

2 + 2 = White Supremacy: How Woke Ideologues Corrupted Canada's Math Curriculum

Ari Blaff writes in [*National Review*](#).

Two plus two no longer equals four, according to members of the Ontario Mathematics Coordinators Association (OMCA), who consider the equation to be a white-supremacist dog whistle instead of a basic mathematical truth.

According to a webinar created by OMCA president Jason To, proponents of math's political neutrality who use the phrasing "2 + 2 = 4" are engaged in an act of "Covert White Supremacy."

To's presentation, released in September of last year, features a pyramid of "White Supremacy in Math Education." The apex of the pyramid features examples of "overt white supremacy" – classroom offenses any reasonable person would consider racist – while the base includes more nebulous examples of what To calls "covert white supremacy." The covert forms of white supremacy allegedly plaguing mathematical education include "Eurocentric math curriculum," "Standardized testing," and exhortations such as "Just stick to math," "I don't see colour in my math class," and "Of course math is neutral because 2+2=4."

White Supremacy in Math Education



OMCA webinar slide on the white supremacy pyramid. (OMCA)

Former OMCA president Heather Theijsmeijer, who originally publicized the webinar, lives on picturesque Manitoulin Island, in Georgian Bay, and serves as the program coordinator for middle- and high-school math students in the Rainbow District School Board, the largest district in northern Ontario. Her social-media history conveys a deep support for OMCA's view of mathematics as a potentially malign force. In one tweet, Theijsmeijer pointed her followers to commentary by Laurie Rubel, an associate professor of mathematics education, explaining that proponents of " $2 + 2 = 4$ " are grounded "in white, Western mathematics that marginalizes other possible values."

Rubel's beliefs are becoming widespread among Ontario's leading mathematics bodies, senior administrators, and a compliant academic establishment, according to several teachers whose accounts were substantiated by educational materials reviewed by National Review.

As math has become hyper-politicized, test scores have continued to plummet.

Not even half of sixth-grade students meet provincial math standards at present; 52 percent of ninth-graders met the bar

during the 2021–2022 school year, down from 75 percent just three years prior, according to provincial standardized testing administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). Woke Math advocates have doubled down in the face of falling performance, seeking to incorporate so-called Indigenous Knowledge Systems and anti-racism.

Theijsmeijer and OMCA did not respond to a request for comment.

‘Discovery Math’

This installment explores the leading personalities who have presided over the decline of Ontario’s mathematical curriculum.

In 2005, the Liberal government of Premier Dalton McGuinty, the same leader who implemented Progressive Discipline, decided to overhaul provincial math instruction. The new curriculum, known as Discovery Math, departed from basic arithmetic learned through repetition, instead encouraging students to “invent their own ways of solving math problems,” writes Michael Zwaagstra, a public-school teacher and education researcher with the Fraser Institute. The premier said the new approach would dramatically elevate then flagging math-test scores, boldly promising to bring three-quarters of public-school students to provincial standard.

That never panned out.

For the last decade, the EQAO has documented the continuous decline of math scores among third- and sixth-graders. International tests such as the OECD’s “gold standard” Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) show similar declines. McGuinty’s successor, Premier Kathleen Wynne, who served as his minister of education the year after Discovery Math was introduced, acknowledged the initiative’s shortcomings in 2017 – but efforts to right the ship have

failed.

Throughout this time, provincial spending went through peaks and troughs under 15 years of Liberal hegemony in Ontario. Funding, as it turns out, is not a panacea for plummeting test scores if the underlying institutional culture and values are corroded.

By the time Conservative Party leader Doug Ford came to power in 2018, he inherited an education file with math scores in utter free fall: Between 2012 and 2018, sixth-grade scores declined by a fifth with less than half of students meeting provincial standards; third grade was slightly better with only a 15 percent drop. Ford campaigned on the central promise to roll back Discovery Math, still deeply embedded in daily teaching practice, reintroducing a “Back-to-Basics” approach.

However, when the Ford government released its long-awaited curriculum update in June 2021, the document was littered with Woke Math concepts, leading policy analysts like Zwaagstra to question whether elected officials or the provincial bureaucracy had truly steered the agenda.

