

Vignettes of Connectivity: The University Art Gallery as a Critical Space for Promoting Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression

Natalie LeBlanc, University of Victoria
natalieleblanc@uvic.ca

Natasha S. Reid, University of Victoria
natashareid@uvic.ca

Shadi Moalem, University of Victoria
shadimoalem@uvic.ca

Yi Qian, University of Victoria
Yiqian2@uvic.ca

Michelle Wiebe, University of Victoria
mxw@uvic.ca

Abstract: In this paper, we present findings from a recent study of an artist-in-residence program aimed at promoting anti-racism and anti-oppression in a university art gallery. This research tested new strategies, grounded in contemporary artistic practices, social justice, and gallery-based education. We propose that play-, will-, and care-infused practices offer affective learning opportunities with the potential to stimulate empathic responses, critical consciousness, and radical imagination through embodied, relational, and community-oriented modes of engagement.

Keywords: Artists-in-Residence; Anti-Racism; Anti-Oppression; Gallery Education

Introduction

“...anti-racist politics and practice in education must attend to the possibilities that are opened to *do* something different, to *feel* differently” (Zembylas, 2015, p. 158).

In an era marked by disconnection (Blatt-Gross, 2025) and increased injustice against and violence toward racialized individuals and equity-deserving groups (Government of Canada, 2026), the arts have become essential in fostering inclusive spaces for dialogue, reflection, and social engagement (Bae-Dimitriadis, 2024). In this paper, we draw from a study entitled *Artistic Approaches to Anti-racism and Anti-oppression: Engaging Artists and University Students in Transformative Action in a Campus Gallery*, conducted at the University of Victoria (Canada) from 2023-26. Through an anti-racism- and anti-oppression-focused artist-in-residence program, this research tested new strategies, grounded in contemporary artistic practices and gallery-based education, for promoting anti-racist and anti-oppressive engagement on a university campus. We align this paper with CRAE’s special issue examining how we might re-imagine anti-racist and anti-oppressive art education through arts-based approaches. We share

vignettes arising from the first of three artist residencies, offered by a racialized artist working with anti-racist and anti-oppressive approaches in their art practice, that occurred in a university art gallery over the span of seven days. We describe how the artist-in-residence engaged university students, educators, and diverse off-campus community members in participatory art making and dialogues about anti-racism and anti-oppression, offering relational and affective learning opportunities in which the concept of *connectivity* became a central theme. Our vignettes offer ways university galleries can be considered public pedagogical sites for promoting dialogues and actions related to anti-racism and anti-oppression, and for provoking empathic responses, critical consciousness, and social transformation.

Background: Anti-Racist & Anti-Oppressive Art Education

This research was motivated by four factors: first, evidence indicating a rise in discrimination, oppression, and violence toward racialized individuals, immigrants, refugees, 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, people with disabilities, and women that had been exacerbated since the pandemic (Solomos, 2021). Second, the escalation of these issues linked to the proliferation of digital technologies that reinforce racism and discrimination (Ibrahim, 2023), the increasing prevalence of far-right political movements in North America (Perry et al., 2022), and the dismantling of anti-oppressive and anti-racist policies in higher education (Williams, 2025). Third, the responsibility of Canadian universities, such as The University of Victoria, where this research was conducted, to implement decolonization, equity, diversity, and inclusion strategies to dismantle systemic barriers within our institutions (Marom, 2023). Lastly, the desire to understand the experiences and perspectives of artists, educators, and university students regarding artistic practices that promote anti-racism and anti-oppression in a university art gallery. It aligns with the Government of Canada's Anti-Racism Strategy (2024) and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council's (2021) strategic plan to enhance Canada's global leadership in social sciences and humanities research, for which it received funding. During this pivotal time, anti-racist and anti-oppressive artistic approaches offer valuable opportunities for empathetic, embodied, relational, and community-oriented learning.

A growing number of art educators are incorporating anti-racist and anti-oppressive principles in their work (Willis et al., 2024). This is an intentional, ongoing, and process-oriented practice dedicated to the exploration, disruption, and eradication of systemic racism based on white supremacy, cultural hegemony, and other forms of oppression and discrimination deeply embedded in our institutions and classrooms (Acuff, 2018). It builds on broader goals set forth by social justice in art education (Quinn et al., 2012), promoting civic participation and challenging unequal power relations (Desai, 2020). Through culturally responsive practices, anti-racist and anti-oppressive art education fosters discussions around privilege, power, and identity, provoking empathy and inclusivity (Kraehe & Acuff, 2013).

Art galleries, situated on the perimeters of formal education systems, are uniquely equipped to address anti-racist and anti-oppressive concerns. Museums and galleries simultaneously reflect, shape, and affect understandings of society (Bennett, 2017), offering creative spaces to collectively unpack and critically engage with pressing social topics (Marstine, 2017). Employing critical race theory, as well as feminist and queer theory, this study aims to expose and resist oppressive systems within a university gallery by engaging publics with artists-in-residence and their contemporary art practices. Artist residencies connect artists, educators, and communities, facilitating critical conversations and collaborative artmaking (Shields et al., 2021). Public engagements invite participants to create art alongside a contemporary artist who is

well-positioned to pose critically engaged questions, offer new perspectives on pressing issues, and provide alternative and creative ways for engaging with social justice concerns (Springgay, 2021). This framework aligns with anti-racist curricula and pedagogy, focusing on identifying and challenging systems that promote racism (Ladson-Billings, 2009), while utilizing an intersectional approach (Crenshaw, 1989) to explore the ways various social categories are affected by systems of oppression and discrimination in overlapping and interconnected ways.

