Say My Name: Name-Based Racial Microaggressions in Ontario's K-12 School System

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Abstract

Names have long been connected with an individual's perception of themselves and their identities. Studies have shown that negative experiences with one's name can impact a student's sense of self and belonging, and their overall well-being. Students in Ontario with culturally diverse, or unique names are at a greater risk of experiencing racial microaggressions relating to their names. These experiences can contribute to the marginalization of diverse student populations such as South Asian Canadian students. Previous research has demonstrated this correlation in various minority populations, but there exists a gap in current literature, with limited research conducted on the South Asian Canadian experience. The voices of Canadian-born South Asians have not been adequately heard despite the growing South Asian population throughout the province. This portfolio was designed to consider these voices, as well as include three elements (or tasks) which all argue that there exists a current need to overhaul existing attendance protocols in Ontario K-12 classrooms. The resulting proposal is for the integration of a name pronunciation tool into existing learning management systems, such as Power Schools, and Desire2Learn.

Key Words: Names, Identity, Student Well-Being, Critical Race Theory, Cultural Difference Model, Cultural Deficit Model, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Racial Microaggressions, Transformative Worldview, Phenomenology, Multicultural Education, Ontario, Canada

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Dedication

To my parents, Harjit Kaur Sohal and Karmjit Singh Sohal. You have both sacrificed so much and worked tirelessly to give me a life full of opportunities. Thank you for your unconditional love and encouragement. Thank you for providing me with a balanced upbringing in small town Ontario, ensuring that I remained connected to our roots. *Thank you for gifting me my name*.

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Introduction

What's in a name? For many, names are symbolic representations of themselves. They are gifted to us at, or shortly after, birth, and they are the literary representations of the way we choose to portray ourselves, and the way we perceive ourselves. Thus, our names are significant parts of our identities, as well as the identities through which we relate to others. When it comes to relating to others, names can also be the basis upon which we are insiders or outsiders, and seen as the same or different. As we grow increasingly aware of the experiences of racialized peoples in Canada, it is crucial to explore how names, a significant element of how we identify ourselves to [and are identified by] others, can contribute to the marginalization of diverse individuals such as second-generation South Asian Canadians.

Through the perspective of colonialism, there exists a relational interaction between societal power dynamics and the westernization of names. However, the perpetuation of such dynamics through ethnic-racial microaggressions and their impact on the well-being, identity, and further marginalization of South Asian Canadians have yet to be fully studied. South Asian immigrant parents have also experienced this phenomenon as seen through trends within this group to adopt western names as part of their professional identity — Mohinder becomes Moe, Rajwant becomes Tony, Harvinder is now Peter, and so on. Girma (2019) describes this as a strategy used to "navigate their racialized immigrant identities" (p. 16). However, this phenomenon also illuminates a unique layer of the intergenerational impact of colonialism. What then is the implication of such a practice on their second-generation children whose identities are a mosaic of Canadian-born and racialized children of immigrants?

Although research has previously identified a correlation between k-12 teachers mispronouncing names and the internalized racism in Black, Latin American, and Pacific

Islander communities (Kohli, 2012), the experiences of second-generation South Asian Canadians are only beginning to emerge in the literature. A further gap in current literature is the limited research conducted on the above-noted group by a member of the community. The voices of Canadian-born South Asians remain relatively quiet in literature, particularly given the growing South Asian population throughout the nation, especially in Ontario.

The purpose of this portfolio is to provide educators with a conceptual understanding of how microaggressions exist in the realm of education — specifically name-based racial microaggressions — and the issues that they create for south Asian students in Ontario. In doing so, the aim of the portfolio is to provide educators with a solid framework through which they can ensure that their classrooms involve culturally responsive pedagogy to support their diverse student population. Through a literature review, the deep impact of name-based racial microaggressions on personal identity, well-being, and sense of belonging will be conceptualized, while subsequent tasks will provide further tools to support educators in the classroom. This portfolio began as a response to a gap in research on the impact of name-based microaggressions on second generation South Asian Canadians. However, implications of the proposed technology (name pronunciation integration with attendance protocols) are far-reaching beyond this underrepresented population.

Rationale

After an experience during my second year of the education program at Lakehead that left me to relive past experiences I had long forgotten, I knew that name-based racial microaggressions were an area of marginalization that I wanted to research and to raise awareness in the field of education. At the time, I did not know the term for this phenomenon, but I was aware that many of my people of colour (POC) peers and family members had similar

lived experiences — I also believe that some part of me was subconsciously looking to validate my own memories, to convince myself I wasn't making a mountain out of a molehill. That lack of validation in those marginalizing experiences is part of the very nature of microaggressions; however, over years and years of reliving similar experiences, those "molehills" accumulate into a mountain that simply cannot be ignored any longer.

The primary premise underlying this portfolio is that there exists a need for additional support and intervention in the current K-12 education system in Ontario surrounding microaggressions. This portfolio is therefore positioned within a transformative worldview. It operates with an agenda to promote change (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018) in the form of recommendations for name-pronunciation integration into attendance protocols. Name-based racial microaggressions are approached throughout this research as a unique lived experience of second-generation children of immigrants, such as South Asian Canadians. The aim of this portfolio is to illuminate the essence that is at the core of this phenomenon (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) and the ways in which it may impact diverse students.

I have had a tumultuous relationship with my own identity and my name. I entered kindergarten using the name Gurjyot, meaning God's Light, a name that my parents gifted me after a religious Sikh ceremony had taken place. After an unfortunate, and accidental mispronunciation of my name by an Occasional Teacher in grade four I pleaded with my family to change my name at school to my easier family name of Sona. So, from grades 4 to 12, I was Sona (and its many variations). Over the years I continued to go back and forth with these names. My name has always been a large part of my struggle with my identity as a third culture child of immigrants. So when a negative experience in a professional environment, surrounded by my peers, caused such a strong emotional reaction from me, I spent time reflecting on this

journey. Although difficult, that experience made me realize that I needed to explore the full extent of the impact that name-based racial microaggressions have on children in the Ontario K-12 public system, and how I can help prevent others from reliving the same experiences as me.

In response to the cultural deficit model that I believe this phenomenon functions within, I am informed by the cultural difference model. Whether consciously or not, name-based experiences bring with them the notion that "minority group members are different because their culture is deficient in important ways from the dominant majority group" (Song & Pyon, 2008, p.2). Historically used to justify the academic disparity of racialized students, the deficit model perpetuates a hierarchical relationship between different cultures. In response, the cultural difference model is seen in current pedagogical approaches that encourage diversity and celebrate the wealth of prior knowledge all students bring to the classroom (Song & Pyon, 2008).

I hold a strong belief in pedagogical approaches that place emphasis on student well-being and mental health. Having had the experience of teaching online through the pandemic in a grade three classroom, I strived to ensure an appropriate balance was kept between curriculum and well-being when everything else about the school year was so off balance and challenging. The experiences I have had, heard about, and read about with name-based racial microaggressions have solidified my understanding of the negative and long-lasting impact they have on student well-being. I had the opportunity to conduct a research study as a course requirement during the spring/summer 2020 term. Data was collected from five participants in semi-structured interviews. What I found was that many others cited similar sources for their experiences with name-based racial microaggressions. I heard every participant speak about the first day of school attendance, or anticipating a mispronunciation from an occasional teacher. It was in one of these conversations, when discussing the new name pronunciation tool available

on Linkedin, when I initially developed the idea of a name pronunciation tool to be integrated within the attendance procedure. Knowing this, I am confident that what we need is an explicit protocol to be in place that helps protect student rights and provides them with the power to choose their own identities.

The three tasks contributing to this portfolio were designed to provide evidence of the need for Ontario school boards, and the Ministry of Education, to support the personal and academic support of their diverse student population. It is also designed to promote increased knowledge and awareness of the importance of learning preferred name pronunciations, and the development of procedures to support educators in their classrooms.

The first task, the literature review, provides a conceptual understanding of the phenomenon of name-based experiences negatively impacting students'. The following research questions were developed: (1) What are microaggressions? (2) How do name-based racial microaggressions impact students with culturally diverse names in K-12 classrooms? *Next,* a soft feature article targeting educators and school administrators, provides readers with an overview of the phenomenon as well as practical suggestions for the classroom. Although the primary goal of this portfolio is to promote the use of a name pronunciation tool, this task will help meet the secondary goal of ensuring educators are aware of the impact name-based racial microaggressions can have and to provide tangible suggestions that can be more easily implemented in their classrooms. *The third and final task,* took the form of a formal proposal for the name pronunciation tool. The proposal was written with the Safe and Inclusive Schools Committee at Grand Erie District School Board as its intended audience.

Task 1: Literature Review

Say My Name: Name-Based Racial Microaggressions in Ontario's K-12 School System

Introduction

Teachers and education professionals strive to provide quality education to all students, while maintaining a focus on creating a safe and inclusive environment. In order to do so, educators are encouraged to understand the lived experiences of their students. Knowing their students and developing student profiles supports teachers in planning and assessment that "enables every student to learn and achieve success" (Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 33). Critically examining the negative influences within the classroom and school environment helps educators understand the role they play and how to respond to such influences or experiences. This is especially important for marginalized student populations such as students of colour, of immigrant descent, and second generation students. Historically speaking, there has been a misconception that South Asians do not experience prejudice, discrimination, or bias, and frameworks such as the "model minority myth" are used to argue that "Asians have 'made it' within society" (Srinivasan, 2019, p.6). This narrative has perpetuated the belief that they are exempt from discrimination. However, Asians, specifically South Asians, experience racism and/or discrimination based on "many multicultural indicators such as skin tone, hair texture, clothing, and accent" (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 7). Within the context of this review, the term second generation South Asian Canadians refers to individuals who are born in Canada, and either one or both of their parents are originally from South Asia (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, or Sri Lanka).

Research suggests that the alignment of cultural or ethnic names with westernized, or "white"[1], pronunciations can be theorized through the cultural deficit paradigm. Also referred to as the *deficit model*, this paradigm suggests that minority or marginalized cultures are deficient, or lacking in certain domains, when compared to the dominant majority culture (Song & Pyon, 2008). From this perspective, with each negative interaction with their name in the classroom, students are subtly internalizing the idea that a cultural, or ethnic, hierarchy exists in which they are inferior (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Mann, 2020). These interactions can take the form of "subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are 'put downs'" (Pierce et al., 1978 quoted in Sue et al., 2007, p.273) known as racial microaggressions. Microaggressions are covert forms of racism. The authors extend their position on the impact of racial microaggressions as they argue that they are cumulative in nature such that they "take a toll on People of Colour. In isolation, racial microaggressions may not have much meaning or impact: however, as repeated slights, the effects can be profound" (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012, p.447). As students' personal identities, mental well-being, and sense of belonging are all impacted by such experiences, educators must explore and understand the racial microaggressions experienced by their diverse students in order to foster and maintain a safe and inviting classroom environment.

Names and Identity

Current literature includes research that has examined and identified a connection between one's name and their personal identity, or sense of self (Dion, 1983, Kohli & Solorzano, 2012, Kim & Lee, 2011). Names are central to one's self-identity and, as Kang (1971) describes, a "symbolic representation of a person's social identity" (p.403). Not only are names essential to

[1] Although the current APA handbook calls for capitalizing both Black and White (APA, 2020), this doesn't seem to be a universally followed guideline. Those in favour of capitalizing the word White feel that doing so follows the standard present for all other racially identifying terminology. However, those who do not support capitalizing White argue that "white carries a different set of meanings; capitalizing the word in this context risks following the lead of white supremacists." (Laws, 2020). I have chosen to do the latter and use the lowercase.

how we see ourselves, they also inform the way that we interact with others and position ourselves in society. In this section of the review of literature, names will be examined within the context of personal, social, and cultural identities.

Aldrin's (2014) theoretical framework of the process of naming explores the mechanisms through which personal naming influences the development of one's identity. It is built on the notion that identity develops, solidifies, and responds to cultural and social factors and is "something people actively do, rather than something that exists a priori" (p. 393).

Individuals create small-scale fluid identities that exist for the duration of particular interactions. In fact, identity creation is made up of several individual acts, one of which is choosing a name. These identities are images of the self that are made *in relation* to one's surroundings and environment. If then, names are an integral aspect of identity, renaming or altering a pronunciation without an individual's consent skews this image. The more skewed interactions someone has with their name, the more this identity image is reinforced, potentially hindering the development of a strong identity in younger students or breaking away the image they had cultivated for themselves.

Aldrin (2014) further positions the concept of naming as being beyond a performative act and instead a process of its own (see Appendix A). The concept of naming as a process is a sentiment shared by other researchers as well. For example, Payne et al. (2018) argues that naming is a social process that symbolizes identity. Within Aldrin's (2014) framework, each phase of the naming process requires making choices that impact one's social positioning; "any name and any chosen action during the process of naming could potentially become associated with certain social attributes, values, groups and, therefore, social positions in relation to which parents will then have to orient themselves" (p.394).

Other dimensions of available literature have also echoed the notion that there is in fact a psychological connection between one's sense of self and their name (Dion, 1983; Kim & Lee, 2011; Payne et al., 2018). Dion (1983) explored the manifestation of this connection as seen in the "Who Am I?" procedure (also referred to as the Twenty Statements Test). When prompted to ask themselves this question twenty times, college students responded with their name at least once. A name is like a "unique identity peg" (Gordon, 1968, p. 125, in Dion, 1983, p.247). Not only are names an important aspect of our personal identity, they also have the power to elicit one's attention. For example, when presented with various stimuli (for example a noisy room), individuals are still able to hear and recognize their own names (Dion, 1983). Even young children with multiple names have been seen to more readily recognize and respond to the name they hear most often at home or school (Kim & Lee, 2011).

