

# *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*

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# *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*

**Volume 3, Issue 2, 2011**

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The *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education* is a publication of Brandon University's Centre for Aboriginal and Rural Education Studies (BU CARES).

## INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Marion Terry, Ph.D.

Welcome to the sixth issue of the *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, devoted to rural, northern, and Aboriginal education. Our authors for volume 3, issue 2, range from Graduate Diploma students to a Ph.D.-qualified associate professor. I thank these current and past BU Faculty of Education graduate students for sharing their work. Together, they have produced a collection of articles with a focus on educational excellence.

- Michael Nantais and Clark Gawletz's research report reveals findings related to their study of online learning in rural Manitoba high schools.
- Kimberly Merasty's refereed article examines the relationship between cultural disconnect and early withdrawals by Aboriginal students.
- Nadia Binda-Noir and Amjad Malik's refereed article addresses issues that hinder Aboriginal students from achieving success in science and mathematics courses.
- Holly Cumming's refereed article speaks to the challenge of providing targeted instruction for ELL students in multicultural classrooms.
- Lisa Blixhavn's refereed article discusses the keys to cultivating student engagement in the middle years.
- Hazen Barrett's refereed article outlines factors for consideration by school boards in choosing leadership candidates and designing leadership training models.
- Alann Fraser's refereed article reviews the roles of stakeholders who nurture positive school learning climates.
- Kyle Prevost's refereed article considers the underrepresentation of male teachers in elementary school classrooms.
- Miranda Weenusk's refereed article examines the reciprocal relationship between student-teacher interaction behaviours and classroom management.
- David Gillingham's refereed article contemplates the factors that contribute to successful teacher induction programs.
- Eric Lowe's opinion paper recommends culturally relevant art education as a means to engage Aboriginal students.

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## **RESEARCH REPORT**

### **Inquiry into Technology-Based Distance Education Delivery in Grades Nine to Twelve Schools in Southwestern Manitoba**

**Michael Nantais and Clark Gawletz**

High schools in general, and small high schools in particular, are becoming increasingly dependent on technology-based course delivery. This type of distance education has kept open many rural schools that would otherwise close due to declining enrolment. Because most research to date has examined online learning at the post-secondary level, the researchers conducted a qualitative study of online education in rural Manitoba high schools.

#### **The Research Study**

The purpose was to identify some of the characteristics that are important for successful online teaching and learning. Data were collected via interviews and a focus group meeting with 14 educators (teachers and administrators) in two school divisions that used the Blackboard Course Management System (CMS), interactive television, and/or the Moodle CMS. The researchers sought not to compare or judge the course delivery technologies, but to understand the perspectives of the people who use them.

In general, the educators were positive about the online experience, and saw a real need for this approach for the survival of small high schools. Online education offers flexibility in terms of course options and variable scheduling in small schools. In addition, the educators reported positive effects on learning. Some students are more successful in online courses than in face-to-face delivery. Furthermore, online courses prepare students for post-secondary education and workplace training that uses online approaches. Seven themes arose from the data: policy, technology, support, time, instruction and design, instructor characteristics, and learner characteristics. These themes provided the basis for making the following recommendations for practice.

#### **Recommendations**

##### ***Policy***

The educators' focus on policy included the need for a clearly articulated policy, including sharing seats in online courses, and offering preparatory online instruction to younger students.

- That school divisions create clear and well-communicated plans and policy regarding online distance learning. This policy should direct all aspects of the implementation of distance education in the division and be well grounded in research. Policy development would ideally include representatives from various stakeholder groups, especially online teachers and administrators. Further, such policy should be informed by Provincial policy.
- That southwest school superintendents (or their representatives) attempt some regional coordination for online learning. Such coordination can assist in offering a range of courses and enhance sharing of seats between divisions.

- That school divisions devise a mechanism, as part of policy, whereby young students are exposed to online learning so that they are better prepared to be successful when taking full courses in grades 10 to 12.

### **Technology**

Distance learning is an attractive alternative to face-to-face delivery, but reliance on technology can create its own problems, including hardware capacity and network speed, and student access to software, websites and online tools, and hardware.

- That school divisions make every effort to ensure that current, reliable infrastructure is available for online courses. This includes hardware for staff and students, as well as efficient and speedy network connections. Consideration should be given for allowing students to use their own technology at school, thus releasing some of the pressure on school divisions to supply it.
- That in any course, specific hardware and software requirements be communicated clearly to students at the start of the course. Further, that all required software and updates be installed on a school's computers before the course starts.
- That schools and school divisions examine the issue of filtering and blocking web content. Online educators and students should have full access to the tools and web sites required to make courses interactive and meaningful, and to address the issue of digital citizenship.
- That school divisions and schools ensure that students have access to necessary hardware and connectivity for online courses. If such equipment is not available at home, time and access should be provided at school so students can complete their course work.

### **Support**

The research participants noted five primary types of support: technical, parental, administrative, onsite, and professional learning.

- **Technical support.** That school divisions and schools ensure that reliable, timely, technical support is available for both hardware and software problems that arise.
- **Parental support.** That school divisions and schools design methods to inform the community and parents about the benefits of online learning. This can be accomplished by producing brochures and web pages explaining the process and student characteristics best suited to online delivery and benefits. In addition, where possible, face-to-face meetings with potential students and parents can help to explain the process and gain parental support.
- **Administrative support.** That school divisions and school administrators, as well as guidance counsellors, be familiar with online learning so that they can actively support the online teacher and help to advise students and parents about the nature of online learning and what it takes to be successful. The role of the administrator may differ from school to school; however, knowledge of this delivery method and support is needed for a successful program.

- **Onsite support.** That each school with students taking courses online appoints a person to act as an onsite mentor or contact person. This role should be part of that person's duties and time made available to carry them out. This person would provide support to students and act as a liaison for the online teacher.
- **Professional learning.** That school divisions and schools make professional development a priority in planning for online learning. Training in both technology skills and online pedagogy is required and should be an integral part of an online learning program. Various avenues for providing this PL should be investigated and implemented.
- **Professional learning.** That an online professional learning community (PLC) for online teachers be established, where participants can share resources, experiences and ask questions of others. MECY could take a leadership role in the formation of such a PLC, using its web-based contacts to establish the community in school divisions engaged in online learning.
- **Professional learning.** That a forum for online teachers in southwest Manitoba be organized. This forum could be the basis for exchange of ideas, creating the opportunity to make new contacts and opening avenues for research into other aspects of online learning. Brandon University's Faculty of Education, through BU CARES, could take a leadership role in organizing and hosting such a forum.

### **Time**

It can take twice as much time to develop and deliver an online course, in comparison to a traditional face-to-face course. Time also factors into student completion of online course tasks.

