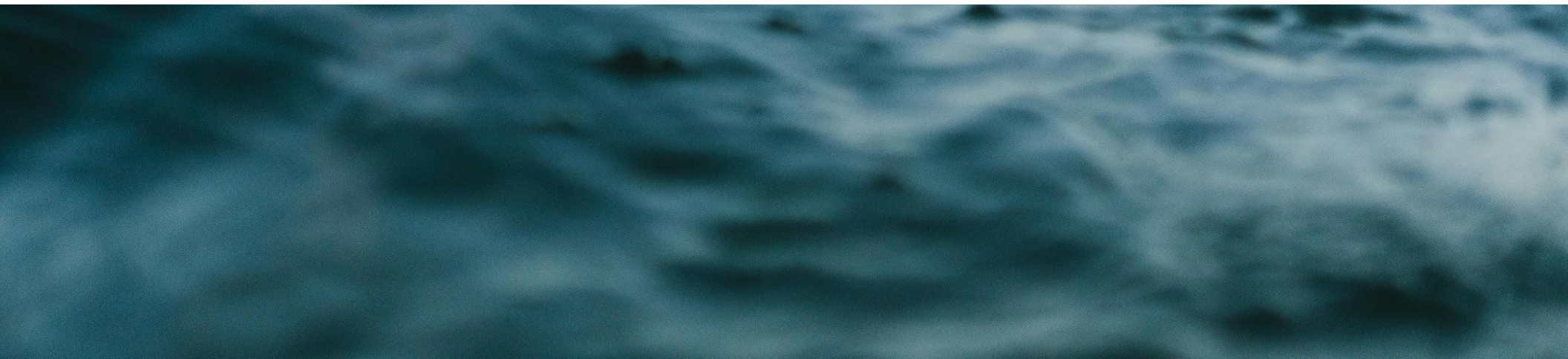


CON-CURRENTS



21st Annual York University Graduate Student Conference in Education

con-currents : part two

March 19, 2025, Online at <https://yorku.zoom.us/j/92192953140>

CON-CURRENTS

Program Summary | Link for all sessions: <https://yorku.zoom.us/j/92192953140>

9:30AM | Keynote Conversation

Dr. Safra Najeemudeen and Sheetal Prasad with discussant Hilarius Kofinti Kofinti

Creating a Community of Care: The Role of Care, Community, and Belonging in the PhD Journey

10:45AM | Ripples and Reflections: Alumni Panel Discussion

Featuring Dr. Zuhra Abawi, Dr. Jane Griffith, and Blessing Owusu

1:00PM | Workshop

We Aren't Here To Learn What We Already Know with Dr. Gabby Moser

2:30PM | Workshop

Navigating the Academic Job Market with Dr. Molade Osibodu and Dr. Rachel Silver

4:00PM | Graduate Student Papers

~Prilly Bicknell-Hersco and
Gurkirat Singh Sidhu
~Sanda Miletovic
~Wendy Moffatt
~Chunlei Liu

~Mahnaz Dehghantezerjani
~Victoria Villani
~Jarrod Hodgins
~Aida Mohammadi

5:30PM | Brief Closing Remarks

A Theme, An Invitation

Sometimes I need both to be strong and to be held. My own mysterious strength of quantum genetics, of cape and revolution, of spin and stripe. What if it is the world being the world that makes the sky the sky? What if the sky rushed in all directions to meet us here, connect us to everywhere? What if the ocean has my back? Could I trust that?
(Gumbs, 2021, p. 32)

This method versus that one; those traditions over another; their word against theirs — constantly asked to choose between one or the other, staying in the tension of the in-between is a challenge. But what is *constant* if not the push-and-pull of currents, which are constantly moving? What might it mean to be *with* — learn *with* — these *currents*? What is it to be swept away by the force of a theory, an observation, or even a pedagogue? When have we been rocked by the waves of knowledge that upend established notions of ‘what works’ and ‘what matters’ in education? How does it feel to be pulled under, surprised by the undertow that was there all along, running below the surface?