Personal identity is something that actively develops during a child's formative years. Through interaction with society, peers, teachers, family, and parents/guardians, children are constantly adding to and adjusting their own identity schemas. The observations that children make of adults around them engaging in naming practices have been shown to impact their own naming practices. An ethnographic study of young Korean American children with at least two given names found that peers, and the children themselves, were more likely to use the name they heard most frequently from their parents or classroom teacher (Kim & Lee, 2011). These children had learned to incorporate the name that they heard most often into their personal schemas, or as belonging to their identity more than the name they heard less frequently. Many of the parents and guardians interviewed in this study stated that they felt a desire to help their children feel like they belonged to their host culture and their ethnic culture, or that they were American and also belonged to the Korean community. In this way we see how names are used

as a resource to 'secure' a child's social identity or position; "A named child has, in a sense, a social identity. To know a child's name…is to know who that child is. And when the child is old enough to know his [sic] own name, he, in a sense, knows who he is. (Alford, 1988, p. 29). Kim & Lee (2011) were responding to the current gap in literature surrounding names, name negotiations, and identities is how young children (specifically of immigrant descent) engage and participate in naming practices.

With names being so connected to identity, researchers have also found *name negotiations* (such as renaming, mispronunciations, or other name-based racial microaggressions) to be associated with a loss of personal and/or cultural identities (Girma, 2019; Keller & Franzak, 2015; Mann, 2020; Srinivasan, 2019). A study examining picture books about culturally and linguistically diverse children found that a major theme in these stories of name negotiations was a conflict of identity. These picture books tell stories of children fearing a loss of their cultural identity while at the same time struggling to assimilate, or fit in, with the host culture (Keller & Franzak, 2015). When describing the impact of name negotiation on these characters the authors argued that "in losing their names or fearing such a loss in the U.S. school context, these characters express how a name is essential to an understanding of self" (p.185). This further supports previous research focused on identifying the extent to which names are related to our personal and social identities. Within this theme of identity conflicts was the idea that in order for children to move beyond the feelings of loss and fear they needed to take control of their name negotiations and the pressures of acculturation or assimilation.

Similar to the concept of names as identity pegs that Dion (1983) discussed, other researchers have described names as fitting various frames, or preconceived expectations about people based on previous experience (Payne et al., 2018). Using a transformative approach,

researchers found that the social frame a name is seen as belonging to can impact perceptions of that individual's identity; "when names do not fit into the accepted social frame, they are marked as inferior, strange, difficult, or esoteric and therefore modified" (Payne et al., 2018, p. 565). Within the context of Canada, names such as John are often seen through a frame of belonging or whiteness while ethnic or cultural names are otherwise attributed to a frame of 'foreignness'. In other words, the social frame in which a name is perceived impacts the perception of that individual's cultural identity. Therefore, "since names and identities are inextricably bound together, the process of renaming is an attempt to change an identity" (p. 564). Payne et al. (2018) solidifies this argument by quoting linguistic scholar Lehiste who argued that "a distortion of the name is a violation of the self-image. In order to retain his identity, the person has to retain his name-protect it against mispronunciations, keep it inviolate" (Lehiste, 1975 as cited in Payne et al., 2018 p.564).

Naming practices correlate with personal *and* social identities; for example, Girma (2019) explored the impact of naming (and renaming) practices on one's cultural identity and showed that not only do parents consider names in terms of social currency, they are also viewed within the context of cultural belonging. This particular case study focused on the naming practices of first generation Ethiopian-Americans found that parents chose names that reflected their ethnic or national ancestry as a way to reclaim "a threatened identity from the homeland" (Girma, 2019, p.25). For Ethiopian Americans, choosing a name that was ethnically grounded meant ensuring the child's identity was culturally situated with their lineage. Thus, this line of thinking could extend to the idea that westernizing or renaming a child weakens their cultural anchor. Conversely, a name could be linked to ethnic socialization; as Dimitrova (2018) explored in their study, "ethnic socialization (i.e., parental practices…) has been generally associated with

multiple components of youths' ethnic identity" (p. 1). In fact, while cultural identities are built upon a number of factors, one of the most influential parental practices relating to ethnic socialization are naming practices. Cultural identity and ethnic identities have also been found to correlate with "positive developmental outcomes" (Dimitrova, 2018, p.3). In protecting, or strengthening, a child's cultural identity, parents may then be providing them with additional tools for success. The researchers also concluded that as there was no apparent link between ethnic identities and school achievement, further research is needed to include "academic dimensions [such as] school engagement [or] persistence" (p.7).

Exploring the transformative nature of names, researcher Tualaulelei's critical ethnographic study illustrated "how teachers and students have agency…in transforming the social space of the classroom through naming practices" (Tualaulelei, 2021, p.20). This agency and transformative potential were seen in one of the classroom's that participated in the study. After students and their teacher participated in interviews focusing on students' Samoan names and their correct pronunciations, the researcher observed the class teacher actively using the correct Samoan pronunciation of their student's names. The teacher also shared that those students who previously had a westernized school name had since insisted their "real names" (p.28) be used in the class instead. However, in classrooms where the teacher was not as active in learning correct pronunciations, the researcher found that students were less likely to advocate for the use of their real names and continued to use their school name instead. The case of the first classroom is evidence to support the argument that a student's different 'selves' can exist in unison instead of separately with their home name aligning with a home self and a school name grounded in a separate identity.

Within their study, Girma (2019) also reiterates the process of naming practices that seems to be shared by many minority or immigrant groups in a white dominant host country. That is the concern with their child's integration into said society and choosing names in hopes that they would "easily fit in the dominant society" (Girma, 2019, p.25). A distinguishing feature of second-generation South Asian Canadians however, is a tricultural perspective on identity (Dimitrova, 2018) or the perspective of "third culture kids" whose identities are built out of their host countries society as well as their ancestral South Asian culture, creating their own unique third culture.

Racial Microaggressions

Although Canada has developed a reputation for being a mosaic of different cultures, instances of discrimination and bias are still experienced by racialized individuals across the nation. Some of these instances can be categorized as less aggressive than acts of overt racism, however their effects remain as detrimental to POC. They differ from historical racism in what Sue et al. (2007) described as a "transformation" (p. 272) into what's now been labelled as modern or symbolic racism. This new age racism no longer involves public or obvious displays of bias, instead they are more ambiguous, making them difficult to identify, often couched as microaggressions. First coined to conceptualize the experiences of Black men in America (Pierce et al., 1977), *racial microaggressions* are now recognized as a shared experience across racial groups. Understood as "subtle, daily insults" (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012), whether intentional or not, racial microaggressions are undoubtedly a type of racism that involves a post-colonial hierarchy that is communicated to the receiver of the microaggression. As such they are internalized as personal inferiority based on their diverse identity; "microaggressions are brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of colour because they belong to a

racial minority group" (Sue et al., 2007, p.273). More often than not, intention is used as a justification for the occurrence of such brief exchanges. However, an unintentional racial microaggression has the potential to have an equally negative impact as an intentional microaggressive behaviour.

Because of its interactional nature, it is important to recognize the complexity of analyzing and understanding the impact of racial microaggressions. Kohli and Solorzano (2012) presented a model (see Appendix B) based on four area for understanding racial microaggressions; (1) the types of racial microaggressions experienced by POC, (2) the context surrounding the experience, (3) what effect did it have on them, and (4) how did they resound to it. This review illustrates the need for intervention and further onomastic research, focusing specifically on these four areas in relation to name-based microaggressions in the classroom.

Types of Microaggressions

When looking at microaggressions and their impact on everyday life, researchers have differentiated instances into three primary types (Sue et al., 2007; Baker, 2017; Ong et al., 2013). *Microassaults* can manifest as verbal or nonverbal attacks with hurtful intentions. This form of microaggression is most closely related to individual-level, traditional, or old fashioned, racism (Sue et al., 2007). Arguably the most conscious of the three types, accordingly microassaults are often shared in the private sphere (Baker, 2017). Next, there are the *microinsults* that most often manifest in an unconscious manner. However, these communications still result in one's racial heritage or identity being demeaned with frequent "snubs...unknown to the perpetrator, but clearly conveying a hidden insulting message to the recipient of colour" (Sue et al., 2007, p.274). For example, questioning whether a student was accepted into a post secondary institution as a result of affirmative action within the admissions process (Srinivasan, 2019). Lastly, there are

microinvalidations that, as the name implies, invalidate the thoughts, or feelings of a POC. These interactions "negate the experiences of the person of colour" (Baker, 2017, p.5). An example of a microinvalidation is asking a Canadian-born person of colour where they are "really from". Microinsults and microinvalidations can be further broken down into subcategories each with unique themes (see Appendix C).

Intention is an important element in categorizing microaggression. However, quantifying and proving that one's actions are impacted by unconscious bias is relatively difficult. Sue et al. (2007) offer a solution to this dilemma by defining microaggressions as being unintentional but most likely to occur when another "reasonable explanation" can be presented to justify a behaviour. For example, justifying a professor's name-based microaggression against a student of colour with the argument that they have hundreds of names to learn, they didn't mean to omit yours. One study on the impact of racial microaggressions found that microinvalidations "likely play a major role in increasing risk for negative affect and somatic symptoms, above and beyond the effects of microinsults" (Ong et al., 2013).

Name-Based Racial Microaggressions

Racial microaggressions can involve cultural divisors such as skin tone, linguistic differences and stereotypes, but they can also involve ethnically diverse names. Experiences revolving around names with ethnic groundings have been referred to as *name-based microaggressions* (Srinivasan, 2019). This phenomenon can manifest itself through mispronouncing names, westernizing the way they are pronounced, the refusal to learn the desired pronunciation of a name, or even renaming an individual all together.

Racialized-renaming has a long history within Canada. The residential school system has undoubtedly been detrimental and damaging to Indigenous communities and identities in

Canada. From mandated cutting of symbolically long hair to forbidding communication in any Indigenous languages, residential schools were meant to assimilate Indigenous students into what was perceived as the more desirable and superior majority culture. One of the tools used in this cultural genocide was the forced renaming of Indigenous students. Altering the literary archetype of their identity was seen as a tool through which their Indigenous identity could be stripped away "first with a temporary number, and then again once they were baptised and given a Christian name" (Mann, 2020, p. 32). In contemporary discussions of renaming in Canada comes the decision that many immigrants consider when making the move from a different country to adopt western names as part of their professional identity in order to "navigate their racialized immigrant identities" (p.16). Although voluntary renaming is a practice still seen with some new Canadians, recent trends show fewer people are Anglicising their names and opting to keep their original names instead (Ramanathan, 2019).

Taking a look at experiences in educational settings, researchers have found that many participants cite the classroom, and direct interactions with a teacher, as being the source of their lived experiences of this phenomenon; "Whether being culturally disrespectful, unaware of their actions, or even just stumbling over a name they have never seen before, the tone set by a teacher about a student's name was something significant that participants have remembered for many years" (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012, p.451). The westernization of names and name-based microaggressions would be classified as microinsults that are often not the perpetrators intention but convey the message that their identity or culture are unimportant (Sue et al., 2007). Where these microinsults "disempower" students, learning a student's preferred name or pronunciation can act as "'micro-empowerments', small but significant interactions that empower

learners…Naming does not have to be a disempowering experience in educational and other public spheres" (Tualaulelei, 2021, p.27).

Racial Microaggressions and Student Wellbeing

Researchers have found that those who have experienced name-based racial microaggressions have also experienced negative impacts on their mental health and well-being (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Mann, 2020; Payne et al., 2018; Srinivasan, 2019). In the aforementioned study on the impact of westernizing names on college students, researchers concluded that by *reframing* names to be more "socially acceptable", students reflected on feeling emotions such as shame and anger (Payne et al., 2018). Shame for allowing their name to be reframed, or feeling shame in their ethnic heritage, while also feeling retrospective anger for having experienced name-based microaggressions. These feelings of shame may also derive from denying their names or being hesitant to correct others at the same time (Payne et al., 2018; Srinivasan, 2019).

These feelings are echoed in an autoethnography that explored the significance of the different personal names the researcher has used over the years, and the role of racial microaggressions in their renaming experiences (Mann, 2020). After having faced many challenges with their name in elementary school, Mann shares an interaction with their mother regarding their first name; "My mother asked me if I wanted to change my name...I told her it was fine, that I liked my name. I hated my name." (p.47).

Feeling torn between accepting the name that parents' have gifted you and doing everything you can to avoid name-based microaggressions can be detrimental to a child's psyche and can manifest itself as internalized racism (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). Feelings of guilt for choosing to westernize a name are typically present as well. With each interaction with racialized

re naming, mispronunciations, and other manifestations of name-based microaggressions, comes a deeper inception of feeling inferior in one's diversity. The desire to distance oneself from their cultural identities may then be attributed to the perceived need to align more closely with the dominant Eurocentric group. Alternatively, voluntary renaming, or westernizing the pronunciation of one's own name may be one of the long term effects of constant experiences in the classroom or it may be a personal choice. The crucial aspect is that those with diverse names make the decision to alter their names to better align with their identities and not to appease the anxiety or frustration that comes with name-based racial microaggressions, racial battle fatigue, or feelings of inferiority based on their diverse culture.