Data Collection & Analysis

The project consisted of three separate artist residencies attracting over five hundred participants, aimed at engaging students and faculty in contemporary artistic practices addressing social justice issues. The residencies supported racialized artists (Indigenous, Black, and Persons of Colour), from across Canada, showcasing a variety of artistic approaches influenced by their individual expertise. Each artist transformed the gallery into an interactive pedagogical space for four to fourteen days using participatory and action-oriented methods that required visitor engagement. Each residency formed a case study (Stake, 1995) and participatory action research (PAR) guided by participant input and grounded in anti-racist principles (Lenette, 2022), allowed us to centre the perspectives, lived experiences, and intersectional identities of racialized artists. By examining racism in educational and societal institutions, the study aligns with critical race theory, demonstrating how art can foster anti-racist practices and enhance critical consciousness through collaborative experiences. Participants included university students in various education programs, artists-in-residence, instructors, administrative staff members, K-12 school groups, and the wider off-campus community. Data collection associated with this residency consisted of two semi-structured group interviews with ten PAR group participants and the artist; six individual interviews with visitors and the artist; and one long-form questionnaire with a school group's teacher; audiovisual documentation of the visitors' and artist's interactions in the space and artworks; and observational field notes. Analysis involved summarization, coding, and content analysis, highlighting themes of anti-racism and anti-oppression, providing insights to assess social attitudes toward these issues.

Promoting Anti-Racism and Anti-Oppression through Art

This article focuses on findings from the first residency that occurred in 2024, entitled, *Poja-Gi: Diasporic Gestures*. kimura byol lemoine (pronouns ze/zer) invited public engagement with diasporic experiences, producing and reconfiguring social relations between individuals, groups, and communities. These practices were less concerned about objects of art per se and more about the social experiences and events that were provoked (Bourriaud, 2002). Relational and experiential art function through a paradigm of *connectivity*, opportunities for participation in which communication and community are simultaneously at play (Kester, 2004). Connectivity emphasizes the intricate, dynamic, and rhizomatic ways human and non-human entities form relationships (O'Sullivan, 2006). For Hoegen & Spronck (2025), connectivity is

a concept that embraces ethical values, approaches of sharing, shared experiences and communing/commonness. What is helpful about the term is that it explicates not just the ways of working together (collaborating/communing, etc.) but also on the basis of which values – ethics – are included. (p. 84)

Drawing from our observations of, and participation in, kimura-lemoine's residency, the research team developed a series of *vignettes*, brief but powerful accounts for which we involved participatory art making and dialogues about anti-racism and anti-oppression. Our team comprises of three faculty members and two doctoral research assistants in art education, representing a diversity of races (Bi-Racial, East Asian, West Asian, and White), ethnicities (Jamaican-Ukrainian, Chinese, Persian, Scottish, French, Irish, and European Mennonite), nationalities (first, second-, and third-generation Canadian, Iranian, and Chinese), and immigration statuses, as well as other intersecting aspects of our social identities that affect the ways in which we understand and engage with anti-racist and anti-oppressive education. We are all settlers on the unceded lands of the Ləkʷəŋən Peoples (Songhees and X̱sepsəm/Esquimalt) and express gratitude for the opportunity to live and work there. We recognize the necessity to examine colonial practices and their detrimental effects on local lands and communities, while acknowledging the privileges held by Canadian universities and the importance of their ongoing support for anti-racist and decolonial initiatives.

A vignette is a short passage that uses imagery to describe a subject in detail. As a response to the strong emotions and sentiments that emerged in our experiences with the residency, affect theory, particularly Ahmed's (2004) conceptualization of *affective economies*, which highlights the importance of emotions as social and political practices, has helped us interpret the data. This differs from a psychological perspective that regards emotions as coming from an individual body, or as Ahmed (2004) attests, an *inside-out* model. Yet it also contrasts with a purely sociological *outside in* model. Rather, this perspective acknowledges that emotions are entangled with relations of power. Through the study of emotions, and more specifically what emotions *do*, Ahmed reminds us that affective economies have material consequences. As emotions circulate and move around and in proximity with others, they create connections or disconnections, shaping "the very surface of bodies as well as worlds" (Ahmed, 2012, p. 12). We think with Ahmed (2010), who proposes that "affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (p. 29). This (post-)phenomenological position is informed by scholars in education who are examining race and racism with a focus on embodiment, materiality, ontology, and process (Hood et al., 2025). These ideas challenge us to think about what it means to be part of an assemblage/agencement (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), in which "knowledge is made in experiences of being in relation and in connection" (Little, 2023, p. 253). Taking inspiration from kimura-lemoine's serene practice that highlights resilience and virtue in the face of adversity, this paper is an active engagement in affirmative praxis (Braidotti, 2025) as an empowering relationship that deeply acknowledges the pain, trauma, violence, and despair that racism and oppression bring. Our vignettes take a close look at how the residency supported social engagement as a way of promoting anti-racism and anti-oppression in a gallery through themes of play-, will-, and care-full-connectivity. We discuss each of these in detail, concluding with implications that these have for re-imagining anti-racist and anti-oppressive art education using arts-based approaches.

Play-full-connectivity

"Toutes mes sympathies, cher racisme (All my sympathies, dear racism)" [kimura-lemoine]

kimura byol lemoine (키무라별르완-木村ビヨルレムワン) was selected as our first artist-in-residence because of her proposal to provoke ludic art and participation, using the mechanics of play to explore serious themes. Play, as a method for promoting anti-racism and

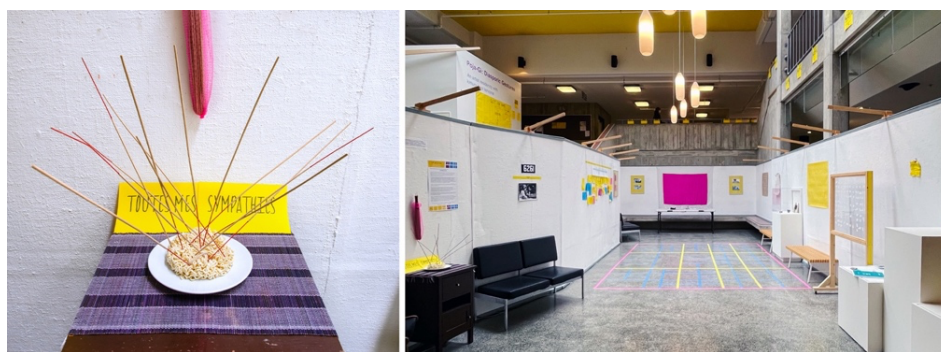
anti-oppression in a university art gallery, was a central thread permeating throughout kimura-lemoine's residency. To begin, kimura-lemoine was born to Korean and Japanese parents, was adopted as a baby to a family in Belgium, moved back to South Korea as a young adult, and settled in Montreal, Canada, where ze lives and works. kimura-lemoine self-identifies as an "atypik asocial a-gendered asian adopted abroad artist activist and archivist" (kimura-lemoine, n.d.). Through calligraphy, painting, digital images, poems, videos, and artistic collaborations, kimura-lemoine develops projects that give voice and visibility to equity-deserving groups and/or individuals, actively examining issues related to diaspora, ethnicity, colourism, post-colonialism, immigration, and gender. kimura-lemoine's work "is obviously very personal (and I'm not ashamed of it)" (personal communication, March 2, 2024). Ze practice is informed by first-hand experience, having encountered oppression, discrimination, racism, and sexism throughout ze life, navigating a plurality of nationalities, countries, cultures, and languages, and learning to live with/in the nuances and differences between.