This year’s conference theme extends an invitation to linger with the *concurrents* of tensions and possibilities encountered in our own scholarship and in our pedagogical relationships. Whether these are methodological, ethical, historical, epistemological — compared with the familiar ‘concurrent sessions’ found at a typical conference (which split attention and attendance into separate spaces, apart from the whole) — we are designing a space where what is experienced as *concurrent* may be the varied practices we animate across our scholarship. And what might that tell us about the questions we ask in our inquiry?

A Theme, An Invitation

With *con-current(s)*, the first half of the hyphenation, “con”, means ours is a place for being “with” one another, and our ideas, to explore the possibility of holding estranged, or seemingly dichotomous ideas, in the same hand. The latter half, “current(s)”, expresses our intention for this conference to be a place for recognizing what is already “existing and happening at the same time” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2024). Our ‘happening’ alongside one another requires us to engage with what tensions we meet, and through that, make new waves.

Extending the 2022 conference and its theme, *re: alongside the 2024 conference’s desires for thinking other worlds, anyways*, we situate *con-current(s)* as a way to think and *re:imagine* otherwise worlds that are *with us, here and now, from then and there*. As Ellyn Lyle, Jodi Latremouille, and David Jardine (2021) write: “We often hear that we are living in extraordinary times. This gives us pause as we wonder, *has there ever been a time that was not extraordinary? ... now is the time. Just as now has always been the time*” (p. 3, emphasis in original).

Mirroring the dynamic push-and-pull of *currents*, our desire is for these dialogues to shape what we imagine, even as we are pulled toward the depths in the face of despairing events and contradictions. As we do this, we approach the in-between as a place of possibility, not stuckness. This may allow us to find, as Bronwyn Davies and Susanne Gannon (2006) suggest, an ability to tolerate the disruption of binaries and move our questions towards those needed to carry out careful, ethical research and pedagogy. As they write,

It is the both/and of these stories that we turn to discover that we are both working in an oppressive regime that silences us and we are the wild women who will laugh at it, and name its absurdity and violence. (Davies & Gannon, 2006, p. 86)

In such a “both-and proposition” writes adrienne maree brown, “Doing the work reveals more of the work to be done in us” (p. 81). We invite graduate scholars to join us in this work, so that we might reveal, analyze, and create *con-current(s)*, together.

A Theme, An Invitation

To do so, this year for the 21st annual graduate student conference hosted by the YGSE, we took a different approach than usual. We decided to not only to witness students' works in progress through traditional paper sessions, but to generate a dedicated space for graduate students studying topics in education to gather and think together about their ideas, ongoing work, questions, and experiences. At Part One, our in-person *colloquium*, participants gathered to encounter a PhD keynote paper, facilitated workshops, and artistic provocations focused on generating dialogue. This day was an opportunity to share ideas and work in progress in conversation with peers. Hosted at The Tranzac Club in Toronto, the in-person *colloquium* was a chance to spend time with each other and with our ideas. [To revisit the program from Part One, visit the link here.](#)

In Part Two, participants meet again, this time online, to encounter each others' work in the form of paper presentations, workshops from Faculty members, and to hear from alumni. Starting with a Keynote Conversation about the role of care and community in the graduate education journey, Part Two features varied voices and perspectives from graduate studies in the Faculty of Education at York University.

We would like to thank our conference committee, reviewers, funders, and participants for joining us to create *con-currents*. Thank you to Gabby Moser, Graduate Program Director, for supporting our conference goals, listening to us, and advocating on our behalf to ensure our event could go forward as we hoped.