Along with the guilt and/or shame comes confusion. As previously established, names help the development of one's identity, so when a child is renamed, their identity may shift as well. In one entry, Mann shares that it was more than just going by a different name, it was distancing themselves from their South Asian culture (Mann, 2020). For second-generation children, these experiences add to the plethora of emotions that are already so interconnected with navigating within society as they uncover their own third culture identities.

When studying the impact of name-based microaggressions and implications for counselling psychology, Srinivasan (2019) found a correlation between these experiences and depressive symptoms in South Asian respondents. Participants of this study reported that there were negative emotions associated with their South Asian names. Although also expressing positive emotions associated with their names, participants shared how the distress they felt stemmed primarily from "the difficulties that they have in microaggressive interactions with others" (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 87). Some participants also reported that they developed a certain

level of anxiety surrounding their names, specifically when anticipating name-based racial microaggressions during elementary classroom attendance.

Srinivasan (2019) also concluded that individuals employed coping strategies to avoid or manage negative experiences. One such strategy included anticipating a name pronunciation by "being aware of contextual clues that others were struggling with their name" (p.88), and interrupting them to reduce the tension. This coping strategy is often used by school-age children during attendance with a new teacher in the classroom. Another key coping strategy is responding with humour in the form of making fun of their own names or laughing and being a 'good sport' while others made fun of their name (Srinivasan, 2019). Lastly, those who chose to actively teach others their names, correcting the pronunciation, or offering word associations with their name to help others (i.e. "Gurjyot as in boat") reportedly were more active when they felt they had a certain amount of power and choice over an interaction. This may mean young students, especially racial minorities, who perceive themselves to have little power or choice may silently experience name-based microaggressions without advocating for themselves.

Facing, responding to, anticipating, or using avoidance strategies have been shown to also lead to *racial battle fatigue* which is "the emotional, psychological, and physiological distress that occurs as a result of racially microaggressive experiences" (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 15).

> "When I introduce myself I make a quick decision in my head about how I want to represent myself to others. I have to quickly take in my environment. Where am I? Who am I with? How long will I be interacting with them? All of this just to decide which of my names to give." (Mann, 2020, p. 19).

Many with diverse names will assess their environment and opt to provide a westernized name that they may not otherwise use regularly, a "Starbucks name" used in public when the interaction is intended to be short lived. In such situations, like placing an order at Starbucks, I have chosen to give the name Sona, deciding that the awkwardness of repeating the name

Gurjyot just is not worth the temporary nature of the interaction. The exhaustive, intuitive, yet almost automatic, thought process that comes with deciding on how to introduce yourself aligns with the argument that name-based racial microaggressions and the resulting racial battle fatigue felt by minority students is thereby a discriminatory experience. This phenomenon is one that does not align with the current vision and long term goal of most Ontario public school boards.

Criticism of the validity of racial microaggression theory argues that there needs to be a greater focus on the perpetrator's intention as opposed to the way their words are interpreted. That is to say racial microaggressions are the result of an individual's misperception of a situation (Nadal et al., 2014). The perpetrators' intentions are important to consider, however the conversation should not be, "did the perpetrator mean the racial microaggression?", rather "what impact do they have on people of colour?" and "how can we avoid these microaggressions?" Perceiving events as discriminatory based on race has in fact been found to have "devastating effects on her or his psychological well-being" (Nadal et al., 2014, p. 5). Because of the *microscopic* nature of this experience, it can be difficult at times for a victim of microaggressions to recognize or process them. Many times, thoughts revert back to considering the perpetrator's intentions or creating a satisfactory justification for the behaviour, or feeling unsatisfied with how they responded to the experience. In such instances, one might turn to a witness or another member of a diverse group to validate their experience. These "sanity checks" (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008), as the name suggests, have direct impacts on overall wellbeing. Studies looking at the impact of racial microaggressions on mental health have concluded that there is in fact a negative relationship between the two, citing the

prevalence of depressive symptoms, anxiety, and reduced behaviour control or substance abuse in participants who self-reported experiencing said microaggressions (Nadal et al., 2014).

Although this study provided implications on counselling and racialized patients, much like Srinivasan (2019), the findings can be extended to educational implications as well. Educators are encouraged to create an open dialogue (Nadal et al., 2014) atmosphere in which the manifestations of racial microaggressions may appear in a classroom, how to navigate such an experience, and ways in which the experience can be avoided in future interactions. In validating these experiences, educators can encourage pride in one's diversity and identity. However, despite a relatively large study sample, this quantitative study represented many different racial identities, the voice of South Asians was still missing. This may have been a result of the snowball sampling method that was used in recruitment that did not make it into a South Asian network.

Name-based racial microaggressions, like all other forms, can be severely detrimental to the well-being and success of students with diverse names. In understanding the short- and long-term impacts of experiences surrounding names we can understand the importance of representation in the classroom and the right to a racial microaggression-free learning environment. Much like counsellors, educators "must be aware that intersectional identities may affect [students'] experiences with microaggressions, which may then have an impact on their mental health" (Nadal et al., 2014, p.64). Although there are many other factors that affect mental health, with intervention, name-based racial microaggressions are one factor whose impact can be minimized within the classroom.

Racial Microaggressions and Sense of Belonging

Name-based racial microaggressions are significant experiences that are remembered for years to come, especially those that occur from K-12 years in the classroom. They mainly involve teachers or peers, and, in most cases, both (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012). These events sever a student's sense of belonging and their perceived positionality within the class community. Mispronounced names or renaming can lead to feeling like an outsider in a "type of cultural 'othering' that contradicts our goals for multicultural school environments" (p. 451) and perpetuates the acculturation of diverse student populations. Alternatively, "[t]he correct pronunciation of names may contribute to a young student's sense of belonging to the school environment because their name is spoken consistently across domains (home, school, church, etc.), thus affirming student identity" (Tualaulelei, 2021, p. 26).

Renaming practices, mispronunciations, westernization, and other name-based microaggressions must be discussed within the context of colonization (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2003; Souto-Manning, 2011; Mann, 2020, Kohli & Solorzano, 2012) and the cultural/immigrant deficit model (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012; Souto-Manning, 2011). All of these unique events label culturally diverse students within the context of being deficient (Souto-Manning, 2011). That is to say, any divergence from the white majority is a weakness. Thus, renaming a child, regardless of the domain in which it occurs, involves colonial influences reflecting the belief (whether intentionally or not) that in order to succeed, diverse students must become westernized. Success, a highly effective motivator for South Asian Canadians, is a state of being that requires a holistic understanding of the reciprocal relationship that exists with mental health and community belonging. Through this form of acculturation or assimilation, it is insinuated that proximity to Anglo-western society is more desirable than an immigrant or

diverse identity. As such, renaming in the classroom communicates to a child that *their* "name, language, and culture are not valued and need to be replaced" (p.113). Jagiela & Gebus (2015) maintain a similar position by equating the act of giving a child a name that aligns with the ethnic majority with a means of assimilation and hiding one's ethnic identity, ultimately further marginalizing ethnic groups. A westernized, more "common", name increases the chances of someone blending with the majority group that surrounds them. "With more than 13 million residents speaking 200 languages, Ontario has the most culturally diverse population in Canada" (Ontario Public Services, 2021, p.6) so this desire to camouflage one's ethnic identity is counter to the image of mosaic diversity that the province has cultivated.

In their 2003 study on names and employability in the United States, Bertrand and Mullainathan (2003) found that when relatively identical resumes were sent to potential employers, candidates with white names received 30% more callbacks than African-American names. This study illustrated the way in which one's preconceived biases about different communities can manifest themselvers as discrimination on the basis of a candidate's name. Oreopolous (2011) later carried out a similar study in Canada, with 13000 resumes and found that "ethnic" names, including Pakistani and Indian names faced lower callback rates than "English-sounding" names. This understanding then, of names and community belonging, can impact naming as parents make the decision to give their child an ethnic or westernized name.

In order to truly embrace inclusive and multicultural pedagogy in the classroom, educators are encouraged to combat the deficit model by adopting a *diversities paradigm* (Souto-Manning, 2011), or the *cultural difference model* that recognizes diversity in students as "different yet valuable" (Song & Pyon, 2008). Young children typically don't have the tools to defend themselves, it is up to the educators and adults to advocate for them (Kohli & Solorzano,

2012). Educators and clinicians need to be aware of the experiences of their diverse students and patients, respectively. “There are tangible practices that educators and clinicians can utilize when working with South Asian Americans who have ethnic names” (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 95).

Culturally Responsive Education

Many have provided practitioners with manageable steps they can take to create and protect their inclusive community environment when involving students with diverse names. One of the most common recommendations in literature is the use of culturally responsive education and multicultural literature within curriculum delivery. Culturally responsive instruction is to be inclusive and representative in an aim to help students feel represented and included in the class community (Peterson et al., 2015). This can take on the form of inquiry based projects on family history, the history of names, or world cultures. This can also look like the inclusion of multicultural literature in the classroom on a regular basis.

In discussing the findings of their study, Srinivasan (2019) stated that “many participants spoke of a dual sense of self, as they tended to behave differently depending on the ethnic identities of their social context” (p. 28). Through representation in the classroom, culturally responsive pedagogy, and explicitly placing an emphasis on individual names and world cultures, educators are able to bridge the gap between a student’s home and school experience, having “the potential to transform diversity into a resource for personal growth and social action” (Peterson, et al., 2015, p. 44). Thus, the classroom can become another space of wholeness for diverse students, moving away from feeling divided in their sense of self.

Curating a library of books in which all students feel represented is another culturally responsive practice (see Appendix D). This can also support ELL students in developing their language skills. It is important to note as well that multicultural literature should be visible even

in a classroom that is not culturally diverse. Selecting multicultural literature can be intimidating for some educators, especially new educators with lesser experience. To help support educators in combating this hesitation and choosing quality resources, researchers Peterson et al. (2015) propose an analytical selection process that considers the following in relation to the literature; (1) Does the book reflect the diversity of society and can it be considered multicultural literature? (2) Are the main characters self-aware of their identities? (3) Is it a quality book with rich curriculum connections for the targeted grade range?

Names and social identity should be a focus within the curriculum and multicultural literature (picture or story books with diverse characters and themes) can help students feel represented and seen in the class; "multicultural literature offers students mirrors that affirm their identities and windows through which they might view and better understand other people, places and cultures in our global society" (Peterson et al., 2015, p.42). It is not feasible to expect educators to have a working knowledge of every language and the cultural or linguistic context behind names. Instead, it is through critical reflection that we can move forward towards a more safe and inclusive community. Keller & Franzak (2015) argue that "there is a vast difference between using ignorance to further marginalize students by establishing one's authority as the all knowing expert…or to provide a space for students to use their own power to educate the class, including the teacher... Children need more examples of books that portray diversity in many different ways, and teachers must likewise be prepared to use these books critically, sensitively, and effectively in classrooms" (p. 188). How can we expect a student to feel represented if the name they see on bulletin boards or hear from their peers doesn't represent them?

Many second generation South Asian Canadians would also identify as third culture kids, with altered identities in their public and private domains. The urge to assimilate or mask their

ethnic identities reserved to the parts of their life outside of the public domain can create a divide in identity formation, especially in formative years, and children become aware of differences in their home self and school self; altering their behaviour to be westernized during the school day but ethnically rooted afterwards (Peterson et al., 2015), like living in shifts of behaving white between 9am to 5pm and then being Brown between 5pm and 9am.

Conclusion

Name-based racial microaggressions are brief, recurrent interactions that impact a student's identity, well-being, and sense of belonging. As suggested, children's books don't promote change on their own but can be catalysts to critical discussions and exploration of generative themes as a group, with the teacher learning with the students. Children's literature should be used in the classroom as a way to critically engage in conversation about names and diversity without singling out the experiences of any students who may have already experienced name-based racial microaggressions (Souto-Manning, 2011). Much of the current literature that provides suggestions or possible interventions to combat the phenomenon focuses on culturally responsive education in the classroom. The primary focus of these proposed intervention is on multicultural literature and critical conversations about differences, inclusivity, and discrimination. However, with current pedagogical practices within the field of education, we have seen a recent focus on decolonizing the resources we use in the classroom and ensuring a diverse representation is visible in the books and stories we share with our students. Although imperative to providing a safe and inclusive environment in the classroom, picture books can be a tool for change but they are not the only tool necessary. What's missing from current literature is an examination of the effectiveness of intervention tools that help educators and peers learn the correct pronunciation of student names.

Although research has previously identified a correlation between K-12 teachers mispronouncing names and the internalized racism in Black, Latin American, and Pacific Islander communities (Kohli & Solorzano, 2012), there is limited literature focusing on the phenomenon from the perspective of South Asian Canadians. For example, the study conducted by Payne et al. (2018) acknowledged a minimal participant diversity, with only four Asian participants. In fact this study does not differentiate between South Asian and East Asian participants, which overlooks the unique experiences of each group. This further reflects the visible gap in literature discussing the South Asian experience.

A further gap in current literature is the limited research conducted on the above-noted group by a member of the community. The voice of Canadian-born South Asians has not been adequately heard, particularly given the growing South Asian population throughout the nation, especially in Ontario.

Along with culturally responsive pedagogical approaches, such as representation in the classroom and critical inquiry into diverse identities, another key way forward is to implement supports and changes to the current attendance protocol in the K-12 school system. Another is by raising awareness among educators at all levels on the impact of name-based racial microaggression on young students. The change in attendance protocol that is proposed involves a name pronunciation tool to be integrated into the attendance system that allows students, and their families, to record their preferred pronunciation of their name. The importance of this process is that the power is returned to the child to make the choice for themselves when it comes to the literary archetype of their identity: their name.