- That school divisions recognize the time commitment required for successful online learning, particularly in the early stages. Teachers should be provided time or some sort of recognition for time spent teaching online courses. Teachers should also be made aware of both the time commitment and benefits involved in developing and delivering online courses.
- That teachers involved in online learning be advised to start slowly and keep the delivery simple and straightforward to begin. Once comfort is built, extra features can be added to a course.
- That school divisions research optimum class size numbers for effective online courses, and limit enrolment as part of policy.

### **Instruction and Design**

Instruction and design are critical in online courses, because the teacher is not physically present to clarify misconceptions, read nonverbal cues of students, or communicate readily in real time. Five primary areas of instruction and design emerged from the data analysis: strategies and tools, communication, flexibility and pacing, assessment, and social aspects.

- **Strategies and tools.** That school divisions and schools utilize the talents and experience of their online teachers to mentor and guide potential distance delivery instructors on the strategies and web tools that work well. A list, or manual, of these

strategies and tools could be developed by the divisions to assist new online teachers in course development.

- **Communication.** That online teachers continue to have a period of time scheduled each day to answer queries, and to update course information in a synchronous fashion, where feasible (synchronous communication will also depend upon the student's timetable). This communication could take the form of a Skype conference or another form of synchronous technology.
- **Flexibility and pacing.** That online instructors implement the degree of flexibility and pacing that works best for their own teaching styles. New online teachers would benefit from hearing the various perspectives on the subject of flexibility and pacing, and choose the methods that correspond with their own views about instructional assessment.
- **Assessment.** That teachers make every effort to address higher order thinking skills in their courses to minimize the problems of cheating and take advantage of the features that digital technology can offer. Balanced assessment strategies should be used to match current provincial instruction and assessment strategies.
- **Assessment.** That online teachers provide timely and meaningful (descriptive, quality) feedback to students.
- **Social aspects.** That online learning courses have a communication piece built in to promote collegiality for the students enrolled in the course. The use of web tools such as wikis, blogs, and Skype sessions are effective means of ensuring an online presence for instructors and students. These programs are user friendly, and are also open-source software, available online at no cost to the divisions.

### ***Instructor Characteristics***

The instructor's role is heightened in online learning situations, because the teacher is integral to the course design and delivery. The research participants identified the following online instructor characteristics as crucial: comfort and enthusiasm with technology, and flexibility and willingness to learn.

- That school divisions and schools administrators identify the most proficient teachers and encourage these individuals to teach online courses. Instructing online requires discipline, comfort with technology, and a desire to embrace professional growth. The teachers possessing these attributes are excellent candidates for the rigors of online teaching, and their potential must be tapped for the benefit of distance teaching and learning. Further, divisions should support these teachers in this endeavour.

### ***Learner Characteristics***

The following characteristics were identified as most typically defining successful online learners: "responsible learner," "independent," "good organizational skills," "good at planning," "good communicator," "motivated," "good reader," "patient," "confident with technology," "problem solver," and "willing to ask questions." Students who lack these traits require extra support, and even with this support not every student can be successful.

- That students be made aware of the nature of online learning and characteristics that would help to make them successful. In addition, they should be made aware of supports available to them.

### **Conclusion**

ICT holds much promise for transforming education, yet we have not witnessed the full potential of this promise. Using ICT to assist in delivering high school courses opens up many possibilities. The data in this study revealed pertinent insight regarding the state of online teaching and learning in rural Manitoba. The teachers and administrators who participated stressed the importance of offering online education, due to the prevalence of digital technology in society and the need for a rich experience that will prepare students for further education and employment. Online education is a viable alternative to the traditional classroom, and has become a necessary method of delivery in small rural high schools. Therefore, the question for educators to answer is not whether to engage in online learning, but how. This article's recommendations are the authors' attempt to translate their research findings into policy and practice.

### **About the Authors**

*Michael Nantais obtained three degrees from Brandon University, including his M.Ed. (2007), and is currently a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Manitoba. He is an assistant professor in BU's Faculty of Education, after 30 years as a teacher and administrator in public schools.*

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## REFEREED ARTICLES

### Cultural Disconnect Causes Early Withdrawal for Aboriginal Students in Manitoba

Kimberly Merasty

#### **Abstract**

*Although more effort is being placed on retaining Aboriginal youth in the public education system, failure to respect cultural differences continues to dominate the typical high school classroom. A recognition of this cultural disconnect is needed in order to see any change in withdrawal rates of Manitoba's Aboriginal students. The author discusses current models of practice, assessment, cultural differences, and holistic beliefs in an attempt to discover a way to incorporate two different educational beliefs that will keep all students in school.*

The ongoing efforts to increase the graduation rate of Aboriginals in Manitoba have not been effective. As of 2006, "33.7% of 15-29 year olds had not completed high school" and "12.4% had not completed grade 9" (Owens, 2006, p. 1). The cause of this problem has not been sufficiently addressed, perhaps because there has been "little recognition given in education to cultural difference from the mainstream" (Dunn, 2001, p. 678). The cultural differences between the Aboriginal view of education and the Eurocentric model used by public school can be seen in the areas of learning style, literacy, engagement, assessment, and best practices in the classroom.

The worldview held by most Aboriginal cultures is one that addresses all things on earth, from the trees and animals to the soil and rocks, as being intricately and cyclically connected. This worldview would suggest that "indigenous pedagogy recognizes the child as a physical, spiritual, emotional, and intellectual being, one who learns best in a circular, holistic, child centered environment" (Ledoux, 2006, p. 270). This is also a strong belief of early childhood education. Although the goal of all education systems, whether government or Aboriginal, is "to prepare children for their lives as positive, participating and, contributing members of society" (Ledoux, 2006, p. 271), it is apparent that this viewpoint changes at the upper levels of a Eurocentric education model. There is recognition in the education system that all people have an individual learning style and that an Aboriginal learning style encompasses a holistic belief. However, the standardized approach to curriculum and school environment creates a school culture that is in opposition to what an Aboriginal approach to teaching and learning would look like. The Manitoba classroom contrasts "traditional Native teaching and learning patterns" (Ryan, 1996, p. 119). Aboriginal teaching practices encourage "contextual learning in real-life context" (Ledoux, 2006, p. 273). Contextual learning blends seamlessly with a holistic view of teaching and learning; however, neither concept is easily mixed with the design of the public school system.