Concepts play a crucial role in kimura-lemoine's process. For example, in Korean, POJA means "let's look." Deriving from the Korean word TAE GEUK GI (pronounced teh-GUK-key) (TAE meaning largeness and GEUK meaning eternity), GI is the name given to the red and blue circle on the Korean flag. When written as one word, POJAGI (pronounced po-jah-key) refers to an assembly of leftover fabrics—a type of traditional Korean patchwork. The title of the residency was a play on words, referring to diasporic histories and the gestures that are unconsciously or consciously learned in new territories of emigration. Art objects representing these encounters filled the gallery, creating a *poja-gi* of stories and gestures of diasporic realities.

kimura-lemoine, a Flemish-Francophone individual who speaks English and learned Korean as an adult, has a playful disposition towards language. kimura-lemoine's practice often involves playing with words and concepts, blurring categories, forming new alliances, and creating new kinds of writing and thought. For example, "*Toutes mes sympathies (All my sympathies)*" was a statement that kimura-lemoine placed next to a plate of uncooked ramen and a pouch of incense, greeting visitors as they entered the gallery (Figure 1). This was a gesture of sympathy that kimura-lemoine made in 2021 to mark the 20th anniversary of Asian Heritage Month amidst the rising "anti-Asian sentiment" during the COVID-19 pandemic (kimura-lemoine, 2021).

Figure 1

Entrance of Poja-Gi: Diasporic Gestures



Note. Photo credits: Yi Qian & kimura byol lemoine.

For Ahmed (2004), texts perform different emotions in their reading, which “involves differentiating between the subject and object of feeling” (p. 13). “*All my sympathies, dear racism*,” connects to the dense past and thick present of racism. For some, *racism* might link with other words such as anger, hatred, or fear, whereas, *sympathies*, might connect with words such as pity, sorrow, or concern. In French, however, *sympathies* often means *condolences*. In this way, kimura-lemoine offered condolences to racism itself, an act using formal language of loss and grief in an ironic manner to acknowledge the harm caused by racism. Using the language of condolences to highlight the persistent and deeply embedded nature of racism today, kimura-lemoine reintegrated this statement into the gallery space as a powerful and provocative gesture. Placing it at the entrance of the gallery reminded visitors about the gravity of the issue, offering pause and reflection. Visitors were invited to take a stick of incense from the red pouch and to place it in the dry noodles – punctuating their presence.

A major motif of the residency was a grid-like formation of 100 rectangular shapes. We quickly learned that kimura-lemoine enjoys working with the Korean word 백 *baek*, which means 100. However, as kimura explained, in Korean/hangul, which is a phonologically based system, the same sound also means white. kimura-lemoine integrated documentation of her previous works in the space, including a timeline contextualizing her practice. kimura-lemoine has developed several projects as a conceptual exploration of 백 (100 + white) that plays with the meanings of whiteness and colonialism. kimura-lemoine refers to herself as a “White Korean” (personal communication, March 2, 2024) for having been adopted by a Caucasian family in the Western world. In critical race theory, *whiteness* is an ideological construct shaped by various social, cultural, economic, and legal systems, which grants certain advantages and delineates superior ways of living (Krahe et al., 2018). Harris (1993) describes whiteness as a form of property, which manifests subtly, yet fundamentally embodies the validation of power and control that work to uphold the status quo as neutral, simultaneously concealing the perpetuation of white privilege. kimura-lemoine’s work plays with the concept and impact of whiteness and its interconnection with identity, colonialism, and national belonging. One project included the compilation of 100 photos of Korean children into an album marking 50 years since the end of the Korean war and the beginning of the Korean international adoption practice (kimura-lemoine, 2003). Ze printed these images in black and white as a statement that regardless of skin colour, race, ethnicity or migration experience, these children all share a commonality—that they are human beings and as such, have value. Personal information, including their names and adoption numbers, are erased. Replacing them, in bright yellow font, are words such as “abandoned,” “adaptable,” “kimchified,” “left-overs,” and “xeroxed.” As an act of visibility and resistance, kimura-lemoine reclaimed these terms along with a colour frequently used in xenophobic and racist remarks directed towards her.

The grid-like formations were meant to emulate a moveable-type printing press with a matrix system, often credited to have been invented by Johannes Gutenberg in the 1400’s. However, as kimura-lemoine explained, this was predated by a lesser-known moveable-type press made in Korea during the Goryeo Dynasty around 1250 AD. Even before this, kimura-lemoine reminded us that woodblock printing existed, most notably in China during the Diamond Sutra (circa 868 AD). Not only did kimura-lemoine’s practice bring attention to these significant, yet-often overlooked systems (particularly in the West), it addressed the profound impact that the printing press has had on racial conversations and dynamics throughout history serving as a tool for spreading racist ideologies, inciting violence, and promoting cultural abolition and silence

(Roberts-Forde & Bedingfield, 2021). As a major structure in the gallery (Figure 2), it played a pivotal role in prompting conversations about racism and oppression.

Figure 2

Bird's-eye view of Poja-Gi: Diasporic Gestures



Note. Photo credits: kimura byol lemoine.