Task 2: Soft Feature Article

Say My Name: Supporting Students With Diverse Names

Teachers and education professionals strive to provide quality education to all students while maintaining a focus on creating a safe and inclusive classroom environment. In order to do so, educators are encouraged to understand the lived experiences of their students. A key understanding central to the K-12 public school system in Ontario is ensuring that the curriculum, and learning experiences in general, are accessible to all. Thus, the Ministry of Education's 2013 guide to effective instruction argues that knowing their students and developing student profiles supports teachers in planning and assessment that "enables every student to learn and achieve success" (Ministry of Education, 2013). Critically examining the negative influences within the school environment helps educators understand the role they play and how to respond to such influences or experiences. This is especially important for marginalized student populations such as students of colour, of immigrant descent, and second generation students. One such potential influence requiring our attention as educators is the representation of diverse names in our classrooms.

Names strongly impact the development of our self perceptions and are integral to our identities. From the way we interact with others to our cultural connections, names influence our personal, social, and cultural identities. Because our names are most used by others and not ourselves, names develop, solidify, and respond to a variety of cultural and social factors. Personal identity is something that actively develops during a child's formative years. Through interaction with society, peers, teachers, family, and parents, children are constantly adding to and adjusting their understanding of their own identities. So when a symbol of one's identity is altered, especially at a young age, there is a lasting impact for many years to come.

What are name-based racial microaggressions?

> *From anticipating my name during attendance, responding to countless variations of it, to going as far as changing my name to be easier for others, name-based racial microaggressions reinforce the notion that anything that differs from the norm is less than in some bizarre way. We know our name is challenging to you and that often you do not realize the impact you mispronouncing our name has on us. All we ask is that you learn our name and make us feel welcome and included in your classrooms. Teachers, please say my name and say it right.*

The above is an example of conversations which occurred in the early stages of this proposal with fellow South Asian Canadians who have experienced name-based racial microaggressions as students. Racial microaggressions can be based on many different identity markers such as skin tone, linguistic differences, stereotypes, and ethnically diverse names. The experiences which specifically relate to names of diverse ethnic backgrounds, are referred to as name-based racial microaggressions. In the classroom this may look like any of the following: mispronouncing names of students, or members of the school faculty refusing to learn the desired pronunciation, or renaming a student all together. As students' personal identities, mental well-being, and sense of belonging are all impacted by such experiences, educators must first understand the racial microaggressions experienced by their diverse students in order to foster and maintain a safe and inviting classroom.

They are those small, sometimes microscopic experiences that have a compounding effect on young learners. Almost everyone with a unique, or ethnically diverse name has had to navigate these experiences at one point or another. However, as the above quote shows, these commonly occuring experiences can have negative impacts on students, and their sense of identity, belonging and well-being as a whole.

Impact On Students

Students deserve a learning environment that is safe, nurturing, and inclusive for all identities and backgrounds. We strive to provide such a warm atmosphere to encourage growth in our students, provide multiple entry points for learning, and to ensure the curriculum is accessible to all by eliminating barriers to learning. Experiencing name-based racial microaggression in K-12 classrooms has been shown to influence student well-being and their sense of belonging, ultimately working against the aforementioned goal of the 21st century classroom. In understanding these impacts can we as educators consciously work towards eliminating this barrier to learning for our students' culturally diverse names while simultaneously educating all students on the importance of inclusive practices.

Well-Being

In 2018 a group of researchers led by Keisha Payne of the Southwestern Law School explored the impact on students of westernizing their diverse names. They concluded that by reframing names to be perceived as more socially acceptable, students reflected on feeling emotions such as shame and anger. Students may feel shameful of distancing themselves from the cultural heritage of their names, or even embarrassment for their ethnic heritage at the heart of these negative experiences. These are strongly negative experiences that compound over time, with the potential to negatively impact a student’s general well being with each instance. This understanding, along with recognizing that the classroom is often cited as a source of name-based racial microaggressions, is cause for immediate intervention. Puting procedures in place to support the elimination of this barrier to learning supports our culturally diverse student population.

When a student with a diverse or unique name has experienced enough name-based racial microaggression, it is then natural for them to adopt coping strategies during attendance. This same study from the Southwestern Law School found that students become attuned to recognizing cues that a teacher is struggling with their name, so they interrupt in order to reduce tension. Students have also reported responding with humour — making fun of their own names or playing along as others made fun of their name. If they're not vigilantly looking for context clues, or acting as "good sports", students may be offering their own word associations to teach others their preferred pronunciation. For example, I have often offered the phrase "Gurjyot as in boat" when introducing myself to someone new. In doing so, a student is able to feel as if they had a certain amount of power during an interaction, however brief. This may mean young students, especially racial minorities, who perceive themselves to have little power, silently experience name-based microaggressions without advocating for themselves.

Navigating these experiences, either with coping strategies or avoidance behaviours is mentally draining, especially with the repetitive nature of racial microaggressions and has been shown to correlate with feelings of racial battle fatigue. In their 2019 study on name-based microaggressions and South Asian Americans, Dr. Ranjana Srinivasan defines racial battle fatigue as "the emotional, psychological, and physiological distress that occurs as a result of racially microaggressive experiences". Learning our students' preferred names and pronunciations, in a manner that avoids singling out students in front of their peers, is a proactive approach to reducing the presence of this fatigue in our classrooms.

Sense of Belonging

Continual exposure to negative experiences with their name has a detrimental impact on a child and their worldview, especially if those experiences are in the classroom. Mispronouncing

names, or other name-based racial microaggressions, can lead to students feeling like outsiders. These compounded experiences create divides within a class community and are counterproductive to the vision of inclusion and acceptance in school environments. We cannot expect students to truly feel like they belong as they are in a class where their name is not represented, a class where the difference of their name may be perceived as unwanted or inconvenient for the teachers or their classmates.

Implications

So what does this mean moving forward? As I continue to urge school boards to strive for name inclusivity through the integration of a simple name-pronunciation tool into an already existing attendance protocol, it is important to highlight things we can do as educators in the interim. Whether it be the tool or inclusive practices in the classroom, there is a shared impact on students with diverse or unique names; the power to influence the development of their identity is rightfully returned back to the student.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy: This is the practice of bringing the diverse identities of your students into the classroom in order to help students feel represented and included in the class community. A great time for this is when establishing class expectations and co creating a classroom agreement grounded in inclusivity and respect such that all students are provided equal access to learning opportunities. This can take on the form of inquiry based projects on family history, the history of names, or world cultures. This can also look like the inclusion of multicultural literature in the classroom on a regular basis; “multicultural literature offers students mirrors that affirm their identities and windows through which they might view and better understand other people, places and cultures in our global society” (Peterson et al., 2015, p.42).

Picture Books: multicultural literature that is brought into the classroom can help students see themselves in the class through diverse characters, expose them to different cultures, and can help facilitate grand conversations about the importance of names and learning how to say someone's name correctly. Some titles to add to your class library:

1. My Name is Jorge — written by Jane Medina, illustrated by Fabricio Vanden Broeck (Wordsong/Boyds Mill Press). 1999.
2. The Name Jar — written by Yangsook Choi (Random House children's Books). 2013.
3. Hannah is my Name — written by Belle Yang (Candlewick Press). 2008.
4. My Name is Yoon — written by Helen Recorvitz, illustrated by Gabi Swiatkowska (Frances Foster Books). 2015.
5. My Name is Sangoel — written by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed, illustrated by Catherine Stock (Eerdmans Books for Young Readers). 2009.
6. Drita: My Home Girl — written by Jenny Lombard (Puffin Books). 2008.
7. My Name Is Not Easy — written by Deby Dahl Edwardson (Marshall Cavendish). 2011.
8. René has Two Last Names — written by René Colato Laínez, illustrated by René Colato Laínez and Fabiola Graullera Ramírez (Piñata Books). 2009.

Another key way forward is through culturally responsive pedagogical approaches, such as representation in the classroom and critical inquiry into diverse identities. Explicit conversation in order to raise awareness among educators at all levels on the impact of name-based racial microaggression on young students is necessary in the cultivation of inclusive school environments. As teachers it is imperative that we understand that mistakes are going to happen, we don't know every language or cultural context behind names. It is through critical reflection that we can move forward towards a more safe and inclusive community. Educators are able to support their students in embracing the duality of their multicultural identity, and by placing an emphasis on names and culture in the class we have the power to connect a student's home and school experience.

Task 3: School Board Proposal

Say My Name: Supporting Students With Diverse Names.

A Proposal Prepared For Safe And Inclusive Schools Committee GEDSB

To Access Document on Canva:

https://www.canva.com/design/DAE1Llix9EU/Ii-NDb_zcYc8RzAenGbuTg/view?utm_content=DAE1Llix9EU&utm_campaign=designshare&utm_medium=link&utm_source=sharebutton

Or See Appendix E: School Board Proposal

Overview

Dear: Jeff Benner, Robin Staats, and the Safe and Inclusive Schools Committee,

Grand Erie District School Board is coming to the end of its current five year strategic plan, in which Equity has been one of the six key indicators to support the success of every student. The school board has made many strides towards building inclusive environments. One of which is supporting educators and school administrators in strengthening a student's sense of belonging. With the increasing diversity of the Grand Erie student population, an ongoing focus on equity and inclusion are imperative to the success of all students.

A student's developing identity and sense of representation in the classroom are shaped by names. Attached is a proposal for the integration of a name pronunciation tool within classroom attendance procedures that has been designed to support Grand Erie in the identification and eradication of systemic barriers to a student's sense of belonging.

Gurjyot K. Sohal

OCT # 701461, M. Ed. Candidate Lakehead University, Former GEDSB student

Executive Summary

Say My Name: A digital tool supporting educators in efficiently learning a students' preferred name, thus reducing name-based microaggressions in the classroom.

Educator's Role: Utilize tool as the first point of inquiry on a consistent and frequent level, in a classroom or OT role, during attendance procedures.

Guardian and Student's Role: To participate in the initial set up of the pronunciation tool by recording the child's prefered name.

Integrating a simple name-pronunciation tool into an already existing attendance protocol. Students are given the power to choose their preferred name and/or pronunciation, recording it in their voice for educators to access and listen to prior to attendance in the classroom.

Using this tool will benefit students, educators, and school administration as it strengthens a school's sense of community. Targeting times of entrypoint into a new school (kindergarten registration or when transfering), students will be aided in this transition by a team that has been provided with the training and resources to say their name.

The aim is to amalgamate this capability into the PowerSchool system. In doing so the tool is readily accessible and does not require the use of an additional platform.

To support Grand Erie in the identification and eradication of systemic barriers to a student's sense of belonging. Thereby fostering an inclusive environment for the growingly diverse GEDSB student and staff population.

Names and Identity

What Are They: Names are central to our self perceptions and integral to our identities. From the way we interact with others to our cultural connections, names influence our personal, social, and cultural identities. Names, and the way we and others interact with them, inform the personal identity that forms actively during the time young children spend a large part of their time in elementary school classrooms. As children interact with society and those around them, children add to, and continually adjust their own identities. With names being so symbolic of this developing identity, it can be unfortunate that its alteration can have a lasting impact for many years, especially if this altered state is not voluntary.

With names being so connected to identity, researchers have also found name negotiations (such as renaming, mispronunciations, or other name-based racial microaggressions) to be associated with a loss of personal and/or cultural identities.

The Power of Choice: Whether it be the pronunciation of their name or adopting an entirely different name, the true essence of this lived experience lies in choice. There is a certain level of choice that is denied to second generation South Asian Canadians when the name they identify with is replaced for the convenience of others.

Interestingly, the concept of choice was extended also to the pronunciation of names with an important reminder that using a more western pronunciation may in fact be the individual's choice. For some, their identity is connected more to a certain pronunciation than another. When a fellow second generation South Asian Canadian was asked to give advice to a young student who also has a diverse name, they responded "you always [need to] know that you're in control...you're in control of how you want to be identified". This tool gives a student the power

to choose the name that best fits their identity, an outcome that benefits many other student populations outside those with ethnically diverse names.

“Every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or other factors” (Achieving Excellence, Ministry of Education, p. 8).

Racial Microaggression

What Are They: Racial microaggressions are a shared experience across ethnicities. They are understood as subtle, but daily insults based on one's cultural, racial, or ethnic differences. Racial microaggressions are experienced by our students every day in Ontario’s public education system, despite having developed a reputation as a province that welcomes and embraces diversity. These experiences are internalized as personal inferiority based on their diverse identity.

Intention is an important element in understanding and combating microaggressions in a class setting. Racial microaggressions can be ambiguous, less overt, and may be a result of unconscious bias. They may also occur when another more 'reasonable' explanation can be presented to justify certain behaviour. For example, justifying why a professor cannot pronounce a diverse background because they have too many names to learn: “They didn't mean anything by it”.

Name-Based Racial Microaggressions: TThere are many different parts of cultural identity which can be the basis for racial microaggressions such as skin colour, cultural practices, and language, but they can also involve ethnically diverse names. The microaggressions that relate specifically to “ethnic” sounding names are often referred to as name-based racial

microaggressions. While they can occur in a variety of settings and parts of day-to-day experiences, they also occur in the classroom.