A holistic learning model is characterized by "the principle of interconnectedness and wholeness; seeing the whole student mind, body, emotions, and spirit" (Holistic Curriculum, 2008, para.1), which is reflective of the Aboriginal worldview. A holistic learner will more likely take in the whole concept and sort out the intricacies of it later. These learners will read a whole novel for example, and then go back chapter by chapter to dissect the story. Learning strategies exemplary of a holistic classroom include student-centered activities such as fish bowling, interest inventories, and personal goal statements. The processes by which these activities are undertaken give students the opportunity to have input into the path of a lesson, thereby enhancing individual learning styles and student engagement. Offering students the chance to

have input into their own learning is always a positive factor when creating a classroom wherein students feel that they are respected and welcomed no matter what their culture.

A holistic approach to teaching, incorporated within existing teaching practices, may be the best way to encourage Aboriginal students to continue forward in the public school setting. However, what must first be addressed are the current literacy problems of Aboriginal students. In 2003, the International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey (IALSS) discovered that “about 60% of the urban Aboriginal population in [Manitoba and Saskatchewan] scored below Level 3 on the prose scale” (Statistics Canada 2005, para. 32). Language is considered to be a “constantly metamorphosing intersection between linguistic elements, identity, culture, history, reality, information, and communication” (Kouritzin, 2006, p. 6). It therefore must be addressed how Aboriginal students are learning language. Many Aboriginal youth are coming from homes with a first language that is not the dominant language of the majority (English or French). However, when they enter public school there is an unspoken expectation that the dominant majority language in the home was French or English, not Cree, Ojibway or Saulteaux. These students then become victims of first language loss. The loss of a mother tongue can have detrimental effects on the desire to engage in public school, as “school practices encouraged minority language speaking children to develop shame, while school work and school friends become linguistic cultural invaders” (Kouritzin, 2006, pp. 21-22). If consideration is not given to the language spoken in the home, then public schools run the risk of “leaving children unaware, or ambivalent, unable to incorporate their ethnic or linguistic identities” (Kouritzin, 2006, p. 22) and creating more culturally disrespectful classrooms.

There is a need to be culturally aware while teaching students of a minority language and culture; however, “pumping up” basic skills in Aboriginal literacy programs is not likely to improve literacy levels or participation in schools because this treats the symptoms rather than the underlying causes of the disease” (Dunn, 2001, p. 679). Improving Aboriginal literacy rates does not simply mean including Aboriginal literature in a high school English class, either. What needs to be remembered is that “all cultural groups can establish adequate procedures for the development of language and cognition in their young children” (Dunn, 2001, p. 679). It is prudent for Manitoba schools and educators to recognize literacy levels in both on-reserve and off-reserve homes, in order to develop best literacy practices within the community.

By addressing literacy levels and holistic learning styles, Manitoba educators may finally be able to engage the Aboriginal student, but engagements is more than simply recognizing what is not working. In order to create an environment that makes the Aboriginal student feel at home, educators must understand that student engagement is “commitment to and investment in learning, identification with and belonging at school, and in terms of participation in the school environment and initiation of an activity to accomplish an outcome” (Kortering & Christenson, 2009, p. 7). The most significant part of this definition for the Aboriginal student in Manitoba would be identifying with and having a sense of belonging in school. It is difficult to ask members of an involuntary minority group to feel as though they belong when the environment has no reflection on their heritage or culture. Therefore, it would be best to go directly to the source and ask the students what can be done. For many students, Aboriginal or not, the most important factor in their success at school is the relationship that they have with their teachers. Upon looking into any school classroom, it is recognizable that a “teacher’s instructional strategies are a manifestation of the school’s culture” (Patterson, Hale, & Stressman, 2007-2008, p. 8). If the school culture is one that does not value the student- teacher relationship by encouraging “caring teachers [who] hold students to high standards, provide them with assistance and support, and refuse to give up on them” (Patterson et al., 2007-2008, p. 8), then students who learn best from that environment will disengage.

Of careful consideration when trying to engage and retain Aboriginal learners is a teacher’s assessment style. In 2006, Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth [MECY] published a document regarding the new focus of assessment within Manitoba schools. This document incorporated principles of holistic teaching and learning, while trying to maintain opportunities for

standardized assessment. The document outlines three focuses of assessment: assessment for, assessment as, and assessment of learning. Assessment for learning has one main characteristic: descriptive feedback. It asks teachers to “use assessment as an investigative tool to find out . . . what confusions, preconceptions or gaps” (MECY, 2006, p. 29) exist for students early on in the learning of new outcomes. In assessment for learning, students are given several chances to assess themselves, re-evaluate goals, and process the content that they are learning. This style of assessment blends with holistic learning, as it can aid the student and teacher in developing different lesson activities, such as hands-on learning. Assessment as learning is the concept whereby “assessment is a process of metacognition for students” (MECY, 2006, p. 41). At this stage of the assessment model, students are given chances to reflect on their own learning and make adjustments to improve their understanding. In essence, this is the practice stage of learning. The final stage of the new assessment model is assessment of learning, which is the more standardized approach to assessment. It uses formalized testing to “confirm what students know” (MECY, 2006, p. 55). This assessment model encourages student involvement in their own learning, and “when students are encouraged to talk about their learning and to self-assess in relation to criteria, models, or exemplars, they are giving themselves descriptive feedback that helps them learn more” (Davies, Herbst, & Parrott Reynolds, 2008, p. 22). Having such involvement with the formal parts of education can help keep all students engaged.

Recognizing that Aboriginal students may see more success in secondary school when their cultural differences are addressed does not mean that the school system has to change completely. Many of the ideas incorporated within the Aboriginal worldview will benefit all students in the Manitoba education system. The best practices are performed at the classroom level, involving teacher, student, and community. Teaching strategies that work well for Aboriginal students include modelling and thinking out loud, storytelling, scaffolding instruction, experiential learning, and cooperative learning. Many of these strategies are already a part of common teacher practice. To improve literacy and graduation levels among Aboriginal students, all stakeholders in the education system must realize that Aboriginal “students do not reject the idea of getting good grades; what they reject are ‘white’ attitudes and behaviours conducive to getting those grades” (Catlin, 2008, p. 6). Adjusting the current attitudes and behaviours does not mean overhauling the system. A program that could have merit in improving the literacy levels is the Cognitive Strategy Instruction in Writing developed by Carole Englert (Englert, 2009, p. 104). Instilled within the literacy initiative are many holistic teaching styles. The CSIW curriculum uses instructional dialogue with teacher and student, modelling to guided and joint practice, and group situations for question and practice. The CSIW “was designed to scaffold performance” (Englert, 2009, p. 106), in order to ensure student success.

