

Addressing Mental Health Disparities in Children and Youth through Multicultural Education
Biography

I am thrilled to be applying for the David Lam Chair in Multicultural Education in the Faculty of Education at the University of British Columbia. I am currently an Associate Professor with a High Impact Position in Children and Youth Mental Health in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology, and Special Education. I have over 20 years of clinical and research experience centering on multicultural education, critical psychology, social justice, anti-oppression, anti-racism, and intersectionality.

At the core, my passion for multicultural education has emerged out of my own personal background. Specifically, I grew up in a biracial, bilingual, bi-religious home – an experience that has shaped the way in which I view the world and the way in which I understand the role of an educator. I have had the privilege of completing my graduate studies and engaging in academic work across four institutions: McGill University, University of California, Irvine, University of Calgary, and The University of British Columbia. My lived and scholarly experiences have allowed me to develop a unique social justice orientation to academia, which centers on inclusive education, collaborative relationships, and community outreach. Naturally, this philosophy impacts my research, teaching, and service within the university and community at large.

For the past twenty years, I have carried out a program of research that promotes equity, diversity, inclusion, social justice, and human rights. First, I have created *The Vividhatà Research Group* (<https://anushakassin.com/research/>) – a space where my graduate students and I collaborate on culturally responsive and socially just research where community engagement is prioritized. Second, my own research presently includes two major foci: (a) *the school integration of newcomer students in French and English public education systems*; and (b) *teaching and learning in educational contexts, investigating multicultural and social justice responsiveness in psychology training*. At this time, I have secured close to \$5,000,000 in research funding (over \$500,000 as principal investigator).

With respect to knowledge mobilization, I have produced 64 refereed publications to date. Recently, I received the Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee Medal and became a Fellow of the Canadian Psychology Association. In 2019, I received a *university-wide teaching award* (University of Calgary); and in 2020, I received a community award for *health promotion with French-speaking newcomer communities* (Portail de l'Immigrant Association). In the past three years, I have been invited to deliver multiple professional development workshops and record podcasts centered on racism and diversity in psychology training.

I currently have 20 manuscripts under review and 20 more in preparation. I have also participated in 198 refereed conference presentations. My scholarship has increasingly been published in high impact journals (e.g., *The Journal of Counseling Psychology*) and presented at international conferences (e.g., the 4th International Conference on Counselling, Psychotherapy, and Wellness in Bengaluru, India). One of my proudest accomplishments to date in the area of knowledge mobilization is the publication of an edited book entitled *Diversity & Social Justice in Counseling, Psychology & Psychotherapy: A Case Study Approach*. This book has the potential to be adopted by counseling, psychology, and psychotherapy training programs across North America. I hope that it will continue to push training in directions that align with multicultural education, critical psychology, social justice, anti-oppression, anti-racism, and intersectionality perspectives.

Should I be invited to interview for the David Lam Chair in Multicultural Education, I would share my vision for policy change within the K-12 as well as the post-secondary systems. This would entail *Infusing Change through Research in K-12 Systems* and *Infusing Change through Teaching and Learning Efforts in Post-Secondary*. My program of research over the three-year tenure of this position would culminate in the creation of several multi-model training tools that will build upon and broaden the critical multicultural education efforts that have emerged from *The Vividhatà Research Group*. These resources, housed on my website (among other spaces), will contribute to knowledge-sharing in Canada in an effort to address mental health disparities in children and youth.

*Addressing Mental Health Disparities in Children and Youth through Multicultural Education***Vision Statement**

There is a mental health crisis occurring in Canada – a reality that held true before we were confronted with a global pandemic. Currently, the prevalence of mental health challenges is unprecedented among children and youth, a large proportion of which stem from social, political, and economical disparities. Specifically, experiences of racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism – to name but a few examples – represent the root of mental health difficulties for many children, youth, and their families. Clearly, this is a topic of critical importance for educators in K-12 systems and post-secondary settings.

While education is a fundamental human right, students from racialized and minoritized backgrounds often face many social, emotional, and academic barriers within various educational contexts. Schools have an ethical responsibility to meet the needs all learners, including that of children and youth from communities that have been socio-politically marginalized. Essentially, the educational and psychological disparities among children and youth in Canada stems from the same social determinants of health. Importantly, one of the ways to address these inequities is through critical multicultural education.