The mispronouncing names of students, the refusal to learn students' desired pronunciation of their own names by members of the school faculty, as well as the renaming of a student altogether are all examples of name-based racial microaggressions in a classroom setting. These microaggressions can have deep impacts on diverse students, particularly on their sense of belonging and self identity, all of which can contribute to negative effects on their overall well-being. These experiences need to be better understood by educators, so that they may engage in strategies to create safer and more inclusive classrooms.

Racialized Re-naming: Involuntary: "Instead of spending time to learn about him and the pronunciations within his culture, the teacher...made an announcement to the classroom that he would now be called 'Frank' Students began to call him Frank, and soon enough Nitin was introducing himself as Frank" (Srinivasan, 2019, p.35). Voluntary: Countless newcomers make the decision to change or westernize their names as a part of their professional identities. Many students must also make this decision to avoid experiences with name-based racial microaggressions.

Impact on Students

Student's Sense of Well-being: Whether it is an intentional or unintentional act, name-based racial microaggressions have been shown to have a negative impact on a student's mental health and well-being. For example, one study exploring the impact on students of westernizing their diverse names concluded that by reframing their names to be perceived as more socially acceptable, students reflected on feeling emotions such as shame and anger (Payne et al., 2018).

Students may feel shameful of distancing themselves from the cultural heritage of their names, or even embarrassment for their ethnic heritage at the heart of these negative experiences. Having such a deep impact on a student's well-being over a potentially extended period of time, paired with the knowledge that many cite the classroom as a source of this shared experience among culturally diverse students, it is imperative that procedures be put in place at the centre of it all.

"When I introduce myself I make a quick decision in my head about how I want to represent myself to others I have to quickly take in my environment. Where am I? Who am I with? How long will I be interacting with them? All of this just to decide which of my names to give." (Mann, 2020, p. 19)

Along with negative emotions, the researcher also concluded that individuals employed coping strategies to avoid or manage negative experiences. One such strategy included anticipating the mispronunciation of a name by "being aware of contextual clues that others were struggling with their name" (p.88), and interrupting them to reduce the tension. This coping strategy is often used by school aged children during attendance with a new teacher in the classroom. Another key coping strategy is responding with humour - making fun of their own names or laughing and being a 'good sport' while others made fun of their name (Srinivasan, 2019). Students that actively teach others their name and developing coping strategies such as word associations (i.e. "Gurjyot as in boat") reportedly were more active when they felt they had a certain amount of power and choice over an interaction. This may mean young students, especially racial minorities, who perceive themselves as having little power or choice may silently experience name-based microaggressions without advocating for themselves.

Facing, responding to, anticipating, or using avoidance strategies have been shown to also lead to racial battle fatigue which is “the emotional, psychological, and physiological distress that occurs as a result of racially microaggressive experiences” (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 15).

Student’s Sense of Belonging: Continual exposure to negative experiences with their name has a detrimental impact on a child and their worldview, especially if those experiences are in the classroom. Mispronouncing names, or other name-based racial microaggressions, can lead to students feeling like outsiders. These compounded experiences create divides within a class community and are counterproductive to the vision of inclusion and acceptance in school environments.

In recognizing the importance of names and working towards learning preferred pronunciations, students are encouraged to participate in the growth of their class and school community, ultimately strengthening the overall sense of inclusion and belonging they feel. Young students typically don't have access to the tools or resources to advocate for themselves. However, by using this name pronunciation tool, educators can support their students as they become active participants in creating an environment free of name-based racial microaggressions. Culturally responsive instruction, explicit conversation about the importance of names with school staff, and the use of name pronunciation tools are some more tangible and achievable practices that can help foster a strong sense of community.

The benefits and importance of representation in the classroom has been shown to improve the experience of diverse students in the Ontario school system. Multicultural literature (picture or story books with diverse characters and themes) can help students feel represented and seen in the class; “multicultural literature offers students mirrors that affirm their identities and windows

through which they might view and better understand other people, places and cultures in our global society" (Peterson et al., 2015, p.42). Along with identity and diversity, placing an explicit focus on names in the classroom can help support a student in accepting a classroom community as their own, but also in feeling accepted by this community. With such practices, and the use of a name pronunciation tool, educators can support their students in embracing their dual identities inside and outside of the classroom as existing in unison as opposed to in duality. This unison allows a student to bring their wealth of knowledge into the class, benefiting the whole class community.

Say My Name

Description: There has been increased discussion in popular discourse about name-based racial microaggressions, as many share their experiences with their names in the classroom. Name pronunciation is an issue of growing concern, especially among marginalized populations. Integrating a simple-to-use name-pronunciation tool into an already existing attendance protocol means students are returned the power to choose their preferred name and/or pronunciation, recording it in their voice for educators to access and listen to prior to attendance in the classroom.

By using this tool, and providing professional development opportunities for staff, Grand Erie is sharing an important message with the students and families of their school community. That message is of inclusion and striving to do everything possible to ensure success for every student.

It is our aim that in considering this integration the school board also considers the power it has to strengthen the sense of belonging and community among all of its schools. The Say My Name

pronunciation tool, in conjunction with restorative practices, a focus on diversity and inclusion, and ensuring representation in the classroom, are imperative to the 21st Century classrooms that GEDSB has been building.

Use: By integrating the functionality of this tool with the currently used PowerSchool platform, school administrators and staff will be able to easily access the resources required to learn the correct, or preferred, pronunciation of all their students' names. Targeting times of entry point into a new school (kindergarten registration or when transferring) or school year, students will be aided in this transition by a team that has been provided with the training and resources to say their name.

Step #1: School Administration Training

Once developed, it is recommended that school staff are provided with the training necessary to use the tool and how to recognize name-based racial microaggression in order to minimize its occurrence. This may look like a newsletter to educators, a PD session, or sharing inclusive education resources to use in the classroom. Teachers and school staff will be provided with the opportunity to view the system in advance. Prevention begins with the sharing of knowledge and open dialogue on the matter.

Step #2: Sharing Material with Parents

Through school wide newsletters, emails, and official social media platforms, parents or guardians will be informed of the role they play in the success of this tool and why it is an important step towards inclusivity in their child(ren)'s school. They will be provided with an opportunity to ask any questions they may have about the issue.

Step #3: Entering Data into Power Schools

Guardians and students will have the option to opt-out of the use of the tool if they wish to at the beginning of the school year but can opt-in at any time through the year. For kindergarten registration and students transferring into the school board, they will be prompted to record their preferred name at time of registration (before the start of the school year). For returning students, the first few days of the school year will include the educator introducing the tool as a part of their regular community building activities as they get to know their new class. Students will then be provided time to record their pronunciations directly into the PowerSchool platform.

Step #4: Educator Use

Now that all stakeholders are aware of the tool and its intended use, educators and school staff can implement the frequent and regular use of the tool, especially during attendance procedures.

Attendance: The vision is to develop a tool that is a permanent fixture of Grand Erie's existing learning management software. The aim is to amalgamate this capability into the PowerSchool system. In doing so the tool is readily accessible and does not require the use of an additional platform. However, in the event that PowerSchool integration is not plausible, third party platforms are currently available (see p. 13 for an overview).

When looking at instances of name-based racial microaggressions, it is quite common for learners with diverse names to reference the classroom as a frequent site of their experiences. More specifically, many share their experiences during attendance and with occasional teachers.

The start of a new school year and interactions with school staff other than their regular classroom teachers are both times in which the use of this name pronunciation tool will foster the inclusive environment Grand Erie is striving to achieve. In providing this additional support and encouraging educators to do all they can to learn the preferred pronunciations of their students, we are able to validate student experiences and communicate our understanding of the impact it may have on their sense of belonging, identity, and overall well-being. This tool tells our students that they are being heard and even if their experiences are not shared by our school staff, we are reflecting on how to support them.

Once fully functioning, school staff will be able to access the recordings of their students' names as soon as they receive their assignments in Power Schools. This gives them the ability to prepare for their first day in that classroom. Occasional teachers will be able to access the tool as soon as they arrive on site for their assignment for the day. In this way GEDSB will be supporting their educators as well in helping alleviate some first day anxieties they may be facing.

Although initially designed to support second generation South Asian Canadians, the benefits of this tool extend far beyond that growing student population. Not only does it give Grand Erie the opportunity to support all students with diverse names, it can be further developed to support diversity among GEDSB staff to be used at an organizational level as well. This tool also has the ability to support students who identify as transgender and whose chosen name may differ from their legal name.

Inclusivity: This project is fuelled by the belief that there is a current need for intervention in the K-12 Ontario public school system to raise awareness of the negative impact of name-based

racial-microaggression. The goal is to provide educators with the resources and training to strengthen the sense of community and inclusivity of their classrooms, thus the general school environment.

Utilizing this tool demonstrates a commitment to enact change that promotes equity and inclusion, as well as professional development on an ongoing basis to raise awareness of power and bias (GEDSB 2019 Student Census Report). Ensuring equity is a goal common among all school boards in the province and the Ontario Ministry of Education (Equity and Inclusive Education, 2014).

Mispronunciations, westernised “preferred” names, and renaming entirely can cause strong negative responses. Facing, responding to, anticipating, or using avoidance strategies have been shown to also lead to racial battle fatigue which is “the emotional, psychological, and physiological distress that occurs as a result of racially microaggressive experiences" (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 15). The distress and responses these experiences can elicit in a student are indicative of the need to continue to implement the change that promotes a sense of belonging and acceptance.

The exhaustive, intuitive, yet almost automatic, thought process that comes with deciding on how to introduce yourself aligns with the argument that name-based racial microaggressions and the resulting racial battle fatigue felt by minority students have a negative effect on their mental well-being. In building a culture that includes open dialogue on diversity, identity, and representation, the use of this tool in Grand Erie demonstrates a commitment to identifying and eliminating barriers that may limit student's reaching their full potential.

With the growing diversity of both the student and staff population in GEDSB, this tool can benefit both populations. For example there is opportunity with this tool to extend past the student experience and to include a space for educators, school staff, and other members of the school board to teach their colleagues their preferred name pronunciation.

“A distortion of the name is a violation of the self-image. In order to retain his [sic] identity, the person has to retain his name - protect it against mispronunciations, keep it inviolate” (Lehiste, 1975).

FAQ

Why can't teachers simply ask how to pronounce a name? Educators and school staff should definitely ask anyone who enters the school how to correctly pronounce their name if they are unsure. Whether the individual has opted in or out of the tool, it is still recommended that they be directly asked if unsure. This tool is meant to help reduce the instances of name-based racial microaggressions that occur in the classroom during attendance. Studies have found that many students reflect on attendance in the classroom, on the first day of school, or when an OT is present as common times to report negative experiences with their name. Having this tool available means that in their regular class prep, teachers can easily, quickly, and discretely utilize the tool before entering a new classroom or when they may still be unsure of a name after asking the student.

What if I don't want to use this tool in my classroom? Taking the time to learn your students' names is a strong and relatively easy team building strategy that shows you care for the well-being of your students. Knowing the pronunciation of a name reiterates to a student that they matter and belong in the class community. Giving students of all ages the power and

autonomy to choose the way their name is pronounced is the primary focus of this proposal. We know how important it is to build relationships with our students and get to know them, to be that one caring adult. So what better way than to learn their names?

Must all students opt-in to this tool? No, the primary goal of this tool and project is to give back power to students with diverse names and pronunciations. Should a student decide that they do not wish to participate in this project they are welcome to opt-out. However, the goal is for 100% of the student population to partake in this project in order to ensure the regular use of this tool in the future as a common practice.

What if I already know how to pronounce a student's name, do they still need to record it? It is important to recognize that knowing how to pronounce a diverse name is directly related to your personal past experience. The student may interact with other school staff that do not know how to pronounce their name, it is for them, and their future educators in the school board, that all students are encouraged to record their preferred pronunciation regardless of if their current teacher is able to pronounce their name or not.

Market Review

As previously mentioned, to ensure the intended user-friendly nature of the tool, it has been described within the premise that PowerSchool integration is plausible. Such integration has been seen over the last number of years on various platforms. For example, in July 2020, LinkedIn introduced its newest feature: the ability to add an audio recording of your name to your profile. “Correct pronunciation is not just a common courtesy - it’s an important part of making a good first impression and creating an inclusive workplace. That’s why we decided to provide a feature that gives you the option to share how to pronounce your name.” (Akoni,

2020). Around the same time, Dartmouth integrated a similar name pronunciation tool in which students record their names for Dartmouth faculty to access. Click Here to view their "Name Pronunciation Tool Guide" to see the ease of directly integrating the tool with the existing Learning Management Software.

In the event that it is not possible within the realm of the already existing attendance procedure, there are alternatives through which Grand Erie District School Board can support their inclusive classroom environments. These alternatives come in the form of third party platforms that can be licenced for use by GEDSB school staff:

Name Coach: Currently being used as a name pronunciation tool in at least four Canadian post secondary institutions, Name Coach allows users to create a profile including the pronunciation of their name that can then be integrated into a school's existing LMS (such as Brightspace/D2L). "Namecoach" has also recently rolled out their new free feature "Name Badge" that allows you to embed your audio recording into your social media platforms or email signature. This already existing tool provides the exact functionality that is needed without the additional cost of development. However, creating a name tool of its own allows GEDSB to continue to extend the use of this tool beyond names as it supports diversity in the classroom for years to come.

Name Shouts: A Canadian-based free platform that allows educators to create class lists with name pronunciations. The benefit of a name pronunciation tool integrated into Power Schools is that the data can be accessed by all school staff beyond just the homeroom teacher

Name Drop: Like “Name Badge”, this platform offers a link that can be attached to an email signature. Currently there is no LMS integration available or education feature where class lists are in one place.