The new curriculum was prefaced with a disclaimer that math “has been used to normalize racism and marginalization of non-Eurocentric mathematical knowledges, and a decolonial, anti-racist approach to mathematics education makes visible its historical roots and social constructions.” Embedded throughout the proposal were references to “anti-racist and anti-oppressive teaching and learning opportunities” as well as “the colonial contexts of present-day mathematics education.”

The precise sentiment could have been ripped directly out of an OMCA seminar.

Public pushback led the government to abandon the hyper-politicized language. The premier’s insistence that Ontarians “stick with math” ignited a firestorm among activist teachers.

Jamie Mitchell, who leads the computer science, math, and innovation, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (I-STEM) program at Aldershot School in the Halton District School Board (HDSB), was apoplectic.

“You can talk about history and social studies while also teaching math. In fact, positioning math as separate from history and social studies is white supremacy in action,” tweeted Mitchell, a recipient of the prestigious Prime Minister’s Award for Teaching Excellence. “I guess what I’m saying is @fordnation is a racist windbag.” The sentiment was defended by a fellow award winner on whom Justin Trudeau had personally conferred the prize.

Ford failed to realize that the sentiment “stick with math,” per OMCA’s pyramid, constitutes a subtle form of white supremacy.

Mitchell boasts an active social-media presence and unabashedly broadcasts his radical politics. In September 2022, the math teacher shared an article arguing that “silence is violence” and that “progressive politics so often let us down because of white fragility and respectability politics.” Mitchell underscored a specific sub-section – “It’s Time to Be Intolerant” – as his “fav” part.

“You want to be progressive? Then you have to accept that sometimes you are going to have to get messy, ruffle feathers, and break with decorum. You cannot be antiracist, decolonial, queer-affirming, etc., while still tolerating and celebrating the presence, lives, or actions of those who are not.”

This is par for the course for Mitchell, who declined to comment and cautioned Ontario educators on Twitter against speaking with National Review.

On a previous occasion, Mitchell, a middle-aged white man, shared a photo of himself wearing a T-shirt proclaiming “Dismantle Oppressive Systems” at school and tagged the

organization Human Restoration Project (HRP).

The group, according to its website, aims to “bring together a network of radical educators who are transforming classrooms across the world.” HRP’s goals include ending “dehumanizing practices” such as “grading” and “radically reduc[ing] homework.” Members of the group strive to entrench social justice as a “cornerstone to educational success” while demanding “anti-racist, inclusive spaces” and adopting “critical pedagogy.”

A similar sentiment was expressed by To, whose position as Toronto’s coordinator of secondary mathematics makes him one of the most influential educational figures in Canada shaping math instruction. The impulse behind antiracist math, To explained to TVO Today, is to lift the “veil of objectivity” surrounding the subject. “Now we can start interrogating some of the dangers of how mathematics has been practiced and how it’s used.”

The math coordinator pointed to research showing that machine-learning and carceral algorithms used in North America had embedded biases that led to disproportionately negative outcomes for racial minorities. He did not elaborate as to how those algorithms relate to basic mathematical instruction at the K–12 level.

To was frustrated with Premier Ford’s outdated view of “trying to keep this perceived objectivity of mathematics as something that should be sacred and untouched.” To declined to comment and pointed National Review to the Toronto school board’s communications director, Ryan Bird, who did not respond to a request for comment.

To is a radical advocate for “transforming your math classrooms” and in September 2022 led over 200 teachers from nearly 60 Toronto schools through a workshop to incorporate an “anti-oppressive lens” into their work. Among the slides To

shared was a “Co-Conspirator Framework” bent on establishing “Critical Consciousness” to better understand “bias, power, privilege, and oppression.” Participants were tasked with confronting “Ideologies” such as “white supremacy” and “colonialism” and challenging “Individual Actions” including “microaggressions” as well as other “oppressive practices in classrooms.”

Beneath the graphic, teachers are encouraged to “co-conspire” with a list of stakeholders, including students.