Finally, positive working relationship between the family and the school must display a visible amount of trust for the student to feel safe and comfortable in the public school environment. It is no secret that the legacy of residential schools still hangs over the ability to form this trust. Schools must “reach out” to parents through a variety of methods to bring all parties closer together. Parents are an invaluable resource: “when parents are involved in talking about learning with their children, children achieve more” (Davies et al., 2008, p. 27). It is the responsibility of teachers and administrators to initiate contact by phone or face to face, and to have an open door policy. Schools that have seen success have created a “family centered approach wherein parents and community members are respected, supported, and treated as equals” (Ledoux, 2006, p. 274). An effective tool is to bring elders into the classroom to share stories of history and mythology. This sharing can be done in a history class or an English class, and provides opportunity for varied instruction.

Cultural disconnectedness challenges both the public school system and the Aboriginal students who withdraw from school. It can be overcome through an understanding of the Aboriginal worldview, holistic teaching practices and learning styles, a change in literacy levels both on and off reserve, improvements in student engagement, and alterations in assessment

techniques and best practices in the classroom. Many of these changes are beginning to occur within the Eurocentric model of our school system. Respecting Aboriginal culture is the key to improving the high school graduation rates of the largest minority in the province of Manitoba.

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# Empowerment and Motivation of Young Aboriginal Mathematics and Science Students in Canada

Nadia Binda-Moir and Amjad Malik

## Abstract

*This article addresses the issues faced by the young Aboriginal students in urban and rural settings, which hinder their achievement in mathematics and science. An effort is made to reveal the techniques and programs that address the under-representation of young Aboriginal students in these subjects at secondary and post-secondary levels. Successful programming is essential to bridge the gap between differing urban and rural cultures and also to make the content material recent and relevant, thus providing a supportive environment. The Aboriginal students can be empowered to learn and be motivated to succeed by improving the linkage between Western and Indigenous thinking, by creating relevant and up-to-date curricula, and by providing adequate support at the family and community level.*

The population of young Aboriginal students is rapidly growing in Canada; however, the rates of achievement among these youth are grossly underrepresented in high schools and post-secondary education. These numbers are even more reduced in the subjects of mathematics and science. Though there are a growing number of young Aboriginals entering into urban areas and attending city high schools, there are still diminished numbers of students pursuing studies in mathematics and science (Morrisette & Gadbois, 2006; Tait, 1999). Empowerment and motivational skills are key tools that are taught to most students in hopes of their becoming successful members of society; these tools are even more crucial to those students from Aboriginal backgrounds. For the purposes of this paper, the term Aboriginal will be used to represent those students of Metis, Inuit, and First Nations heritage. This paper provides a background of the key problems facing Aboriginal students in urban and rural settings; as well as outlining techniques for providing sound teachings in mathematics and science with the purpose of empowering and motivating young Aboriginal students.

## Current Issues Facing Young Aboriginal Students

Though the Aboriginal population in Canada is growing rapidly, there is still a strong dissonance between the number of young Canadian Aboriginals and the number of young Canadian Aboriginals who are graduating. Current statistics for the graduation rates of Aboriginal students indicate that less than 50% of students are graduating from high school (Pirbhai-Ilich, 2011). This statistic is in stark contrast to their non-Aboriginal counterparts, where the graduation rates are as high as 88% (Pirbhai-Ilich, 2011). In recent years, several attempts have been made to reconcile these numbers; however, these attempts have not proven successful as there are still significant problems plaguing the education of Aboriginal students in both urban and rural settings (Sutherland & Henning, 2009). There are three main areas of concern regarding the education of young Aboriginal students specifically in the areas of math and science: contradictory ways of thinking between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals, a lack of relevant course material, and the absence of proper support systems.

Drastic differences exist in the way that science is viewed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. In this article, the term *Western* describes non-Aboriginal perspective of science and the term *Indigenous* describes the Aboriginal perspective. The Western approach tends to view science as an amalgamation of distinct subject areas, whereby the researcher acts as a separate entity quite removed from the subject matter of study (Hatcher, Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2009). The overall aim of Western science puts an immense emphasis on finding definitive answers in an attempt to gain a certain level of power over nature (Aikenhead

& Ogawa, 2007). Once this power is attained by the researcher, the so-called mysteries of the universe will be unlocked and a level of ultimate knowledge will be achieved.

Indigenous science tends to have a more holistic approach to learning, or coming to know. Coming to know is a term that is used to describe the way in which Indigenous science is understood by Indigenous peoples (Colorado, 1988). The Indigenous researcher is not seen as a removed specimen, but more as an active participant who is thoroughly connected to the environment and the subject area. Knowing is based more on the experiential journey taken by the learner rather than on empirical evidence (Hatcher et al., 2009). This journey focuses on the relationships and kinships found between living organisms; allowing the learners to engage their body, mind, and spirit (Cajete, 2000). Because there is such a great disparity between the Indigenous way of viewing science and the Western way of viewing science, many Aboriginal students feel a certain disconnect with the subject area because they can not grasp the differences in the ways of learning. Western culture is not conducive to Indigenous teachings and some Aboriginal students have problems trying to change the way that they think (Hatcher et al., 2009). As a result of this disconnect between the two ways of viewing science, many Aboriginal students pull away from the sciences and choose not to pursue them in their later high school years or in university or college.

Another problem that plagues young Aboriginal students is the perceived lack of relevance of the subject matter. Because there have traditionally been low numbers of Aboriginals enrolling in science and math courses (Tait, 1999), many youth have not had the exposure to the subject areas that their non-Aboriginal counterparts have had. The absence of contact between Aboriginal students and the science and math subjects may be due to their living in isolated communities or their having few to no family members involved in careers that utilize the subject areas. This lack of exposure has led to several generations of underachieving minorities in these subjects (Varghese, 2009).

A lack of culturally relevant classes can also be linked to the differences between Indigenous and Western peoples' personal circumstances. Generally speaking, the home life of Aboriginal students is not the same as non-Aboriginal students in such factors as family structure, family occupation, community location and structure (Sutherland & Henning, 2009). The result of these differences between home environments and school environments is the offering of a science and math curricula that has the impression of an entirely foreign culture (Aikenhead, 1996), a culture to which Aboriginals have no real connections (Pirbhai-Ilich, 2011). Because Aboriginal youth do not have a significant connection to the sciences and math, they have low registration numbers in these areas in both high school and post-secondary education, leading to an overall disengagement from the subject areas.

The final issue that hinders the success of Aboriginal youth in the areas of science and mathematics is the lack of proper supports at the family and community level, which would include people in leadership roles. For those students living in relatively isolated communities, such as those in northern Manitoba, there is a scarcity of qualified support staff. Often, the only person qualified to help a student is the teacher, and quite frequently this teacher does not have adequate training in the areas of science or math (Professor Lindsay, personal communication, July 5, 2011). If, in addition, the student has a poor relationship with the teacher, he/she can be left feeling discouraged with the subject area and not want to resolve his or her negative experiences. As a result, the student could abstain from taking science and math courses in the future.