Contemporary artistic practices grounded in play and ludic participation, as noted by Stott (2015) “offer an opportunity to reflect upon the possibilities of organized social complexity at present” (p. 133). Play has long been regarded as essential in child development, enhancing cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills, while fostering bonds, trust, and communication (Vygotsky, 1967). kimura-lemoine's semiotic and deconstructive practice demonstrates how play can be built on a systematicity (Stott, 2015) that structures affect. Playing with concepts shows kimura's disposition towards everyday life, inviting visitors to “inhabit worlds of feeling – visceral spaces where sensation, sensemaking, emotion, and articulation are jumbled together” (Trammell, 2023, p. 47). kimura-lemoine's mode of play is a reparative approach to the pain caused by racism and oppression, addressing a long history of discrimination and struggle. It transcends fixed boundaries by connecting different moods as well as different people, ideas, and points of view together through *play-full-connectivity*. In the next section, we attend to how this mode of engagement prompted visitors' active and intimate involvement.

Will-full-connectivity

It's my first visit to the gallery. As I step into it, I see the walls lined with various artifacts: a pack of incense, a navy-blue plaque with the number 6261, a large pink blanket, and there are no description labels on the walls. My mind is filled with questions, and my gaze shifts again to a small square of yellow fabric pinned to the wall. I step closer and recognize it: It's a body scrubber! Something flashes in my mind from childhood; I stand there, struck by this unexpected connection among all other unfamiliar objects. During the following hours in the gallery, kimura-lemoine and I converse about these personal

artifacts. With these dialogues, each piece on the wall, while alien to me at first, became a window into kimura-lemoine's life—zer diasporic experiences, moments of otherness, and connection. I was motivated to be vulnerable and share back. [Shadi]

kimura-lemoine carefully arranged objects and photographs in the gallery, each with a unique personal story that ze openly shared with visitors as they entered the space. Many of these stories were based on kimura-lemoine's experiences as a Korean-born individual who was adopted abroad and other multiple intersections of zer identity. Some stories focused on kimura-lemoine's experiences with zer adoptive family, stories about other survivors, and stories of the complexities inherent in the adoption process. For example, the back wall featured a pink traditional Korean blanket that kimura-lemoine's birth mother gave zer as a gift when they first reunited. Other notable items on display included a slow-waving *Maneki Neko*, a sculptural cat known for welcoming visitors, and the number 6261, in the form of an address (Figure 3). As the above vignette reveals, participants responded positively to kimura-lemoine's approach, displaying a willingness to be vulnerable and share their experiences in return.

Figure 3

Select objects from Poja-Gi: Diasporic Gestures



Note. Photo credit: Yi Qian & kimura byol lemoine.

At first sight, these objects appeared ambiguous– ubiquitous. It was evident that several of them acted as a springboard for the palette of colours permeating throughout the space – bright hues of yellow, pink, and blue. Most notably, there was an absence of didactic labels. Besides a small poster introducing visitors to the residency, there was very little written to help viewers navigate the space or understand the significance of these objects through observation alone.

kimura-lemoine led visitors on a journey through the space, helping them piece together rich layers of zer identity. The number 6261, for example, was kimura-lemoine’s adoption number, assigned by an adoption agency in Korea. This number symbolizes zer experience as one of over 220,000 Korean children adopted and sent overseas from 1953 to 1976. kimura-lemoine disclosed that not all these children received an adoption number and as such, are not legally documented in the country’s adoption records. Many images on display in the gallery were stills from an array of films that kimura-lemoine made over a lifetime, reflecting themes such as trans-nationalism and *belonging*, revealing zer dual Eastern and Western identity, as well as zer queer identity. As kimura-lemoine explained, “It’s part of my search for where I belong, and my struggle with the sense that I don’t belong anywhere” (Jun, 2002). Throughout the residency, kimura-lemoine openly shared with visitors the role of art in helping zer navigate the “in-between-ness” of zer mind and body (personal communication, March 2, 2024).

The short documentary #6261, screened during the residency, examines belonging through stories of Montreal residents, showcasing the possibilities of non-linear narrative as a participatory mode of engagement utilizing the address 6261 to connect different places, people, and stories together. During the screening kimura-lemoine explained that zer adoption number became a catalyst for exploring a new city and interacting with residents of 100 randomly chosen streets over 100 days. Travelling on foot and using public transportation with zer camera, kimura-lemoine documented the journey and the diverse social, ethnic, economic, and linguistic experiences that ze encountered. As the film demonstrates, kimura-lemoine’s art practice often functions as a platform for addressing salient issues by bringing together different lived experiences and viewpoints as “the focus and form of the work” (Irwin & O’Donoghue, 2012, p. 231). This extended into the gallery space, where kimura-lemoine encouraged participants to draw a gesture that spoke to a time in their lives when they felt *othered*, forming a wall of drawings that grew during the residency (Figure 4). Visitors’ drawings reflected diverse experiences connected to self-perception, language, gender identity, migration, and familial separation (Figure 5). One visitor elaborated on their contribution based on their experience with autism (Figure 6), explaining,

I wasn't really diagnosed [until] right before I turned 18, so a lot of my life was feeling like an outcast. And like just wondering why I'm different and so I drew a picture of myself looking confused ... and then eyes looking at me and saying different things like 'you're weird' or 'why don't you look at me in the eyes?' ... I was trying to think of – what are the things people actually said to me that made me feel like that. [Kai Punt, undergraduate student, post-residency interview]

Another visitor described the mixture of emotions that this engagement provoked through their experience as a twin (Figure 6), stating,

[My twin and I are often] placed beside each other and people will just walk around us to try to see our differences ... I didn't realize that I had that feeling inside me. But then when I was looking at all the art, I started to kind of feel those feelings of... feeling kind of sad, feeling kind of frustrated, confused, but also that specialness of, like —oh, people really care. They want to see who I am. [Mariah Madill, undergraduate student, PAR meeting]

Figure 4

Timeline of works by kimura byol lemoine and visitors' drawings



Note. Photo credit: Yi Qian.

Figure 5

Select visitors' drawings



Note. Photo credit: Yi Qian.

Figure 6

Select visitors' drawings, Kai (left) and Mariah (right)



Note. Photo credit: Yi Qian.