Summary

Names are central to our self perceptions and integral to our identities. So when a symbol of one's identity is altered, especially at a young age, there is a lasting impact for many years to come. With names being so connected to identity, researchers have also found name negotiations (such as renaming, mispronunciations, or other name-based racial microaggressions) to be associated with a loss of personal and/or cultural identities.

Clicking the speakerphone alert on the attendance screen of “PowerSchool”, educators can hear a student's preferred name and pronunciation in the student or guardian's own voice! Integrating a simple name-pronunciation tool into an already existing attendance protocol gives students power to choose their preferred name and/or pronunciation, recording it in their voice for educators to access and listen to prior to attendance in the classroom.

When looking at instances of name-based racial microaggressions, it is quite common for learners with diverse names to reference the classroom as a frequent site of their experiences. By taking the time to learn a student's preferred name pronunciation, educators and school staff are able to validate their sense of belonging and trust in the greater school environment.

Whether the school board decides to build and integrate this tool as a “PowerSchool” plug-in, or opts to take advantage of existing platforms (such as Name Coach), Grand Erie will be aiding students to reclaim the power of choosing their name and providing educators the tools necessary

to respect these choices. Both of which are two of the goals central to the name pronunciation tool's integration into GEDSB's attendance procedures.

“I hope my teacher says my name right”

“Maybe I should use a nickname instead”

“Why can't anyone say my name? I'm tired of correcting people all the time”

“I wish my peers called me by my real name”

Conclusion

Name-based racial microaggressions are experienced by many students who have culturally diverse names. While the mispronunciation of a name may sound like an innocuous event, patterns of this and other name-based racial microaggression can have far reaching impacts on students’ sense of belonging and identity. These impacts can not only affect students’ overall sense of well-being, but they can also be long-lasting impacts that students take with them throughout their careers and personal lives. Considering the negative impacts that name-based racial microaggressions can have on students, it is important for educators to take on a role to reduce their occurrences in the classroom.

“Say My Name” is a tool through which educators can tackle the occurrence of name-based racial microaggressions in the classroom, transforming the interaction into a “micro-empowerment” (Tualaulelei, 2021, p.27). It allows students and their families to have a say in how the students’ names are pronounced by faculty. This tool has the potential to be seamlessly integrated into the attendance protocols of classrooms. However, this simple tool can have a deeply positive impact on the educational experiences of students. Not only can students

feel a sense of belonging by having their culturally distinct names acknowledged correctly, but a consideration for their names can also contribute to their own ideas about their identities as well as positively impact their overall well-being. While negative experiences with name-based microaggressions can be carried beyond the classroom, positive experiences can similarly have long lasting impacts.

As Canada becomes increasingly diverse, so will the names that appear on the attendances of classrooms. Educators thus have important roles to help to shift the ways in which classrooms can not only reflect this growing diversity but be inclusive for students from all backgrounds. Through this inclusivity, the classroom can continue to be a safe, welcoming and nurturing environment for all to learn and grow. The growing emphasis on name-inclusivity is also echoed among other diverse populations in both the public and private sector. For example, private corporations are beginning to introduced initiatives to support the name inclusivity of customers that are transgender (Mastercard, 2022). The name pronunciation tool can be similarly applied to support transgender and non-binary students in Ontario schools.

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APPENDIX A: Personal Naming and Identity Creation

Reprinted from "Choosing a name = Choosing identity? Towards a theoretical framework" by Aldrin, E., 2014, *Names in daily life. Anexo, Sección*, *4*, p. 394-395.

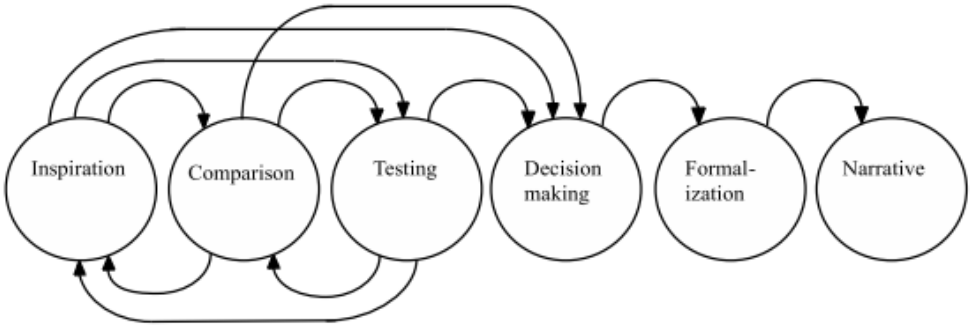


Chart 1. The process of personal naming.

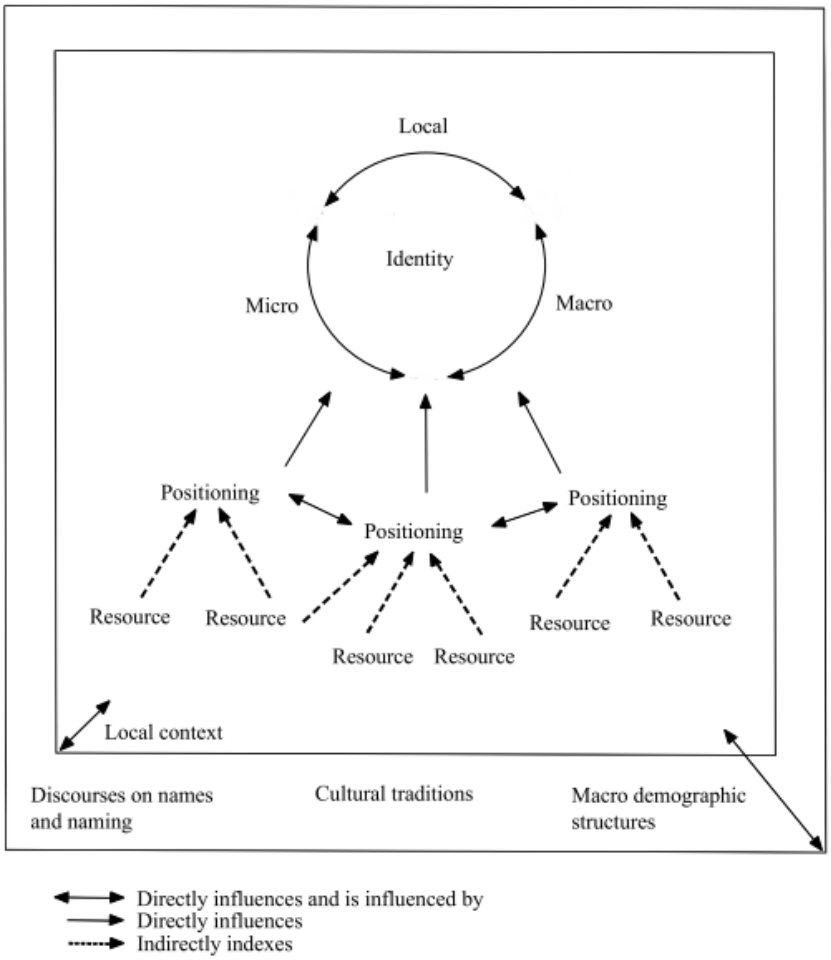


Chart 2. Identity creation through naming.

APPENDIX B: Racial Microaggressions

Reprinted from "Teachers, please learn our names!: racial microaggressions and the K-12 classroom", by Kohli, R. & Solórzano, D., 2012, *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 15(4), p. 447.

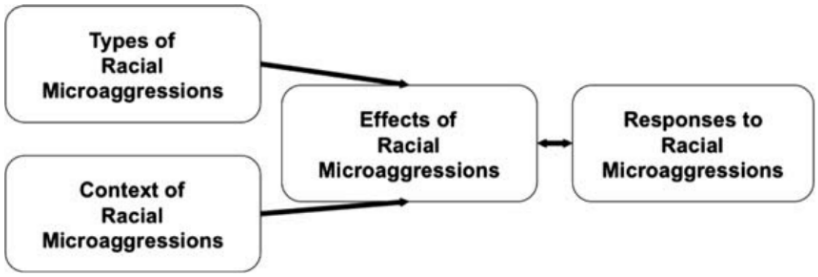
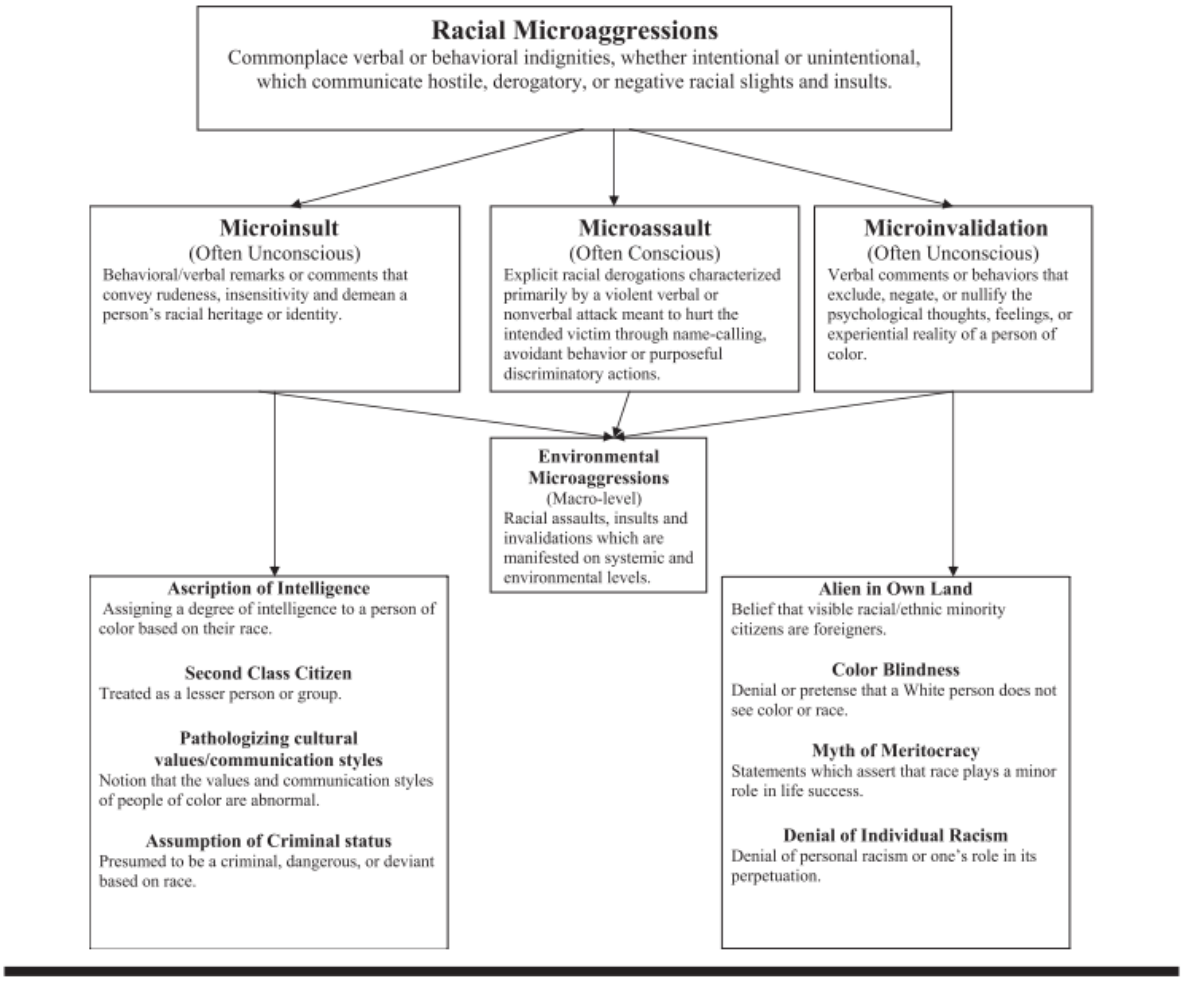


Figure 1. A model for understanding racial microagressions.

APPENDIX C: Categories of and Relationships Among Racial Microaggressions

Retrieved from "Racial Microaggressions In Everyday Life: Implications For Clinical Practice" by Sue, D. W., Capodilupo, C. M., Torino, G. C., Bucceri, J. M., Holder, A. M. B., Nadal, K. L., & Esquilin, M., 2007, *American Psychologist, 62*(4), p.278.

Figure 1
Categories of and Relationships Among Racial Microaggressions



APPENDIX D: Culturally Responsive Story Books

1. My Name is Jorge — written by Jane Medina, illustrated by Fabricio Vanden Broeck (Wordsong/Boyds Mill Press). 1999.
2. The Name Jar — written by Yangsook Choi (Random House children's Books). 2013.
3. Hannah is my Name — written by Belle Yang (Candlewick Press). 2008.
4. My Name is Yoon — written by Helen Recorvitz, illustrated by Gabi Swiatkowska (Frances Foster Books). 2015.
5. My Name is Sangoel — written by Karen Lynn Williams and Khadra Mohammed, illustrated by Catherine Stock (Eerdmans Books for Young Readers). 2009.
6. Drita: My Home Girl — written by Jenny Lombard (Puffin Books). 2008.
7. My Name Is Not Easy — written by Deby Dahl Edwardson (Marshall Cavendish). 2011.
8. René has Two Last Names — written by René Colato Laínez, illustrated by René Colato Laínez and Fabiola Graullera Ramírez (Piñata Books). 2009.