Traditionally, Aboriginal people have utilized techniques such as sharing circles, ceremonies, mediation, and storytelling as their chief means of interacting and communicating (Sutherland & Henning, 2009). These techniques of communication are usually facilitated by Elders in the community (Spence, White, & Maxim, 2007). It is a rare occurrence to see any of these methods of learning being used in today's Western classrooms. A lack of leadership, due to the ineffective use of Elders in teaching and learning, can lead to students' not having proper guidance in school, which can lead to floundering in their studies and a total disengagement

from science and math. The shortage of adults with post-secondary education in predominantly Aboriginal communities significantly affects the graduation rates of Aboriginal youth (Spence et al., 2007). Educational attainment declines when there are limited numbers of adults in proper educational leadership roles in the family or community; educational success further suffers when support from these people is lacking.

### **Practices Required to Build Motivational Skills and Empower Young Aboriginal Students**

On a whole, it can be said that the levels of high school completion amongst Aboriginal youth are lagging behind their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Belczewski, 2009); however, certain practices can be implemented to thwart these issues and promote success. Throughout the country, several studies have been carried out that provide valuable information regarding the success of Aboriginal youth (for example, see Baydala et al., 2009; Houser & Bainbridge Frymier, 2009; Spence et al., 2007). There are also hidden pockets throughout the country where young Aboriginal students are thriving in their studies. These successful programs provide valuable information about what is required to empower and motivate Aboriginal youth. Three main areas need to be addressed in order to provide successful programming that empowers and motivates Aboriginal students: (1) creating border crossings between Western thinking and Indigenous thinking, (2) creating relevant and modern curricula, and (3) providing adequate support at the family and community level.

There are blatant differences in the way science and math are viewed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples; however these two different ways of thinking can be merged together to create a unified approach to “coming to know.” The Mi’kmaq people of Atlantic Canada have a tenet known as Two-Eyed Seeing. Two-Eyed Seeing allows a learner to view with one eye the strengths of the Indigenous ways of knowing and with the other eye the strengths of the Western way of knowing (Hatcher et al., 2009). By using Two-Eyed Seeing, the formation of an integrated curriculum can occur. This integrative curriculum can draw on aspects of both Indigenous learning and Western learning without either taking precedence over the other. Students who formerly struggled trying to adapt to a more Western mode of thought would have an easier time following a curriculum that more closely mirrors an integrated way of life between the two cultures.

One of the main reasons that Aboriginal students disengage from learning is due to the perceived irrelevance of the classroom curricula (Belczewski, 2009). This deficiency in relevance can be linked to the dissonance between school culture and home culture or a disinterest in the delivery method of curricula. Western type schools emphasize discussion and explanation (Varghese, 2009), which are not commonly used in Aboriginal culture.

One way to combat the stress caused by this discord, and at the same time demonstrate the relevancy of the curriculum, is to deliver the course materials by means of a more holistic approach – more specifically by using the Aboriginal model of the Medicine Wheel. The Medicine Wheel is a powerful and common symbol used in traditional Indigenous culture. Modelling and delivering courses via this framework will enable students to feel a certain kinship toward the material to be learned. A holistic approach can also tap into several of the multiple intelligences at one time (Hatcher et al., 2009). In Varghese’s (2009) broad frame for each of the four quadrants of the Medicine Wheel, lessons can be divided into seeing, feeling, knowing, and doing. Creating this harmony will empower students to excel and gain self-confidence.

Another way to make material relevant is by using teaching strategies that students are familiar with. This includes methods such as Elders’ stories, sharing-circles, reflection, and the use of technology (Sutherland & Henning, 2009). Knowledge that is passed down through Elders can motivate students to connect with their past, present, and future (Hatcher et al., 2009). Even if the specific material is more Western in nature, using traditional techniques can draw a link between the old and the new, and make the information more relevant. Schools that

offer culturally relevant teaching strategies are more likely to provide Aboriginal students with the tools that they need to succeed (Baydala et al., 2009). Like other youth, Aboriginal students thrive on the use of technology. Teachers must tap into the students' interests by using modern forms of technology in their teaching (Pirbhai-Ilich, 2011). The use of holistic teaching strategies and the implementation of technology is a surefire way to engage students and make the material relevant.

The final strategy that can be used to motivate and empower Aboriginal youth can be considered the most important technique: educators and community members must provide a respectful environment that is supportive and conducive to learning. The foremost way to provide a supportive learning environment is by having teachers who are passionate and motivated themselves. Teacher characteristics have a significant effect on student motivation and achievement (Houser & Frymier, 2009). Teacher clarity is ranked amongst the highest criteria for influencing student empowerment. Their empowered students are more likely to be motivated to complete assigned tasks and have greater self-esteem. Effective teachers must also navigate the bridge between Western and Indigenous science (Sutherland & Henning, 2009). This compassion for both ways of learning can provide the support that students need to be successful.

Another way to provide support is by developing a community of caring. Results from studies carried out by the British Columbia Ministry of Education and the Saskatchewan Department of Education show that communities that participate in activities that support schools are a key factor in promoting education attainment in youngsters (Spence et al., 2007). In several programs throughout Canada and the world, having community involvement has greatly inspired and motivated students (for example, see Aldous, Barnes, & Clark, 2008; Hatcher et al, 2009; Belczewski, 2009). One such summer-school program was offered to Aboriginal science students in Australia and the results were groundbreaking. Students significantly improved in their studies and in their behaviour and attitudes. In another program offered to the students of the University of New Brunswick First Nations Science Outreach Program, university students hosted a science camp within the Aboriginal community. The purpose of this program was to build relationships between educators and youth, and within the community itself. Positive relationships help to motivate and empower students by providing a supportive community (Belczewski, 2009; Baydala et al., 2009).

A final way to motivate and empower students is to surround them with inspiring and educated adults. Adults who value education can offer leadership and guidance to young students, with resultant positive effects on their motivation and future success (Spence et al., 2007). Encircling students with educated, supportive adults provides an environment that nurtures education and empowers students to succeed.

## **Conclusion**

The growing populations of Aboriginal youth have not accompanied commensurate increases in high school completion rates. Strides have been made to address the low levels of high school graduates; however, many of these developments have not had much success. Problems such as the differences between student culture and school culture, a perceived lack of relevance of course material, and the absence of support from community and family members, trouble today's Aboriginal youth. These issues can be addressed by bridging the gap between the two differing cultures, making material modern and relevant, and providing a supportive environment filled with educated adults. Once these issues are addressed, students will feel empowered to learn and motivated to succeed. Education will be theirs for the taking.