Through verbal and visual stories, visitors explored how various factors, including bias, prejudice, and cultural contexts, can lead to feelings of difference. This became an opportunity for them to share personal lived experiences, and as the last example demonstrates, even bringing forth opportunities to see them anew. The word *willful* is often associated with a range of negative feelings and outcomes fueled by anger, resentment, frustration, impatience, fear, and anxiety. kimura-lemoine's practice differs from these sentiments, aligning with Ahmed's (2014), *Willful Subjects*, which reclaims the term to denote the persistence and insistence of discussing and bringing to the fore racism and oppression. kimura-lemoine and Ahmed (2012) remind us that to share or to listen to others speak about their experiences with racism and oppression is "to be charged with willfulness" (p. 18) because, in doing so, we refuse to allow these stories and experiences to be forgotten or overlooked. As this vignette demonstrates, kimura-lemoine's vulnerability was a source of connection, allowing visitors to engage with *otherness* and explore diverse perspectives, prompting reflections on personal and cultural identities and countering stereotypes of the *other*. In this way, the gallery became a space that honoured difference and fostered dialogue through shared vulnerability. *Will-full-connections*, as a method for promoting anti-racism and anti-oppression in a university art gallery, recognizes the vulnerability and the resiliency of underrepresented stories that challenge dominant, often oppressive, societal narratives. As counternarratives, they offer a more complex and humanizing understanding of lived realities as compared to the narratives favoured by those in power (Kraehe et al., 2018), animating living connections through their exchange (Staikidis, 2025). In the next section, we attend to how this established an affectively safer community for self-presentation.

Care-full-connectivity

Someone called me by a colleague's name. It was the third time that week. I half-jokingly expressed that I wanted to change my name to Tasha. A few minutes later, with a smile and a slight bow forward, kimura-lemoine presented

me with a bright yellow piece of paper with Korean writing in black ink. Ze said, “This is Natasha in Korean”. I was moved. Then, kimura-lemoine told me that the sounds fittingly are a combination of “Me” and “Tasha” (me = na = 나 + Tasha = tasya = 타샤). Ze excitedly said this means that in Korean, I am already Tasha and I can easily go back and forth as I please. As the residency unfolded, I learned that kimura-lemoine’s name (kimura byol lemoine) embodies layers of zer cultural identities, combining Korean, Japanese, and Belgian. Through deep listening, kimura-lemoine took a responsive approach, grounded in an offering. [Natasha]

Attuned to matters of identity, subjectivity, and agency, kimura-lemoine responded to Natasha, the lead investigator of the study, with a creative offering originating from zer own cultural identities. kimura-lemoine offered a similar experience to visitors and approached each interaction with the same open, responsive, and caring manner (Figure 7). During these interactions, kimura-lemoine searched for ways that personal and cultural experiences and identities could overlap and connect, practices for which empathy, kindness, and love were paramount. This mode of engagement values the sharing of personal and cultural knowledge, experience, and resources, without the expectation of receiving something in return. As a gift, it “pushes against the dominant capitalist exchange economy, replacing independence, distance, ownership, and excess with relationality, generosity, interdependence, and connection” (Reid, 2024, p. 196). It forms a relationship between the giver and receiver, and thus between everyone who encounters the artwork-turned-gift (Hyde, 2019).

Figure 7

Visitors posing with their names written in Korean



Note. Photo credit: Yi Qian.

This idea extended to ‘Free Ramen Day’ when clusters of university students and a group of middle school children visited kimura-lemoine in the gallery. ‘Ramyeon’ (湯麵 in Korean/hangul), ‘ramen’ (ラーメン in Japanese/katana) and ‘lā miàn’ (拉面 in Chinese simplified)

are instant noodles, considered to be “junk food” because of glutamate they contain (kimura-lemoine, in conversation). kimura-lemoine explained that instant ramen noodles symbolize zero culture of origin. It is a relatively inexpensive food that is easily found in major cities, that can be consumed quickly, and that Koreans generally eat as a snack. kimura-lemoine made and gifted ramen to visitors, leading them to share stories and time in the gallery. Visitors carefully chose a soup flavour, after which kimura-lemoine poured boiled water over the chosen cups. Allowing their soup to steep, visitors chatted in the space and continued to do so while slurping noodles (Figure 8). Visitors commented that this was new for them because “normally you would go to a restaurant for food and not to an art gallery” (kimura-lemoine, in conversation). Cooking, eating, and sharing ramen became an invitation and an opportunity to slow down together and to engage in conversations about diasporic realities. Eating as art, Springgay and Zawlicka (2017) remind us, is “an expression that interrupts forces of habit” (p. 281). This was welcomed by university students who gathered for a warm meal in-between class on a wet winter’s day, and by the middle school group whose instructor had organized a field trip to the residency, marking a special occasion to relationally engage with each other in a gallery space. The instructor noted how “The exhibition quickly shifted to a bustling street food feel as the kids clamoured for their free ramen” (Tasha Henry, post-residency questionnaire).

The gallery visitors’ surprise, excitement, anticipation (as they waited for their noodles to soften and their broth to cool), and delight (as they slurped their noodles and waved their chopsticks in the air) was palpable. As Shin and Bae (2019) and García (2018) remind us, food preparation and sharing can create opportunities to break the rules of the institution *with* others, where participants exchange cultural knowledge and build relationships. This created a genuine opening into discussions related to complex social, cultural, and political issues such as identity, memory, race, oppression, immigration, safety, and belonging. García (2018) posits that food can be used to talk about issues through a ‘border pedagogy’ – addressing the metaphorical and conceptual borders that bodies, culture, history and politics actively navigate. Through food materials and processes, a border pedagogy can “decenter, reterritorialize, remap and create new knowledge” (p. 65), and it can influence how we learn and experience hybridity, contradiction, and authenticity. Moreover, it is not so much a means to resolve these but to hold them in productive tension. As such, food materials and processes can provide opportunities to learn about various societal aspects such as power, culture, race, and health (García, 2018) and the “liminal space between knowing and not knowing [that] varies with each encounter” (García, 2018, p. 73). For Shin and Bae (2019), this is “a site for *becoming-other* [emphasis added], where participants confront and resist unquestioned social structures, systems, and values” (p. 230), forming new, creative connections.