APPENDIX E: School Board Proposal (PDF)

Say My Name

Supporting students with diverse names

A Proposal Prepared for Safe and Inclusive Schools Committee GEDSB

PRESENTED TO
Jeff Benner and Robin Staats
(SIS Committee Co-Chairs)

FEBRUARY 2022

PRESENTED BY
Gurjyot K. Sohal

Table of Contents

Overview

Dear: Jeff Benner, Robin Staats, and the Safe and Inclusive Schools Committee,

Grand Erie District School Board is coming to the end of its current five year strategic plan, in which Equity has been one of the six key indicators to support the success of every student. The school board has made many strides towards building inclusive environments. One of which is supporting educators and school administrators in strengthening a student's sense of belonging. With the increasing diversity of the Grand Erie student population, an ongoing focus on equity and inclusion are imperative to the success of all students.

A student's developing identity and sense of representation in the classroom are shaped by names. Attached is a proposal for the integration of a *name pronunciation tool* within classroom attendance procedures that has been designed to support Grand Erie in the identification and eradication of systemic barriers to a student's sense of belonging.

Gurjyot K. Sohal
OCT # 701461, M. Ed. Candidate Lakehead University,
Former GEDSB student

Executive Summary

Say My Name:

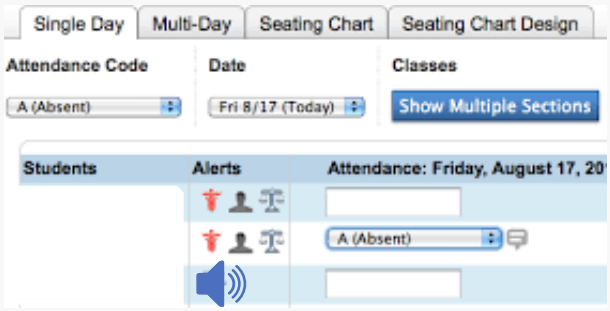
A digital tool supporting educators in efficiently learning a students' preferred name, thus reducing name-based microaggressions in the classroom.

Educator's Role

Utilize tool as the first point of inquiry on a consistent and frequent level, in a classroom or OT role, during attendance procedures.

Guardian and Student's Role

To participate in the initial set up of the pronunciation tool by recording the child's preferred name.



Clicking the speakerphone alert in the attendance screen of Powerschools, educators can hear a student's prefered name and pronunciation in the student or guardian's own voice!

Integrating a simple name-pronunciation tool into an already existing attendance protocol. Students are given the power to choose their preferred name and/or pronunciation, recording it in their voice for educators to access and listen to prior to attendance in the classroom.

Using this tool will benefit students, educators, and school administration as it strengthens a school's sense of community. Targeting times of entry point into a new school (kindergarten registration or when transferring), students will be aided in this transition by a team that has been provided with the training and resources to say their name.

The aim is to amalgamate this capability into the PowerSchool system. In doing so the tool is readily accessible and does not require the use of an additional platform.

To support Grand Erie in the identification and eradication of systemic barriers to a student's sense of belonging. Thereby fostering an inclusive environment for the growingly diverse GEDSB student and staff population.

Names and Identity

What Are They

Names are central to our self perceptions and integral to our identities. From the way we interact with others to our cultural connections, names influence our personal, social, and cultural identities. Names, and the way we and others interact with them, inform the personal identity that forms actively during the time young children spend a large part of their time in elementary school classrooms. As children interact with society and those around them, children add to, and continually adjust their own identities. With names being so symbolic of this developing identity, it can be unfortunate that its alteration can have a lasting impact for many years, especially if this altered state is not voluntary.

With names being so connected to identity, researchers have also found name negotiations (such as renaming, mispronunciations, or other name-based racial microaggressions) to be associated with a loss of personal and/or cultural identities.

The Power of Choice

Whether it be the pronunciation of their name or adopting an entirely different name, the true essence of this lived experience lies in choice. There is a certain level of choice that is denied to second generation South Asian Canadians when the name they identify with is replaced for the convenience of others.

Interestingly, the concept of choice was extended also to the pronunciation of names with an important reminder that using a more Western pronunciation may in fact be the individual's choice. For some, their identity is connected more to a certain pronunciation than another. When a second generation South Asian Canadian was asked to give advice to a young student who also has a diverse name, they responded "you always [need to] know that you're in control...you're in control of how you want to be identified". This tool gives a student the power to choose the name that best fits their identity, an outcome that benefits many other student populations outside those with ethnically diverse names.

> "Every student has the opportunity to succeed, regardless of ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic status or other factors" (Achieving Excellence, Ministry of Education, p. 8).

Racial Microaggressions

What Are They

Racial microaggressions are a shared experience across ethnicities. They are understood as subtle, but daily insults based on one's cultural, racial, or ethnic differences. Racial microaggressions are experienced by our students every day in Ontario's public education system, despite having developed a reputation as a province that welcomes and embraces diversity. These experiences are internalized as personal inferiority based on their diverse identity. Intention is an important element in understanding and combating microaggressions in a class setting. Racial microaggressions can be ambiguous, less overt, and may be a result of unconscious bias. They may also occur when another more 'reasonable' explanation can be presented to justify certain behaviour. For example, justifying why a professor cannot pronounce a diverse name because they have too many names to learn: "They didn't mean anything by it".

Name-Based Racial Microaggressions

There are many different parts of cultural identity which can be the basis for racial microaggressions such as skin colour, cultural practices, and language, but they can also involve ethnically diverse names. The microaggressions that relate specifically to "ethnic" sounding names are often referred to as name-based racial microaggressions. While they can occur in a variety of settings and parts of day-to-day experiences, they also occur in the classroom.

The mispronouncing names of students, the refusal to learn students' desired pronunciation of their own names by members of the school faculty, as well as the renaming of a student altogether are all examples of name-based racial microaggressions in a classroom setting. These microaggressions can have deep impacts on diverse students, particularly on their sense of belonging and self identity, all of which can contribute to negative effects on their overall well-being. These experiences need to be better understood by educators, so that they may engage in strategies to create safer and more inclusive classrooms.

Racialized Re-naming

Involuntary:

> "Instead of spending time to learn about him and the pronunciations within his culture, the teacher…made an announcement to the classroom that he would now be called "Frank." Students began to call him Frank, and soon enough Nitin was introducing himself as Frank (Srinivasan, 2019, p.35)

Voluntary:
Countless newcomers make the decision to change or westernize their names as a part of their professional identities. Many students must also make this decision to avoid experiences with name-based racial microaggressions.

Impact on the student

Wellbeing Belonging

Student's Sense of Wellbeing

Whether it is an intentional or unintentional act, name-based racial microaggressions have been shown to have a negative impact on a student's mental health and well being. For example, one study exploring the impact on students of westernizing their diverse names concluded that by *reframing* their names to be perceived as more socially acceptable, students reflected on feeling emotions such as shame and anger (Payne et al., 2018). Students may feel shameful of distancing themselves from the cultural heritage of their names, or even embarrassment for their ethnic heritage at the heart of these negative experiences. Having such a deep impact on a student's well being over a potentially extended period of time, paired with the knowledge that many cite the classroom as a source of this shared experience among culturally diverse students, it is imperative that procedures be put in place at the center of it all.

> “When I introduce myself I make a quick decision in my head about how I want to represent myself to others I have to quickly take in my environment. Where am I? Who am I with? How long will I be interacting with them? All of this just to decide which of my names to give.” (Mann, 2020, p. 19)

Along with negative emotions the researcher also concluded that individuals employed coping strategies to avoid or manage negative experiences. One such strategy included anticipating a name pronunciation by “being aware of contextual clues that others were struggling with their name” (p.88), and interrupting them to reduce the tension. This coping strategy is often used by school aged children during attendance with a new teacher in the classroom. Another key coping strategy is responding with humor - making fun of their own names or laughing and being a ‘good sport’ while others made fun of their name (Srinivasan, 2019). Students that actively teach others their name and developing coping strategies such as word associations (i.e. “Gurjyot as in boat”) reportedly were more active when they felt they had a certain amount of power and choice over an interaction. This may mean young students, especially racial minorities, who perceive themselves as having little power or choice may silently experience name-based microaggressions without advocating for themselves.

Facing, responding to, anticipating, or using avoidance strategies have been shown to also lead to racial battle fatigue which is “the emotional, psychological, and physiological distress that occurs as a result of racially microaggressive experiences” (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 15).

Impact on the student

Wellbeing **Belonging**

Student's Sense of Belonging

Continual exposure to negative experiences with their name has a detrimental impact on a child and their worldview, especially if those experiences are in the classroom. Mispronouncing names, or other name-based racial microaggressions, can lead to students feeling like outsiders. These compounded experiences create divides within a class community and are counterproductive to the vision of inclusion and acceptance in school environments.

Educators are in a unique position by allowing for the empowerment of their students. In recognizing the importance of names and working towards learning preferred pronunciations, students are encouraged to participate in the growth of their class and school community, ultimately strengthening the overall sense of inclusion and belonging they feel. Young students typically don't have access to the tools or resources to advocate for themselves. However, in using this name pronunciation tool, educators can support their students as they become active participants in creating an environment free of name-based racial microaggressions. Culturally responsive instruction, explicit conversation about the importance of names with school staff, and the use of name pronunciation tools are some more tangible/achievable practices that can help foster a strong sense of community.

The benefits and importance of representation in the classroom has been shown to improve the experience of diverse students in the Ontario school system. Multicultural literature (picture or story books with diverse characters and themes) can help students feel represented and seen in the class; “multicultural literature offers students mirrors that affirm their identities and windows through which they might view and better understand other people, places and cultures in our global society” (Peterson, et al., 2015, p.42). Along with identity and diversity, placing an explicit focus on names in the classroom can help support a student in accepting a classroom community as their own, but also in feeling accepted by this community. With such practices, and the use of a name pronunciation tool, educators can support their students in embracing their dual identities inside and outside of the classroom as existing in unison as opposed to in duality. This unison allows a student to bring their wealth of knowledge into the class, benefiting the whole class community.

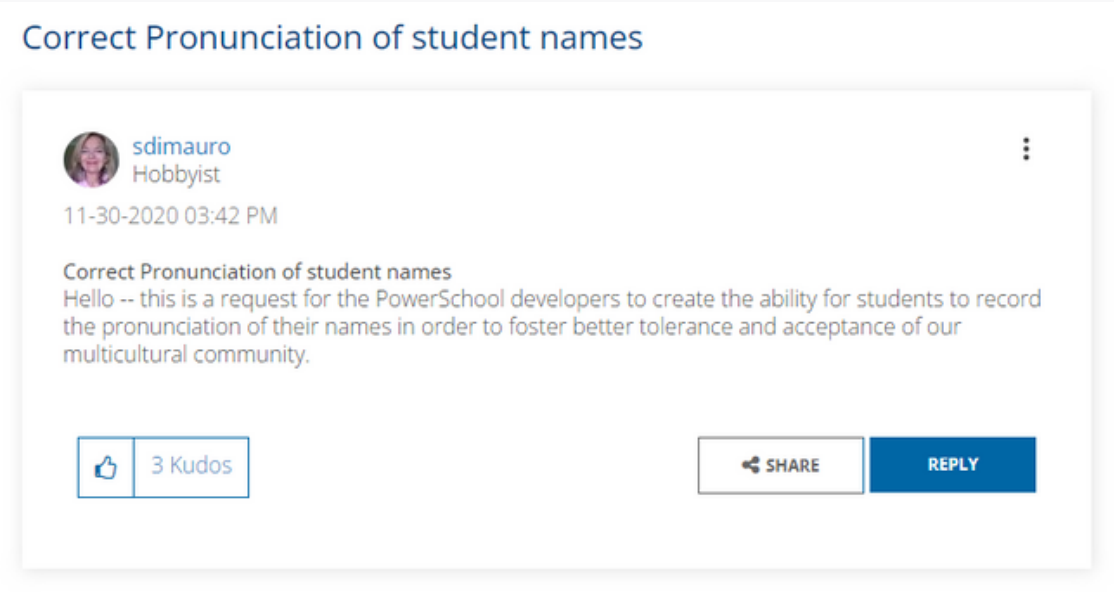
Say My Name

Description Use Attendance Inclusivity

There has been an increase in discussion in popular discourse about name-based racial microaggressions, as many share their experiences with their names in the classroom. Name pronunciation is an issue of growing concern, especially among marginalized populations. Integrating a simple-to-use name-pronunciation tool into an already existing attendance protocol means students are returned the power to choose their preferred name and/or pronunciation, recording it in their voice for educators to access and listen to prior to attendance in the classroom.

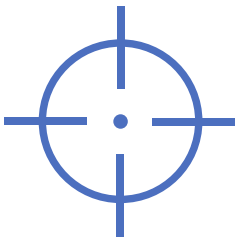
By using this tool, and providing professional development opportunities for staff, Grand Erie is sharing an important message with the students and families of their school community. That message is of inclusion and striving to do everything possible to ensure success for every student.

It is our aim that in considering this integration the school board also considers the power it has to strengthen the sense of belonging and community among all of its schools. The Say My Name pronunciation tool, in conjunction with restorative practices, a focus on diversity and inclusion, and ensuring representation in the classroom, are imperative to the 21st Century classrooms that GEDSB has been building.



Say My Name

Description **Use** Attendance Inclusivity



By integrating the functionality of this tool with the currently used PowerSchool platform, school administrators and staff will be able to easily access the resources required to learn the correct, or preferred, pronunciation of all their students. Targeting times of entry point into a new school (kindergarten registration or when transferring) or school year, students will be aided in this transition by a team that has been provided with the training and resources to say their name.