My passion for multicultural teaching and learning in educational contexts has a long-standing history in my own multicultural background and has grown exponentially through my graduate training and academic career spanning four institutions: McGill University, University of California, Irvine, University of Calgary, and The University of British Columbia. Specifically, I have developed expertise in research epistemologies and pedagogical approaches that preface multicultural education, critical psychology, social justice, anti-oppression, anti-racism, and intersectionality. These ideologies are at the centre of *The Vividhatà Research Group* (<https://anushakassan.com/research/>) – a space where I engage in collaborative, culturally responsive and socially just research with colleagues and graduate students from all over the world. Coming from a scientist-practitioner training program, I believe that research is an invaluable and necessary tool, which plays an important role in shaping our professional knowledge, informing effective service delivery, and solidifying non-discriminatory pedagogical models.

The David Lam Chair in Multicultural Education represents an unparalleled opportunity to carry out social justice research and establish inclusive pedagogical practices that would benefit children and youth from racialized and minoritized backgrounds along with the families and educators who support them. Accordingly, my vision for this position includes engaging in research, teaching and learning initiatives, and service with immediate policy implications. Specifically, should I be given the opportunity to hold this Chair, I would conduct research with racialized and minoritized children and youth in K-12 schools as well as teaching and learning projects in post-secondary settings. In the following sections, I elaborate on my two-pronged program of research by providing a vision for how holding this Chair would allow me to both carry on existing work and elevate my scholarly endeavours in critical multicultural education. Finally, I will propose concrete objectives to be carried out during my three-year tenure should I be the successful candidate.

Infusing Change through Research in K-12 Systems

Over the past ten years, my primary program of research has centered on the educational and psychological needs of newcomer students. A great deal of this research has taken place due to a strong partnership with the Calgary Catholic School District and more specifically the St. John Reception Centre, which welcomes all newcomer families prior to registering students in schools. This is where I carried out my first SSHRC-funded project (2017–2019), which was entitled *School Integration Among Canadian Newcomer Youth: An Arts-Based Ethnographic Study*. This partnership not only enabled rigorous research, but it also helped establish long-term solutions to improve the experiences of newcomer students. By way of example, the results of my research led to the development of six English as an Additional Language programs in Junior Highs across the school district - an initiative that did not exist prior. Further, this partnership resulted in many professional development workshops delivered to school staff as well as improved relationships

between newcomer and non-newcomer students, families, and communities. It also provided opportunities for graduate students under my supervision to carry out their theses and dissertations in different school settings.

Since transitioning to my position at UBC, I have established a research partnership with Surrey Schools and the conseil scolaire francophone de la Colombie-Britannique and. These are the research settings where my most recently SSHRC-funded research (2021–2024) is taking place. This two-year, multi-modal research project is entitled *Newcomer Youth and School Integration: An Arts-Based Engagement Ethnography in the French and English Public System*. In line with the Government of British Columbia's Service Plan for Education, this research will identify ways in which the French and English provincial education systems can become more culturally responsive and socially just to meet the needs of newcomer youth. Moreover, these initiatives reflect my commitment to fulfilling the Chair mandate of facilitating community engagement and disseminating knowledge in a way that is accessible, relevant, and impactful.

The challenges that newcomer students face in their integration into the school system parallel that of many other children and youth who are from racialized and minoritized backgrounds. Through the *Teachers of Tomorrow* initiative (2021–2024), I have been expanding my program of research, to work with broader groups and communities who have been marginalized. The aim of this project is to understand the impact of a partnership approach to a healthy settings community change process focused on wellbeing in teacher preparation programs. Using a multi-method design, this research will: 1) evaluate a healthy settings approach on local BED programs; 2) describe provincial contexts for developing health promoting environments; and 3) examine the composition and evolution of the networks nationally.

To embody this research in ways that centre on multicultural education, critical psychology, social justice, anti-oppression, anti-racism, and intersectionality, I will continue to engage in community-based, participatory projects, which prioritizes the voices and experiences of individuals and communities who have historically been underrepresented in educational studies. In my research thus far, newcomer youth have been positioned as experts of their own experiences, who have a critical, yet untapped perspective to share about their educational needs and school engagement. Further, an innovative methodology, which I have co-created to capture novel experiences among newcomer youth, is that of arts-based engagement ethnography. This research design is leading to an in-depth, multi-layered, contextual understanding of the phenomenon of school integration. Adapting this methodology to conduct research with children and youth who have been racialized and minoritized represents an ideal opportunity to collect data in novel ways, while offering an intervention which is likely to have immediate benefits to participants.