From the waves,

~Tesni Ellis and Ellie Van Berkel

Conference Coordinators, 2024-2025 YGSE

con-currents Part Two Program

9:30AM | Opening Remarks and Keynote Conversation

Dr. Safra Najeemudeen and Sheetal Prasad in conversation with discussant Hilarius Kofinti Kofinti

Creating a Community of Care: The Role of Care, Community, and Belonging in the PhD Journey

The PhD journey is often depicted as solitary and grueling—a test of endurance marked by cycles of doubt, anxiety, burnout, isolation, and relentless institutional pressures. But does it have to be this way? In this keynote, Safra and Sheetal, in conversation with Hilarius Kofinti Kofinti, will draw from their personal doctoral odyssey, involvement in the graduate student council, and research-based insights to explore the transformative power of care, community, and belonging in navigating the challenges of academia. Through reflective storytelling, they will bring to light the invisible struggles that define the PhD experience—moments of despair, the quiet longing for validation, and the critical importance of being seen and heard. By revisiting distinct phases of the doctoral journey, they will share the 'tricks of the trade'—rites of passage shaped by their own trials, setbacks, and celebrations.

Together, we'll reimagine what it means to create spaces of care—where students feel safe to express vulnerability and build connections. Whether it's a kind word from a colleague, a supportive community during tough times, or simply having someone in your corner, these acts of care have the power to transform a lonely path into one of shared strength and connection. This session challenges us to rethink the culture of graduate studies, shifting the narrative from one of survival through endurance to one of thriving together. Ultimately, it's a call to action: to build a culture where PhD students don't just receive advice or answers but find a community of care.

con-currents Part Two Program

10:45AM | Ripples and Reflections: Alumni Panel Discussion

Featuring:

~ Dr. Zuhra Abawi (York BA Hon 2009, B.Ed. 2013, M.Ed. 2014)

~Dr. Jane Griffith (York PhD 2015)

~Blessing Owusu (York BA 2017, B.Ed 2019, M.Ed 2024)

Hear from alumni about their experiences as they think about their studies and scholarship in relation to our conference theme, *concurrents*. Guest speakers Dr. Zuhra Abawi, Dr. Jane Griffith, and Blessing Owusu will share brief presentations and answer questions from the audience in this conversational panel. We ask our guest speakers: thinking back on your studies at York in relationship to your present scholarship or practice, what do you have to say to graduate students who are caught amidst the tensions and possibilities of educational scholarship?

12PM | Break for Lunch

1:00PM | Workshop

We Aren't Here To Learn What We Already Know
with Dr. Gabby Moser

Following [Kyla Wazana Tompkins's call for questions](#) that "move from theory to the world," this workshop considers the kinds of questions we want to pose to texts, to ourselves, and to one another. After reading the text out loud together, participants will deploy Tompkins's strategy of collectively writing, editing and revising questions, that might serve as mandates for future research, teaching and artistic practice.

2:30PM | Workshop

Navigating the Academic Job Market
with Dr. Molade Osibodu and Dr. Rachel Silver

This workshop will draw on our experiences navigating the North American job market to support you with tools and strategies. We focus in particular on building an academic CV, noting things to think about at different points in the degree program. We invite you to bring questions and join us for an engaging discussion.

con-currents Part Two Program

4:00PM | Graduate Student Papers

In two 'waves', graduate students from the Faculty of Education will present papers on varying topics. A brief discussion period will allow the audience to ask questions to presenters after Wave One and again following Wave Two.

~Wave One~

~ Prilly Bicknell-Hersco and Gurkirat Singh Sidhu
Interrogating Whiteness in Education: Conversations from Marginalized Voices in Academia

~ Sanda Miletovic
Introducing traditional ecological knowledge into the secondary school system

~ Wendy Moffatt
In defence of critical literacy pedagogy: An effective literacy approach addressing the needs of immigrant students in Canadian schools

~ Chunlei Liu
Exploring the Impact of ChatGPT on Language Education: A Literature Review

~Wave Two~

~Mahnaz Dehghantezerjani
Where Are We Heading? Are Inquiry-Based Learning and Class Discussions Enough?