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# **Experiential Instruction: Fostering Language and Literacy in English Language Learners**

**Holly Cumming**

## **Abstract**

*This article targets a teaching dilemma found in today's schools, which is the challenge for teachers in our multicultural classrooms to provide appropriate, targeted instruction for the English Language Learner (ELL), most specifically, in the two critical areas of oral language and literacy. The concepts of experiential instruction in this essay target the early years classroom. Experiential instruction engages students orally, cognitively, and physically by drawing upon their whole sensory system within familiar contexts. Students see themselves as communicators, thinkers, and doers as their culture, language and interests are honoured and accepted as starting points to language and literacy learning.*

The challenge for teachers in our culturally diverse schools is not the growing number of English Language Learning students in classrooms, but the challenge to provide the appropriate, targeted instruction for the English Language Learner (ELL), which fosters oral language and literacy (Hadaway & Young, 2010; Xu & Drame, 2008). Students' first encounters with language and literacy in schools are critical to their success as learners. Early years classroom and Reading Recovery teachers can provide experiential instruction that guides the ELL to become active in their own acquisition of language and literacy. Active learners become orally, cognitively, and physically engaged when involved in stimulating learning experiences. Experiential instruction involves providing learning opportunities that build on the familiar and engage the whole student's sensory system. Sensory stimulations, within familiar contexts, engages all parts of the brain in the thinking process, which results in powerful learning (Clay, 2005b; Herrell & Jordan, 2008; Lyons, 2003). ELLs, in particular, become communicators, thinkers, and doers (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009) when teachers provide specific, meaningful, sensory learning opportunities to develop oral language and literacy.

## **Student Communicators**

Experiential instruction begins with honouring culture and engaging in interactions that value the resources that ELLs bring to the classroom. Traditional practices of repetitive vocabulary drill, a right-way philosophy, and strict grammar teaching have given way to new instructional practices (Jones, 2011). The interactions that foster student communication are now more in line with the kinds of interactions that nurturing families would engage in at home. Communication between family members is free flowing and comfortable (Clay, 1998). Good teachers create a family of learners by honouring culture, accepting all modes of communication, and providing interactive learning experiences that transition students to begin using English oral expression in confident ways.

## **Honouring Culture**

The "one size fits all" mode of instruction (Askew, 2009; Hadaway & Young, 2010, p. 28) is often used in classrooms as teachers frantically search for the most effective program for teaching English learners. The most effective program is one wherein teachers make personal connections with students, talking with them and taking time getting to know their culture, language, and interests. Frequent "culture days," whereby students are encouraged to bring something from their culture to share with others, are simple ways of letting students know that they are valued, contributing members of their learning community. Personal connections are

one of the hallmarks of Reading Recovery, which begins at the onset of each child's lesson series. This one-to-one teacher-student interaction capitalizes on shared personal experiences that generate conversations from the students' interests and culture (Van Dyke, 2006; Thompson, 2008; Williams & Haag, 2009). When possible, in both the classroom and Reading Recovery settings, having books such as *The Day of Ahmed's Secret* by Florence Parry and *The Eagle Drum* by Lorraine Adams respects and connects the home and school cultures. Students feel a sense of familiarity and belonging when labels in their languages are displayed around the classroom. Honouring culture, one student at a time, through personal connections and shared experiences is a "best practice" approach for meeting the individual instructional needs of ELLs.

### ***Accepting All Modes of Communication***

Teachers are often focused on the use of words as the only mode of communication with students, forgetting that there are other modes that ELLs in particular may use for communication. ELLs often bring with them many "non-verbal abilities" (Williams & Haag, 2009, p. 160), which are used for communication. A sensitive, observant teacher responds positively and builds upon physical gestures, in order to develop English oral language and literacy (Clay, 2005a).

The acquisition of language begins with listening, which builds receptive language. The ELL acquires receptive language best in a non stressful environment, "where they are not forced to speak until they are ready" (Herrell & Jordan, 2008, p. 69). During this time of early exposure to English, especially in early years classrooms and Reading Recovery "Lessons in the Known" (A. Matczuk, Reading Recovery Trainer, personal communication, June 24, 2010), signs can be helpful. All students, including ELLs, can have fun and build relationships using signs to begin communicating with each other. In its simplest form, "thumbs up and thumbs down" can be taught as a whole class, non-stressful way of responding. Red (I don't understand), yellow (I'm confused), and green (I understand) signposts can be used to acknowledge comprehension in many situations. American Sign Language is being used in early years classrooms with second language learners to support language and literacy learning. Research is indicating that ASL improves students' brain processing systems, builds confidence, and provides tools for mediation and meeting personal, daily needs (Simpson & Lynch, 2007). Acknowledging and building on a shrug of the shoulders, a wave of the hand, and a nod of the head honours the ELL's attempts to communicate. Students' nonverbal abilities that are acknowledged and encouraged facilitate a non-stressful transition to oral expression.

### ***Interactive Transitioning to Oral Expression***

In schools, ELLs gradually become literate in English by following much the same path as preschoolers do when gaining control over language and literacy. This path is often referred to as "emergent literacy" (Clay, 1991; Sulzby & Teale, 2003). Emergent literacy occurs, as students new to the English language are guided by knowing individuals through interactive experiences, which fosters confidence in trying out some of the new language. Some teaching approaches for transitioning students to using expressive language are the following: "simulation (role play), trips, hands-on objects (realia) or exhibits, demonstrations and/or modelling, visual images (pictures, photographs, and videos), recordings, audio productions, or verbal symbols" (Neal, 2009, p. 93). These approaches, consistent with experiential instruction, engage the students' senses, extend their personal experiences, and provide opportunities for language production and concept development. These approaches are called "language experience" (Herrell & Jordan, 2008 p. 213), whereby students are actively responding to real experiences through "scripted and modeled talk" (Herrell & Jordan, 2008, pp. 161). In these

aforementioned approaches, the teacher actively interacts with students in very direct ways to guide them with ease in the use of the English language.

In the classroom, as well as Reading Recovery Lessons in the Known, teachers combine language experience with the art of storytelling. Wordless picture books, such as *Four Hungry Kittens* by Emily Arnold McCully and *Do You Want to be my Friend?* by Eric Carle are but a few texts that support emergent literacy for the ELL. These picture-only books provide freedom for learners to construct their own meaning without the distraction of unknown print (Hu & Commeyras, 2008). As emergent storytellers, ELLs begin to build control over language, understand more complexities about stories, and develop a sense of story, which fosters experiences beneficial for transitioning to reading and writing (Clay, 1998; Dockrell, Stuart, & King, 2010). The use of repetitive books, poems, action songs, and chants, which begin to familiarize students with book language, vocabulary, and language structures, are part of effective transition to print. Expository and concept books, such as *Big Things* by Beverly Randall and *Time for Dinner* by Jenny Giles, provide clear images, often photographs, which portray familiar experiences with English language labels (Garibaldi, 2003; Guccione, 2011). Combining reading and talking about expository and concept texts with hands-on experiences and real-life items is powerful in facilitating oral language (Carlson, 1996). Frequent teacher-student interactions, involving conversations around carefully chosen texts and hands-on experiences, give students the tools to transition comfortably into using spoken English.