As this vignette demonstrates, kimura-lemoine transformed the university and gallery, modelling care-infused practices that became a disruption to the progress-oriented, rushed, didactic, and individualistic nature of neoliberal higher education, rooted in colonial endeavours (Staikidis, 2024). The gallery events situated care and love as a radical and political act that created space for diverse participants to come into relation. Nel Noddings (2013) posits that an ethic of care challenges the perception of care as a weakness, rather, it serves as a resistance against structural violence. Similarly, bell hooks (2016), emphasizes how practices of love can “heighten our awareness of the ways living in a culture of domination governed by a politics of imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (p. 191) advocating for kindness, empathy, being open to the unknown, and courage to confront our fears with integrity and accountability (hooks, 2013). This approach fosters new ways of living and being in the world.

Figure 8

Visitors drawing and eating ramen in the gallery



Note. Photo credit: Yi Qian & kimura byol lemoine.

Re-Imagining Anti-Racist & Anti-Oppressive Art Education using Arts-Based Approaches

I'm watching as kimura-lemoine stands back from the display cabinet, tilting zer head and looking at the packages of ramen. Ze carefully arranges some packages, stands back, then quickly steps forward again, rearranging them into a new striking pattern. kimura-lemoine performs this as the packages of ramen slowly diminish, and the colours and subsequent form changes. Each one reminds me of a vibrant display you might see in Chinatown. [Natalie]

This vignette was one of many instances that kimura-lemoine was quietly making art in the space and throughout the residency (Figure 9). Sometimes this was evident as ze prepared, then moved objects into varying arrangements. Oftentimes, however, ze's practices were less obvious. This addresses the calm, patient, and contemplative disposition that kimura-lemoine embodied – what we have come to refer to as a *tender attunement* (Michna, 2023) to the visual and material properties of the objects, the space, and the bodies that moved and were moved in various ways over the seven-day residency. As an ethical and aesthetic practice, tenderness builds on feminist understandings of care as “the most modest form of love” (Tokarczuk, 2019, p. 11), giving “an existence to all the tiny pieces of the world that are represented by human experiences, the situations people have endured and their memories” (Michna, 2023, New Ethical section para. 2). Tenderness, as an emotion or a feeling, is the quality of being gentle, loving, and compassionate. Through careful observation and deep response to emotional and physical states in the gallery, kimura-lemoine demonstrated the significance of tenderness as a means of fostering meaningful relationships within an artistic context.

Zembylas (2015) argues for the exploration of affect in rethinking “the ‘technologies’ that are being used to establish racial categorizations between bodies, binding them together or apart” (p. 146). Drawing on Ahmed's (2004) concept of affective economies, he advocates that educators disrupt affect-positions that emerge in normalized processes of racism and oppression by creating “small cracks” (p. 159) that leverage affective forces, thus facilitating new possibilities for action and engaging with difference. During kimura-lemoine's residency, we learned many aspects of zer life story – being adopted, displaced, feeling helpless, voiceless, and searching for and finding acceptance and belonging. We learned how ze was manipulated and controlled several times through pervasive racism and oppression. kimura-lemoine's art practice and zer life history demonstrated the violence and the harm that racism does to human dignity, a reminder that everyone's humanity deserves to be protected and respected. Yet it also demonstrated zer commitment to play-, will-, and care-full practices, provoking critical reflection on epistemic injustice and cultural norms that uphold a racialized social order, thereby fostering new configurations that matter.

Building on Deleuze and Guattari, and Spinoza's ethics of joy, Braidotti (2025) characterizes affects as “transversal forces ... expressions of the *potentia* – the power to relate to others” (p. 526). This emphasizes our capacity to engage in new types of relationships that “do not repeat racialized forms of antagonism” (Zembylas, 2015, p. 158). Rather than exploiting or commodifying difference, kimura-lemoine created positive, alternate, and vibrant ways of living, bringing people together through play-, will-, and care-full-connectivity. These art forms offered empowering and nurturing experiences, providing multiple ways for existing in a gallery, where answers were not evident, vulnerabilities could safely surface, and intuitions could be communicated and validated (Burke, 2020).

Figure 9

Ramen display and kimura-lemoine in the gallery



Note. Photo credit: kimura byol lemoine & Yi Qian.

kimura-lemoine's play-, will-, and care-infused practices promoted critical awareness of structural inequalities embedded in our world and envisioned new ways to combat them *through* art and shared experiences. This was an act of resistance towards pedagogical models based on competition, mastery, and speed, advocating instead for affective, relational, and embodied approaches towards self-care, mutual care, and social healing (Reid et al., 2026). bell hooks (1994) states, "it has become painfully clear that biases that uphold and maintain white supremacy, imperialism, sexism, and racism have distorted education so that it is no longer about the practice of freedom" (p. 29). kimura-lemoine's residency disrupted these biases and structures, establishing a liberating space, fostering diverse ways of being, participating, and knowing, and where publics could engage relationally within a campus gallery, witnessing, and taking part in actions, dialogues, and processes that evoke emotions, provoke affects, and critique oppressive systems. As one visitor noted,

What the exhibit did for me was dismantle the white hegemonic foundation of [the] postsecondary institution, by carving out a place for expression that did not conform but rather questioned the place and space for art as a living interaction rather than a static, untouchable, or unachievable object, devoid of subjectivity. When any space invites subjectivities, it asks to be changed by that interaction. I thought this exhibition was asking to be changed as much as it was asking its participants to change. To me, that is an invitation to agency grounded in anti-oppression theory. [Tasha Henry, post-residency questionnaire]

Another visitor remarked,

That was the most different thing I've ever been to. It was far from art and yet it wasn't. It was creative. It was like a blueprint of a life. It went from pathos to intellect. The stories about the babies ... that, coming together with all the other bits and pieces, affected me. It was like a sociology class. Nothing seemed connected to anything else. There was very little to help us enter in (no titles for example) and that seemed to express kimura-lemoine's description of zer life. From afar the pieces didn't grab or call for attention. I moved closer by choice and began to make connections with the help of the stories that were shared.
[Unknown visitor, observational field notes]