In the years to come, the research that I will carry out in the area of multicultural education will be useful in informing curricula, educational policy, and integration practices. From a social justice perspective, such implications represent the ultimate goal of research and provide a means of assessing its true impact. In this way, the aim of my ongoing program of research is systemic change within the educational systems. Currently, individual students must adjust, adapt, integrate, and/or assimilate into school contexts to be successful. However, this often comes with a great mental health cost. Ultimately, school systems must be flexible enough to promote the integration of all children and youth, particularly those from racialized and minoritized backgrounds whose needs have been neglected for far too long. Such systemic shifts would have an enormous, positive impact on their social, emotional, and academic development, and in turn, their mental health.

Infusing Change through Teaching and Learning Efforts in Post-Secondary

One of the primary avenues to implementing the results of the research outlined above is through programmatic change in post-secondary settings. Over the past ten years, I have engaged in teaching and learning research in the area of cultural and social justice responsiveness in psychology training – a domain that has not received much scholarly attention in Canada. This research has centered on the experiences of diverse clients, graduate students, and field supervisors to improve the quality of culturally sensitive and socially just teaching, training, mentoring, and supervision in psychology.

This research has been disseminated in many ways, for example, through publications in high impact journals, scholarly conferences, and educational workshops. In the past year, I have been invited to deliver multiple professional development workshops centered on racism and diversity in psychology training. One of these workshops – *Increasing diversity in psychology training: A Pathway to Addressing Systemic Racism?* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zxvOnRakPgg>) – was delivered to the members of the Canadian Council for Professional Psychology Programs, which is the largest psychology training association in the country. Similarly, I was invited to record a podcast on *How to help people deal with racial trauma* for the Canadian Psychological Association (<https://soundcloud.com/user-389503679/dr-anusha-kassan-how-to-help-people-dealing-with-racial-trauma>). The David Lam Chair would represent an ideal opportunity to expand this work across educational disciplines. Specifically, if I were selected for this position, I would engage in additional public lectures and media events, such as the aforementioned, to promote the growth of multicultural education scholarship and practice.

Perhaps my proudest accomplishment with respect to teaching and learning lies in the programmatic changes that my research help foster in Educational Studies in Counselling Psychology at the University of Calgary. Specifically, from 2015 to 2020, I led the program through a series of critical changes to implement a social justice training philosophy at its core. This came with important changes to the program's admissions criteria, hiring practices, curricula, teaching practices, research endeavors, to name but a few examples. In that process, I helped the program identify core social justice values and develop a definition for this signature pedagogy. I have begun influencing similar shifts in School and Applied Child Psychology at UBC, as co-chair of the Committee for Critical Social Justice.

The type of critical leadership I demonstrated throughout this change process speaks to my readiness to assume a position such as the David Lam Chair. Specifically, I would be in a position to offer consultation on courses that would build capacity in the area of intercultural/cross-cultural understandings, social justice, anti-racist, and intersectionality. Similarly, this opportunity would allow me to expand my teaching and learning efforts to programs across the Faculty of Education at UBC. This would increase inter-disciplinary collaborations within the Faculty as well with key educational stakeholders in the province through the establishment of an advisory group that fulfills the Chair mandate of foregrounding a climate of intercultural communication, anti-racism, and anti-oppression politics, practices, and activism.

In addition to my leadership on programmatic transformation, I have integrated my social justice lens into the past courses I have delivered and created unique assessment tools and learning tasks to promote optimal student development. For example, in the *Masters Practicum in Counselling Psychology*, which I taught for five consecutive years, I supervised graduate students who were entering into a clinician role for the first time. I developed a comprehensive and culturally responsive evaluation tool which allowed field supervisors to more accurately evaluate their supervisees' performance and give them constructive feedback on the development of their multicultural clinical skills. Further, I have developed several course assignments, such as the self-reflexive field activity, which prioritize experiential learning among students to prompt reflexivity and enhance cultural and social justice responsiveness (<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0361684319837660>). I have also co-edited a textbook, which is entitled *Diversity and Social Justice in Counseling, Psychology, and Psychotherapy: A Case Study Approach*.

If I were selected to hold this Chair, I intend to build upon my strong foundation in delivering and creating coursework that promotes social justice, intercultural communication, anti-racism, and anti-oppression politics and practices through the provision of an annual interdisciplinary course in critical multicultural education at UBC. Such a broad educational effort represents a great opportunity to link research results in K-12 systems with ongoing teaching and learning efforts taking place in post-secondary settings. In this way, pedagogical changes can occur in parallel.