Step #1: School Administration Training

Once developed, it is recommended that school staff are provided with the training necessary to use the tool and how to recognize/minimize name-based microaggression. This may look like a newsletter to educators, a PD session, or sharing inclusive education resources to use in the classroom. Teachers and school staff will be provided with the opportunity to view the system in advance. Prevention begins with the sharing of knowledge and open dialogue on the matter.

Step #2: Sharing Material with Parents

Through school wide newsletters, emails, and official social media platforms, parents/guardians will be informed of the role they play in the success of this tool and why it is an important step towards inclusivity in their child(ren)'s school. They will be provided with an opportunity to ask any questions they may have about the issue.

Step #3: Entering Data into PowerSchool

Guardians and students will have the option to opt out of the use of the tool if they wish to at the beginning of the school year but can opt in at any time through the year. For kindergarten registration and students transferring into the school board, they will be prompted to record their preferred name at time of registration (before the start of the school year). For returning students, the first few days of the school year will include the educator introducing the tool as a part of their regular community building activities as they get to know their new class. Students will then be provided time to record their pronunciations directly into the PowerSchool platform.

Step #4: Educator Use

Now that all stakeholders are aware of the tool and its intended use, educators and school staff can implement the frequent and regular use of the tool, especially during attendance procedures.

Say My Name

Description Use **Attendance** Inclusivity

The vision is to develop a tool that is a permanent fixture of Grand Erie's existing learning management software The aim is to amalgamate this capability into the Powerschool system. In doing so the tool is readily accessible and does not require the use of an additional platform. However, in the event that PowerSchool integration is not plausible, third party platforms are currently available (see p. 13 for an overview).

When looking at instances of name-based racial microaggressions, it is quite common for learners with diverse names to reference the classroom as a frequent site of their experiences. More specifically, many share their experiences during attendance and with occasional teachers.

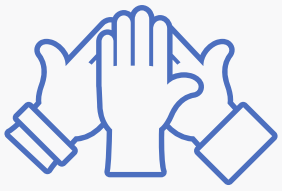
The start of a new school year and interactions with school staff other than their regular classroom teachers are both times in which the use of this name pronunciation tool will foster the inclusive environment Grand Erie is striving to achieve. In providing this additional support and encouraging educators to do all they can to learn the preferred pronunciations of their students, we are able to validate student experiences and communicate our understanding of the impact it may have on their sense of belonging, identity, and overall well being. This tool tells our students that they are being heard and even if their experiences are not shared by our school staff , we are reflecting on how to support them.

Once fully functioning, school staff will be able to access the recordings of their students' names as soon as they receive their assignments in Power Schools. This gives them the ability to prepare for their first day in that classroom. Occasional teachers will be able to access the tool as soon as they arrive on site for their assignment for the day. In this way GEDSB will be supporting their educators as well in helping alleviate some first day anxieties they may be facing.

Although initially designed to support second generation South Asian Canadians, the benefits of this tool extend far beyond that growing student population. Not only does it give Grand Erie the opportunity to support all students with diverse names, it can be further developed to support diversity among GEDSB staff to be used at an organizational level as well. This tell also has the ability to support students who identify as transgender and whose chosen name may differ from their legal name.

Say My Name

Description Use Attendance **Inclusivity**



This project is fuelled by the belief that there is a current need for intervention in the K-12 Ontario public school system to raise awareness on the negative impact of name-based racial-microaggression. The goal is to provide educators with the resources and training to strengthen the sense of community and inclusivity of their classrooms, thus the general school environment.

Utilizing this tool demonstrates a commitment to enact change that promotes equity and inclusion, as well as professional development on an ongoing basis to raise awareness of power and bias (GEDSB 2019 Student Census Report). Ensuring equity is a goal common among all school boards in the province and the Ontario Ministry of Education (Equity and Inclusive Education, 2014).

Mispronunciations, Westernized "preferred" names, and renamings entirely can cause strong negative responses. Facing, responding to, anticipating, or using avoidance strategies have been shown to also lead to *racial battle fatigue* which is “the emotional, psychological, and physiological distress that occurs as a result of racially microaggressive experiences” (Srinivasan, 2019, p. 15). The distress and responses these experiences can elicit in a student are indicative of the need to continue to implement the change that promotes a sense of belonging and acceptance.

The exhaustive, intuitive, yet almost automatic, thought process that comes with deciding on how to introduce yourself aligns with the argument that name-based racial microaggressions and the resulting racial battle fatigue felt by minority students has a negative effect on their mental well being. In building a culture that includes open dialogue on diversity, identity, and representation, the use of this tool in Grand Erie demonstrates a commitment to identifying and eliminating barriers that may limit student's reaching their full potential.

With the growing diversity of both the student and staff population in GEDSB, this tool can benefit both populations. For example there is opportunity with this tool to extend past the student experience and to include a space for educators, school staff, and other members of the school board to teach their colleagues their preferred name pronunciation.

> “A distortion of the name is a violation of the self-image. In order to retain his identity, the person has to retain his name - protect it against mispronunciations, keep it inviolate (Lehiste, 1975)”

FAQ

Why can't teachers simply ask how to pronounce a name?

Educators and school staff should definitely ask anyone who enters the school how to correctly pronounce their name if they are unsure. Whether the individual has opted in or out of the tool, it is still recommended that they be directly asked if unsure. This tool is meant to help reduce the instances of name-based racial microaggressions that occur in the classroom during attendance. Studies have found that many students reflect on attendance in the classroom, on the first day of school, or when an OT is present as common times to report negative experiences with their name. Having this tool available means that in their regular class prep, teachers can easily, quickly, and discretely utilize the tool before entering a new classroom or when they may still be unsure of a name after asking the student.

What if I don't want to use this tool in my classroom?

Taking the time to learn your students' names is a strong and relatively easy team building strategy that shows you care for the well being of your students'. Knowing the pronunciation of a name reiterates to a student that they matter and belong in the class community. Giving students of all ages the power and autonomy to choose the way their name is pronounced is the primary focus of this proposal. We know how important it is to build relationships with our students and get to know them, to be that one caring adult. So what better way than to learn their names?

Must all students opt in to this tool?

No, the primary goal of this tool and project is to give back power to students with diverse names and pronunciations. Should a student decide that they do not wish to participate in this project they are welcome to opt out. However, the goal is for 100% of the student population to partake in this project in order to ensure the regular use of this tool in the future as a common practice.

What if I already know how to pronounce a student's name, do they still need to record it?

It is important to recognize that knowing how to pronounce a diverse name is directly related to your personal past experience. The student may interact with other school staff that does not know how to pronounce their name, it is for them - and their future educators in the school board - that all students are encouraged to record their preferred pronunciation regardless of if their current teacher is able to pronounce their name or not.

Market Review

As previously mentioned, to ensure the intended user-friendly nature of the tool, it has been described within the premise that PowerSchool integration is plausible. Such integration has been seen over the last number of years on various platforms. For example, in July 2020, LinkedIn introduced its newest feature: the ability to add an audio recording of your name to your profile. "Correct pronunciation is not just a common courtesy -- it's an important part of making a good first impression and creating an inclusive workplace. That's why we decided to provide a feature that gives you the option to share how to pronounce your name." (Akoni, 2020). Around the same time, Dartmouth integrated a similar name pronunciation tool in which students record their names for Dartmouth faculty to access. Click Here to view their Name Pronunciation Tool Guide to see the ease of directly integrating the tool with the existing Learning Management Software.

In the event that it is not possible within the realm of the already existing attendance procedure, there are alternatives through which Grand Erie District School Board can support their inclusive classroom environments. These alternatives come in the form of third party platforms that can be licenced for use by GEDSB school staff:

Name Coach

Currently being used as a name pronunciation tool in at least four Canadian post secondary institutions, Name Coach allows users to create a profile including the pronunciation of their name that can then be integrated into a school's existing LMS (such as Brightspace/D2L). Namecoach has also recently rolled out their new free feature Name Badge that allows you to embed your audio recording into your social media platforms or email signature. This already existing tool provides the exact functionality that is needed without the additional cost of development. However, creating a name tool of its own allows GEDSB to continue to extend the use of this tool beyond names as it supports diversity in the classroom for years to come.

click here

Name Shouts

A Canadian-based free platform that allows educators to create class lists with name pronunciations. The benefit of a name pronunciation tool integrated into Power Schools is that the data can be accessed by all school staff beyond just the homeroom teacher

Name Drop

Like Name Badge, this platform offers a link that can be attached to an email signature. Currently there is no LMS integration available or education feature where class lists are in one place.

click here

Summary

Names are central to our self perceptions and integral to our identities. So when a symbol of one's identity is altered, especially at a young age, there is a lasting impact for many years to come. With names being so connected to identity, researchers have also found name negotiations (such as renaming, mispronunciations, or other name-based racial microaggressions) to be associated with a loss of personal and/or cultural identities.

"I hope my teacher says my name right"

When looking at instances of name-based racial microaggressions, it is quite common for learners with diverse names to reference the classroom as a frequent site of their experiences. By taking the time to learn a student's prefered name pronunciation, educators and school staff are able to validate their sense of belonging and trust in the greater school environment.

"Maybe I should use a nickname instead"

Clicking the speakerphone alert in the attendance screen of PowerSchool, educators can hear a student's prefered name and pronunciation in the student or guardian's own voice! Integrating a simple name-pronunciation tool into an already existing attendance protocol gives students power to choose their preferred name and/or pronunciation, recording it in their voice for educators to access and listen to prior to attendance in the classroom.

"I wish my peers called me by my real name"

Whether the school board decides to build and integrate this tool as a PowerSchool plug-in, or opts to take advantage of existing platforms (such as Name Coach), Grand Erie will be aiding students to reclaim the power of choosing their name and providing educators the tools necessary to respect these choices. Both of which are two of the goals central to the name pronunciation tool's integration into GEDSB's attendance procedures.

"Why can't anyone say my name? I'm tired of correcting people all the time"

CV

Gurjyot K. Sohal
M.Ed Candidate, OCT #70161
she/her/hers

EDUCATION

M.Ed. Specializing in Social Justice Change - Lakehead University 2020 - 2022 (expected graduation) supervised by Dr. G. Pluim
B.Ed (Hons) - Lakehead University (2018 - 2020)
B.A. (Hons) - Wilfrid Laurier University (2010 - 2015)

QUALIFICATIONS

Special Education Part 1 AQ
Intermediate FNMI ABQ
Teaching English Language Learners Part 1

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Graduate Assistant - Lakehead University - C&I Language Arts, Practice Inclusive Education (2020 - Present)
Virtual Learning Academy - GEDSB - Gr. 3 Teacher (2020 - 2021)
Grand Erie Learning Alternatives - Brantford, Ont - Heritage Language Instructor (2005 - 2017)

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

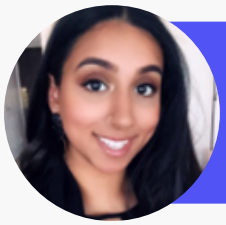
The Westernization of Names as an Ethno-Racial Microaggression Against Second-Generation South Asian Canadians (Qualitative Research Study) - Lakehead University 2020

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

Sohal, G. (2021, April 27). The Westernization of Names as an Ethnic-Racial Microaggression Against Second-Generation South Asian Canadians [Conference Presentation]. **Comparative International Education Society**.

Sohal, G. (2022, April 21) Say My Name: Name-Based Racial Microaggressions in Ontario's K-12 School System [Conference Presentation]. **Comparative International Education Society**

About Me



Gurjyot K. Sohal
OCT, M.Ed Candidate

I am a second generation South Asian Canadian with parents who immigrated to Canada in the early 1980's. I was born and raised in Brantford, having gone through my entire K-12 experience within the GEDSB, at a time where it was predominately white making me accustomed to being a visible minority in most all aspects of my life. As both a Canadian and a South Asian, with a diverse name, my name - Gurjyot - has always been a large part of my struggle with my identity.

Gurjyot is a name that was gifted to me by my parents through a traditional Sikh naming ceremony. Many cultures and religions associate a deep meaning to the process of naming a child. In South Asia, naming rituals represent a child's membership in their parental community or mark a spiritual rite of passage. However, for second-generation Canadians of South Asian descent, like myself, names can also be a large source of internal conflict.

When I started kindergarten in GEDSB, I did so with the name Gurjyot. However, after an unfortunate, but unintentional, incident in grade 4, I pleaded with my family until they officially changed my preferred name at school to my more palatable family nickname - Sona. So from then, until high school graduation I was Sona. Even still, I was called Sonia instead. But I never connected with the name, it didn't feel like me - because it never was *my* name.

I have experienced people struggling with my name from a very early age. So when a professor omitting my name in front of my peers and colleagues in a noticeable way caused such a strong emotional reaction from me as it did, I realized that I needed to know more about names and the impact they have on South Asian Canadians like myself

I am now in the final term of my Masters of Education at Lakehead University where I have dedicated my portfolio to the exploration of name-based racial microaggressions and developing this proposal for the use of name pronunciation tools in K-12 Ontario schools.

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Say My Name

If they can learn to say Tchaikovsky and Michelangelo and Dostoyevsky, they can learn to say Uzoamaka. - Uzo Aduba

We know how important it is to build relationships with our students and get to know them, to be that one caring adult - what better way than to learn their names?

THANK YOU

Gurjyot Kaur Sohal
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