Within play-, will-, and care-infused practices resides a need for wonder. Wonder is the desire to be curious about something. It is marked by a feeling of surprise, mingled with admiration, caused by something unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable. Considering this, we've intentionally left some of the objects that were on display in the gallery during kimura-lemoine's residency and pictured in this paper, unidentified. For Lira et al. (2023), "wonder disrupts power and knowledge boundaries – opening doors to different understandings" (p. 669). Ahmed (2008) argues,

Wonder is about being moved by what is before us: it is about movement, but a movement that is made possible by being surprised by what is held still. It is through wonder that pain and anger come to life, as wonder allows us to notice what hurts, what causes pain and what we feel to be wrong, is not necessary, and can be unmade as well as made. Wonder is what energizes the very hope of transformation, the very will to politics. (p. 250)

Re-Imagining Anti-Racist & Anti-Oppressive Art Education through Play-, Will-, and Care-Full-Connectivity

In closing, we encourage readers to re-imagine anti-racist and anti-oppressive art education in their own practices, reflecting on the following:

Through play-full-connectivity, kimura-lemoine highlighted the importance of language and communication in shaping social, cultural, and racial power dynamics. *How might processes of rearranging, recontextualizing or reinventing words and concepts provide insight into the mechanisms through which structures and discourses have contributed to racism and oppression?*

Will-full-connectivity speaks to the significance of sharing personal narratives and counter-stories centred upon racialized perspectives. *How might we look to visual and verbal stories, objects, and materialities as starting points for expression and connection, while valuing lived experiences and acknowledging our own entanglements with processes of oppression and racialization?*

In care-full-connectivity, kimura-lemoine demonstrated how affective, emotive, and nonverbal dimensions of art can foster genuine care. *What artistic actions, gestures or gifts can facilitate pathways for deep and meaningful forms of engagement and dialogue, validating others' perspectives while promoting reflective listening, tenderness, and openness to alternate points of view?*

Finally, how might we approach these with curiosity and wonder? What will this do?

In this paper, we offered ways in which a university art gallery can be considered a public pedagogical site promoting dialogues and actions related to anti-racism and anti-oppression. This included provocations for empathic responses that caringly sit with difference; critical consciousness around systemic and individual racism; radically imagining alternative, loving futures; and artistic actions that support the manifestation of these futures, leading to social transformation. In the words of bell hooks (2016), this is a liberating worldview, empowering “us to think and act differently” (p. 193).

Acknowledgements

We thank the artists-in-residence and publics for their contributions to the residencies, including the PAR, post-residency interviewees, and school-group participants. We extend our gratitude to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding our project, the University of Victoria’s Department of Curriculum and Instruction, Michelle Butterfield for documentation efforts, collaborators Catherine McGregor and Paul Whitinui, and research assistant Lindsay Beal.

Note

More information, including research findings and products, is available on our website: <https://artisticapproachestoantiracismantioppression.opened.ca/>

References

- Acuff, J. B. (2018). 'Being' a critical multicultural pedagogue in the art education classroom. *Critical Studies in Education*, 59(1), 35–53.
- Ahmed, S. (2004). *The cultural politics of emotion*. Edinburgh University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2008). Feminist futures. In M. Eagleton (Ed.), *Concise companion to feminist theory* (pp. 236–254). Blackwell Publishing.
- Ahmed, S. (2010). Happy objects. In M. Gregg & G. J. Seigworth (Eds.), *The affect theory reader* (pp. 30–51). Duke University Press.
- Ahmed, S. (2012). Whiteness and the general will: Diversity work as willful work. *philoSOPHIA*, 2(1), 1–20. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/phi.2012.a486618>
- Ahmed, S. (2014). *Willful subjects*. Duke University Press.
- Bae-Dimitriadis, M. S. (2024). Revisiting the power of storytelling, collaborative, experiential learning, and community engagement for social and educational change. *Art Education*, 77(2), 4–7. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043125.2024.2321080>
- Bennett, T. (2017). *Museums, power, knowledge: Selected essays*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group. <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9781315560380>
- Blatt-Gross, C. (2025). From objects to relationships: Reviving connectivity through collaborative artmaking. *The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*, 44(1), 61–78.
- Bourriaud, N. (2002). *Relational aesthetics*. (S. Pleasance & F. Woods, Trans., with M. Copeland). Les Presses du réel.
- Braidotti, R. (2025). Intelligence, affirmative ethics and the anti-fascist life. *Deleuze and Guattari Studies*, 19(4), 524–537. <https://doi.org/10.3366/dlgs.2025.0616>
- Burke, E. (2020). Intuition and vulnerability: A queer approach to museum education. *Journal of Museum Education*, 45(4), 403–413.
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1(8), 139–167.
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia* (B. Massumi, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Desai, D. (2020). Educating for social change through art: A personal reckoning. *Studies in Art Education*, 61(1), 10–23. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2019.1699366>
- García, C. S. (2018). Materialized practices of food as borderlands performing as pedagogy. *Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*, 38(1), 65–74.
- Government of Canada. (2024). *Building a foundation for change: Canada's anti-racism strategy 2019–2022*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/services/combating-racism-discrimination/anti-racism-strategy-2019-2022.html>
- Government of Canada. (2026). *Police-reported hate crime in Canada, 2024*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/260330/dq260330a-eng.htm>
- Harris, C. I. (1993). Whiteness as property. *Harvard Law Review*, 106(8), 1707–1791.
- Hoegen, P., & Spronck, V. (2025). How we wish to work: An exchange on participation, connectivity and care. *Performance Research*, 29(2), 82–87. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13528165.2024.2417566>
- Hood, E. J., Travis, S., Brown, K. J., Herman, D., & Yoon-Ramirez, I. (2025). Dialogic praxis and racialized embodiment in art education. *The Journal of Social Theory in Art Education*, 44(1), 45–60.
- hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.