The “co-conspirator” concept was popularized by Brazilian academic Paulo Freire, whose *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is considered one of the foundational academic texts of the 20th century. Freire packaged Marxist and post-colonialist thinking together, arguing that education is a political tool used by the privileged to oppress and dominate the lower classes. Fostering a “Critical Consciousness” translates to “a state of mental and spiritual development that confers upon its subject a morally progressive, engaged, and holistic view of life,” as one proponent summarizes it.

This philosophy is now the guiding principle at Toronto schools, the most influential district in the country, and has been embraced by Ontario’s leading teachers unions.

OMCA’s list of recommended books for teachers to assign makes clear just how deeply radical politics has infiltrated Canadian education. One book – *High School Mathematics Lessons: To Explore, Understand, and Respond to Social Injustice* – features contributor biographies that reflect an obsession with identity politics, including one bio that describes “a white, cisgender woman” who “strives to interrogate her privilege and understand how mathematics education perpetuates yet can intervene to challenge oppression.”

There are four “critical” reasons, the textbook argues, for

teaching the field of mathematics for social justice including empowering students “to confront and solve real-world challenges they face” as well as to “learn to use mathematics as a tool for social change.”

Every single case study the textbook cites applies unambiguously to a progressive cause: “Culturally Relevant Income Inequality,” “Climate Change in Alaska,” “Intersectionality and the Wage Gap,” “Humanizing the Immigration Debate,” and “Making Mathematical Sense of Food Justice.” The textbook also warns teachers to be careful when discussing “wealth redistribution” because it “may cause improper inference or political associations to socialism.”

No educator will find moving examples of the right to life, the nuclear family, free speech, or open markets. Jeffrey, a soft-spoken Ontario math teacher, admitted he doesn’t rely on these book for inspiration in his math class, “but I know they are in vogue at the moment.”

Indigenous Knowledge Systems, an educational movement to incorporate Native practices into public schooling, has become another trendy topic among proponents of this new radical approach to education. Numerous OMCA social-media posts in recent months have highlighted the group’s embrace of such programming, including a ritzy getaway to the Hockley Valley Resort, where members can pay up to \$300 per night to learn about Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

It’s unclear exactly how Indigenous Knowledge contributes to basic mathematics. A British Columbia teaching resource on the subject instructs kindergarten teachers to build the skill of estimating reasonably by using Indigenous “measuring techniques in daily life (e.g. seaweed drying and baling).” Middle-schoolers are asked to practice “two-step equations” featuring integers and constants by using “spirit canoe journey calculations.”

Most teachers simply go along with the zeitgeist for fear of being considered a racist, Jeffrey said. "I'm sure there's interesting things in here," Jeffrey said of Indigenous Knowledge. Yet, the math teacher questioned whether such "skills are still relevant to the workforce today."

Many teachers and parents have become deeply uneasy about the injection of politics. It is so alarming that many are petrified to speak – even anonymously – about their experience for fear of losing their jobs. Wayne, a lifelong educator, confessed his misgivings about Ontario's education by saying if this "gets out, I'm done."

While many are still afraid to speak out, some parents have begun to quietly band together and organize to oppose the relentless political creep.

Catherine Kronas, a concerned mother and former trustee candidate from Hamilton, reflected that "there are parents who are completely alarmed at what's happening, but fearful of speaking up more."

"I was broaching some of these issues in Facebook groups and getting shut down, my posts deleted. But talking to parents on the ground, individually, people are beginning to notice something is going on. People are very concerned to the point where they are afraid to discuss it," she said.

Still, proponents of Woke Math insist that the politicization of education is simply a fiction concocted by reactionaries. In November 2022, several Ontario math teachers shared pictures of themselves on social media wearing "Woke Math" T-shirts, many seemingly on school property. Apart from To and Mitchell, the group included Devan Singh, the head of mathematics at Elsie MacGill Secondary School in HDSB.

Singh responded to concerns from one community member that this appeared to fit a pattern of growing politicization of curriculum.

“What political ideologies might those be? For example, is acknowledging systemic racism existing a political ideology?” the teacher asked. “I think everything is political but to what degree is acceptable I think is the debate.” Singh declined to comment for this piece.