### **Student Thinkers**

Experiential instruction builds on students' strengths and what they know, which fosters new learning. Drawing on students' current understandings, in order to construct new competencies in language and literacy, is a complex process (Clay, 2001). Much active learning takes place during this process, which moves students from what they know to new understandings. Active learning that leads students to become proficient communicators, readers, and writers utilizes the following strategies: "solving words, monitoring and correcting, searching for and using information, summarizing, maintaining fluency, adjusting, making connections, synthesizing, inferring, analyzing, and critiquing" (Pinnell and Fountas, 2009, p. 18). Active learning for the ELL begins with time spent building confidence, flexibility, and speed with what is already known and making connections to what is new.

### ***Building the Known***

Key to becoming literate in any language is developing fast and fluent thinking processes. The process that leads to independent proficiency in language and literacy depends upon students building up known information in automatic ways; consequently, the brain is free to concentrate on new aspects of learning (Clay, 2005a; Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). Experiential instruction is used in classrooms and Reading Recovery lessons, in order to build fast, automatic responses that prepare the brain for new knowledge acquisition.

In classrooms, students reread familiar texts (Herrell & Jordan, 2008; Clay, 1991; Routman, 2008), building up automatic recognition of word features that are then recognized in new contexts. This work of literacy automaticity is undertaken in the reading and writing of entire texts. In the Reading Recovery lessons, specific procedures of rapid naming (Clay 2005a) may be used with individual students, if needed, in order to foster fast and fluent processing of the known. Rapid naming involves recalling the names of familiar objects, letters, and words according to various attributes, such as colour, type, number, size, same, and different. Rapid knowing is then quickly transferred to the reading and writing of texts. Fast and fluent processing is maintained within the reading and writing of whole texts, in order to foster the essential meaning-making function of language and literacy. As well, the reading of large numbers of appropriate texts is critical for all readers, but especially ELLs, as the continuous

exposure to vocabulary and other features of print builds speed and efficiency in developing language and literacy processing systems (Herrell & Jordan, 2008; Stanovich, 1986; Clay, 2005b).

### ***Making Connections***

Within experiential instruction, instructional approaches emphasize accessing all parts of the brain through stimulating, interactive learning experiences. Teachers “guide students’ language and experience to create a community of thinkers and inquirers who seek and share knowledge” (Guccione, 2011, p. 568). Language and experience do not occur in isolation, but are connected through explicit and guided instruction.

***Explicit instruction.*** In both classroom and Reading Recovery settings, teachers connect students’ thinking in thematic and explicit ways. Texts are chosen carefully for their engaging themes, interesting information, enticing characters, nail-biting plots, and intriguing illustrations, all of which transfer in inferential ways to other texts (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). For the ELL, the familiarity that occurs between books with similar themes and consistent characters supports enjoyment and comprehension of reading. Explicit instruction is employed even further, as teachers use clear and concise language, and engage in “think alouds” (Guccione, 2011, p. 570) and “talk plans” (Meyers, 1993, p. 37) that model language for students, in order to make connections between texts, between the texts and the students, and between texts and the world.

***Guided instruction.*** Exposure to academic language and literacy experiences is most effective when teachers engage the students’ thinking processes through guided instruction. Such approaches include giving students wait time before responding (Clay, 2004), using “I think” statements in reading and writing discussions (Guccione, 2011, p. 573), creating mind pictures to access comprehension (Herrell & Jordan, 2008), and assisting students through an “optimal learning model” (Routman, 2005, p. 11) of “I do, we do, you do” (Giles & Tunks, 2009, p. 28). In all of these approaches, teachers are mindful of where students are in their learning, and where they need to go next. Expert teachers guiding students toward independent learning follow a three-step process: “assistance by more capable others, transition from other assistance to self-assistance, and assistance provided by self” (Lyons, 2003, p. 50). ELLs, in particular, require thoughtful teachers to provide the necessary guided instruction in the right place, at the right time, and with high expectations, in order for students to become active in their own language and literacy learning.

### **Student Doers**

The stimulation of a student’s sensory system is most obvious when put into the context of physical action. Language and literacy involving physical responses include the following experiential, instructional approaches: drama, role playing, action songs, poems and chants, skits, reenactments, and mime. All of these approaches, which involve muscle movement, are powerful ways for students to develop and demonstrate “alternate ways of knowing” (Williams & Haag, 2009, p. 167). Language and literacy learning centered on vocabulary and comprehension development can be maximized by connecting muscle groups with oral expression. In early years classrooms, ELLs are particularly engaged, motivated, and joyfully included when playing such language games as “Simon Says,” “Stand up-Sit down,” and “I Spy.” In Reading Recovery’s *Lessons in the Known*, teachers and students “create ingenious innovations” (Clay, 2005a, p. 33), which include movement, drama, and mime to engage students in early language and literacy learning.

Defining a student as a doer means not just body movements, but also fast brain processing as students engage in talking, reading and writing. This rapid brain function “refers to many electrical impulses racing around the brain looking for a best-fit solution” (Clay, 2005b, p. 103). ELLs may find it challenging to engage in fast thinking processes necessary for active learning. The stress of being placed in a totally unfamiliar environment can inhibit the brain from active engagement. The Reading Recovery teacher, having the benefit of one-to-one instruction, uses culture, language, and interests to activate the students’ thinking processes in stress-free, fast, and fluent ways. Student-action, photo books can be created during Lessons in the Known. Students are photographed in many action poses. These photographs, along with English labels, are made into a personalized book for students to talk about, act out, read, and share with others. ELLs become student doers when body and brain are actively engaged in language and literacy experiences.

### Conclusion

As ELLs first enter their new classrooms, they should find that their teachers are ready. Teachers are ready when using appropriate, targeted, experiential instruction that honours students’ culture, language and interests. Teachers struggle to provide appropriate instruction for ELLs. It is not “simply a matter of pedaling harder along the same path” (Askew, 2009, p. 109), but several different paths are needed for effective teaching. Communicating in personal and accepting ways, working from the known, engaging sensory systems and whole-body movements, and building connected experiences are different paths that engage ELLs in active language and literacy learning. ELLs transition to English language and literacy proficiency when they see themselves as communicators, thinkers, and doers.