- hooks, b. (2013). *Writing beyond race: Living theory and practice*. Routledge.
- hooks, b. (2016). *All about love: New visions*. William Morrow.
- Hyde, L. (2019). *The gift: How the creative spirit transforms the world*. Vintage.
- Ibrahim, Y. (2023). *Digital racial: Algorithmic violence and digital platforms*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Irwin, R. L., & O'Donoghue, D. (2012). Encountering pedagogy through relational art practices. *The International Journal of Art & Design Education*, 31(3), 221–236.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1476-8070.2012.01760.x>
- Jun, C. (2002). *Korea Herald 2002. star~kim project*.
<https://starkimproject.com/media/interviews/korea-herald-2002/>
- Kester, G. H. (2004). *Conversation pieces: Community + communication in modern art*. University of California Press.
- kimura-lemoine, b. [@kimurabyol]. (n.d.). *Profile page name* [Instagram profile]. Instagram. Retrieved August 10, 2026, from <https://www.instagram.com/kimurabyol>
- kimura-lemoine, b. (2003). *Baek*. <https://starkimproject.com/concepts/#jp-carousel-526>
- kimura-lemoine, b. (2021). *Cuisine ta ville 2021*. <https://starkimproject.com/cuisinetaville2021/>
- Kraehe, A. M., & Acuff, J. B. (2013). Theoretical considerations for art education research with and about ‘underserved’ populations. *Studies in Art Education*, 54(4), 294–309.
- Kraehe, A. M., Gaztambide-Fernández, R., & Carpenter, B. S. (Eds.). (2018). *The Palgrave handbook of race and the arts in education*. Palgrave.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2009). Just what is Critical Race Theory and what’s it doing in a nice field like education? In E. Taylor, D. Gillborn, & G. Ladson-Billings (Eds.), *Foundations of Critical Race Theory in education* (pp. 17–36). Routledge.
- Lenette, C. (2022). *Participatory action research: Ethics and decolonization*. Oxford University Press.
- Lira, A., Barría, A., & Muñoz-García, A. L. (2023). Gender knowledge, territorialising the rhizome, and playing with creative methods. *Gender & Development*, 31(2-3), 661–681.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2023.2264640>
- Little, R. K. (2023). Emergent bodies: Rethinking race and racialization through materialities. *Studies in Art Education*, 64(2), 251–260.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2023.2180313>
- Marom, L. (2023). Resistance, performativity, and fragmentation: The relational arena of EDI/D in Canadian higher education. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 46(4), 1083–1114.
<https://doi.org/10.53967/cje-rce.6071>
- Marstine, J. (2017). *Critical practice: Artists, museums, ethics*. Routledge.
- Michna, N. A. (2023). From the feminist ethic of care to tender attunement: Olga Tokarczuk’s tenderness as a new ethical and aesthetic imperative. *Arts*, 12(3), 91.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/arts12030091>
- Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education*. University of California Press.
- O’Sullivan, S. (2006). *Art encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought beyond representation*. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Perry, B., Gruenewald, J., & Scrivens, R. (Eds.). (2022). *Right-wing extremism in Canada and the United States*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-99804-2>
- Quinn, T., Ploof, J., & Hochtritt, L. (Eds.). (2012). *Art and social justice education: Culture as commons*. Routledge.

- Reid, N. S. (2024). Gift economy in art museum education: Imagining a giving museum. *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*, 17(2), 193–215.
<https://doi.org/10.18848/1835-2014/CGP/v17i02/193-215>
- Reid, N. S., LeBlanc, N., Moalem, S., Qian, Y., & Wiebe, M. (2026). Toward social healing in art galleries: Artist residencies as relational sites for anti-racist education. *The International Journal of the Inclusive Museum*. <https://doi.org/10.18848/1835-2014/CGP/A492>
- Roberts-Forde, K., & Bedingfield, S. (Eds.). (2021). *Journalism and Jim Crow: White supremacy and the Black struggle for a New America*. University of Illinois Press.
<https://doi.org/10.5622/illinois/9780252044106.001.0001>
- Shields, A. L., Percy, I. M., & Vander Meer-Chassé, T. (2021). Making time and space for art: An examination of an artist-in-residence within a postsecondary art education program. *Canadian Review of Art Education*, 48(1), 73–99.
- Shin, R., & Bae, J. (2019). Conflict Kitchen and Enemy Kitchen: Socially engaged food pedagogy. *Studies in Art Education*, 60(3), 219–235.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2019.1640501>
- Social Sciences and Humanities Council of Canada. (2021). *SSHRC Strategic plan: Momentum (2020-2025)*. https://sshrc-crsh.canada.ca/about-au_sujet/publications/strategic_plans-plans_strategiques/2020/momentum-eng.pdf
- Solomos, J. (2021). Race and ethnicity in pandemic times. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 44(5), 719–734. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2021.1867217>
- Springgay, S. (2021). Reconciliation and education: Artistic actions and critical conversations. In V. Bozalek (Ed.), *Higher education hauntologies: Living with ghosts for a justice-to-come* (pp. 88–101). Routledge.
- Springgay, S., & Zaliwska, Z. (2017). Learning to be affected: Matters of pedagogy in the artists' soup kitchen. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 49(3), 273–283.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2016.1216385>
- Staikidis, K. (2024). An ethics of care in art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 65(1), 3–11.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2024.2320042>
- Staikidis, K. (2025) Storytelling as counternarrative in art education. *Studies in Art Education*, 66(1), 3–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00393541.2025.2471742>
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *Art of case study research*. Sage.
- Stott, T. (2015). *Play and participation in contemporary arts practices*. Routledge.
- Tokarczuk, O. (2019). *Nobel lecture: The tender narrator*.
<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/2018/tokarczuk/lecture/>
- Trammell, A. (2023). *Repairing play: A Black phenomenology*. The MIT Press.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1967). Play and its role in the mental development of the child. *Soviet Psychology*, 5(6), 6–18.
- Williams, E. (2025, February 15). *How some organizations are changing course on equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives*. CBC.
<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/how-some-organizations-are-changing-course-on-equity-diversity-and-inclusion-initiatives-1.7456341>
- Willis, S., Shin, R., & Richards, A. (Eds.). (2024). *Intersectionality of critical identities in art education*. Insea Publications.

Zembylas, M. (2015). Rethinking race and racism as technologies of affect: Theorizing the implications for anti-racist politics and practice in education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 18(2), 145–162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13613324.2014.946492>