~Victoria Villani
What Will Happen if Dance Education Disappears? The Importance of Dance Education in Fostering Connection and Avoiding 'Worldlessness'

~Jarrod Hodgins
Exploring Culturally Diverse Theatre in the Grade 9-10 Curriculum in ELL Student Reading

~Aida Mohammadi
Beyond Sentimentality; Baldwin's Critique of Protest Novels in Contemporary Discourse

5:30PM | Brief Closing Remarks

Meet our *con-currents* Keynote Speakers

Safra Majeemudeen, RECE, is a Professional Practice Analyst at the College of Early Childhood Educators. She holds a PhD from the Faculty of Education at York University, an MA in Early Childhood Studies, and a BA in Early Childhood Leadership. Her dissertation explores how digital storytelling can illuminate the resettlement experiences of Syrian refugee children in Ontario, providing educators with deeper insights into these children's journeys and fostering greater social awareness of their realities. Her career spans roles as an early childhood educator (ECE), family support practitioner, adjunct professor in early childhood programs, and professional learning coordinator for ECEs. Committed to equity, justice, and liberation, Safra's work centers on teaching and learning in culturally diverse contexts.

Sheetal Prasad is a Ph.D. candidate and SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship recipient in the Faculty of Education at York University. She holds an Honours BFA in Studio Art with History minor at McMaster University and a MFA in Interdisciplinary Art, Media and Design at OCAD University. Her current research examines representation within Canadian secondary history classrooms and how history textbooks and curricula can be interrogated through multimodal learning and engagement. With her background in fine art, she combines archival and art research methods to create augmented reality works that inform viewers of multiple perspectives in Canadian history.

Meet our *con-currents* Alumni Speakers

Zuhra Abawi is an Assistant Professor of Education and Chair of the Department of Educational Leadership at Niagara University Ontario. She is the author of *The Effectiveness of Educational Policy for Bias-Free Hiring: Critical Insights to Enhance Diversity in the Canadian Teacher Workforce* (2021) and co-editor of *Equity as Praxis in Early Childhood Education and Care* (2021) and *Enacting Anti-Racist and Activist Pedagogies in Education: Canadian Perspectives* (2023). Her work focuses on how discourses of race, equity and identity are negotiated, mediated and socialized in education.

Jane Griffith (settler) completed a PhD in York University's Language, Culture, and Teaching program in 2015. Her dissertation focused on the printing presses of nineteenth-century residential schools, which eventually became the book *Words Have a Past: The English Language, Colonialism, and the Newspapers of Indian Boarding School*. After graduating, she completed a post-doc in the Department of Social Justice Education at OISE and is now an associate professor in the School of Professional Communication at TMU.

Blessing Owusu Blessing Owusu is a dedicated intermediate-grade educator, author, and advocate for equity and inclusivity in education. A proud three-time York University alumna, she holds multiple degrees, including a Master of Education, with a research focus on intersectionality within schools. Through her own experiences and her Master's Research Project (MRP), she wrote *Abena's Adventures: A Taste of Home*, a children's book that highlights cultural representation and belonging. Blessing actively engages in leadership opportunities, professional development, and initiatives that support marginalized communities. Passionate about fostering inclusive learning spaces, she integrates culturally responsive practices into her teaching to empower students and create meaningful learning experiences.

About York Graduate Students in Education (YGSE)

The YGSE represents and advocates for the collective interests of Faculty of Education graduate students in all matters of departmental policy and action at York University and beyond. The YGSE seeks to build community among the graduate students, faculty, and the larger university, with consideration for diverse experiences and interests. Above all, the YGSE works to nourish the environment within which graduate students develop, both professionally and personally while maintaining an open, accessible and democratic voice for students.

As an organization that operates and is implicated within a colonial institution, we recognize our responsibilities to Indigenous peoples, Land, and members of marginalized communities.

We do so by supporting community projects that have these concerns as central to their initiatives, ensuring equity concerns are prioritized in YGSE matters, and ongoing reflection on and articulation on our relationship with treaty. In this way, we are actively working on noticing and dismantling oppressive structures within YGSE.

YGSE membership is drawn from volunteers each Fall and meets approximately five times during the academic year. Getting involved with the YGSE is an excellent leadership opportunity to better understand and more fully participate in the Faculty of Education and the university. Learn more about the YGSE and how to get involved at <https://ygse.info.yorku.ca/>.

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