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# The Importance of Student Engagement in the Middle Years

Lisa Blixhavn

## Abstract

*The importance of student engagement in schools is ever-increasing, particularly in the middle years area. Student achievement is directly linked to a student's level of engagement. Middle years teachers have a responsibility to work hard to understand the needs of their adolescent students, establish connections with their students, and provide them with the opportunities to become decision makers in their own education. Building relationships with students, providing rich educational experiences, and creating positive learning environments are the keys to student engagement, which leads to student success in the middle years.*

Student engagement is a major concern for educators and researchers. Student engagement is understood as connecting students to school and their learning. Improved engagement brings improved learning, self-esteem, and commitment to school (Manitoba Education, 2010). The success of students in the middle years is directly linked to their level of engagement (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2007). When a student becomes disengaged in school, it is usually during the early adolescence stage of middle years, and continues to decline into high school. Disengaged students may choose to drop out of school. It is important for middle years educators to understand the influences and choices that can improve student engagement so they influence students positively, which may keep students in school until graduation. Middle years students are unique in their engagement needs. The needs of the developing adolescent require a deep understanding from educators. Students need to participate in their education, and be included in making decisions that affect their learning. Involving students in the planning, implementing, and assessment stages encourages student engagement. Students need to establish relationships with their families, peer groups, and teachers that influence them in positive ways. When educators take the time to include these steps in their classrooms, it can enhance students' commitment to, connection to, and engagement in learning.

## Understanding Adolescents

The first key of student engagement, which is developing a deeper understanding of young adolescents, assists educators in understanding why middle years students are the way they are. Students at this age level are experiencing major changes in their bodies, brain development, limited reasoning skills, and possibly mental health issues, which can result in behaviours that are deemed undesirable in classrooms. Puberty is a difficult stage for most adolescents. Hormonal changes in the body can cause great emotional highs and lows that can greatly affect the student's ability to function in the classroom (Manitoba Education, 2010). Middle years students are also dealing with developing brains that can cause them to act impulsively. Impulse behaviours may have small or large consequences that could potentially affect a student's life for the long term. Mental health issues often surface during adolescence, which can have a negative impact on school performance. Students with mental health issues, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, depression, anxiety and other disorders, may struggle with attendance and school performance (Manitoba Education, 2010). Students also demonstrate the need for independence during adolescence, but still need to feel valued and respected. It is crucial that middle years educators understand the unique developmental stage of their students so that they know what their students are experiencing, and are sensitive to the unique needs that can arise for individual students.

## **Student Empowerment in Education**

Students who participate in their education are engaged by the feeling of empowerment that they experience when involved in planning their own learning, and can make decisions about their learning and lives (Bland, Carrington, & Brady, 2009). Middle years educators who use students' background knowledge, interests, and incorporate this information in their lesson planning are providing rich learning experiences for their students. Rich learning experiences are engaging because they provide students with a "voice and choice" (Manitoba Training, 2010, p. 25) in their learning. Multiliteracy projects are an example of rich and engaging learning experiences. Such projects provide students the opportunity to immerse themselves in activities that are "community-based, cross-curricular and connected to students' complex textual lives" (Ryan, 2008, p. 191). The design of such projects incorporates the use of various communication media, a variety of text, such as video or mobile communication, and "computer speak," which can also engage students. Students work from self, or group-developed research questions that are relevant to their lives and that address issues and concerns valid to their worlds. Students must work collaboratively to discover the various ways to the answer the question. Students share their findings and demonstrate their learning by using the communication media of their choice. A multiliteracy project also supports students by giving them responsibility in their learning while incorporating the learning of academic skills (Ryan, 2008). Middle years educators who implement such approaches are encouraging students to make decisions about their lives and learning, and incorporating the interests and strengths of students, which are all keys to engaging a learner.

Differentiated instruction is also a technique that can assist teachers in engaging and empowering their students. Utilizing differentiated instruction techniques such as oral presentations in place of tests or the use of e-readers with text-to-voice functionality, can particularly engage struggling learners because they now have a way to "show what they know." Collaborative groups are another differentiated technique that can engage learners in several different ways. This technique can facilitate socialization, provide support when students are struggling, and can give high achieving students opportunities to assist their peers. The list of differentiated instructional techniques that can be used in the classroom is endless, and invaluable when trying to engage struggling learners. Hands-on experiments and design projects from the Manitoba curriculum are simple differentiated instruction techniques to incorporate in a middle years program, because they are already set up for educators to utilize in their classrooms with engagement in mind. The process of including students in the design of assignments and assessment rubrics is another method of differentiated instruction. Including learners in the design of assignments and assessments engages learners because they are aware of what the assignment needs to look like and the value of each different aspect of the assignment. Students are engaged and empowered because they have more control over what their learning looks like. Providing rationale for assignments, connecting tasks to the student's world and interests, involving students to participate in the design of the task and the assessment process, and facilitating collaboration among students (Stipek, 2002) are powerful aspects of student empowerment that teachers can implement to engage learners in the middle years.

## **Positive Interpersonal Relationships**

Middle years students are greatly affected by the people who surround them. Students spend more time with their teachers and peers than they do with their own families; therefore, it is important that students establish relationships that make a positive impact on their lives. Peer influences peak in adolescence (Molley, Gest, & Rulison, 2010), which makes the middle years an extremely important time for positive interactions between students and their families, teachers, and peers.

Parental attachment plays an important role in student engagement. The emotional resources and skills parents teach their children “persists into adolescence” (Elmore & Huebner, 2010), even as the time spent with parents’ declines. Strong attachments to both family and friends are connected to the highest levels of self-esteem (Carter, McGee, Taylor, & Williams, 2007). High levels of self-esteem are associated with a high academic self-concept, which is connected to higher levels of academic engagement and achievement. Children who are happy and secure at home tend to be happy and secure at school, which can be reflected in their academic endeavours, and most often translates into students that are engaged in their learning. The level of positive connections with family can have a large impact on the types of choices adolescents make. The ability of middle years students to make positive choices can greatly influence their level of engagement in the classroom.

Teachers also play an integral role in student engagement. A positive relationship with a teacher can personalize school for many learners and improve their feeling of connection to school and learning, both key aspects in being engaged (McClure, Yonezawa, & Jones, 2010). Many schools have recently begun to find ways, such as looping and advisory groups, to give teachers and students time to build relationships. The technique of looping puts a teacher with the same group of students for a period of two to three years. Looping provides many unique opportunities for relationship building. Teachers learn about students as individuals, understand the individual academic strengths and needs of students, and build on this knowledge for more than one year (Jewett, 2009). Looping also eliminates the six to eight-week period that teachers often spend familiarizing themselves with their students each year. Due to the positive bond that forms, along with the extra time that looping provides for students and teachers to be together, students are often in an engaged state for extended periods of time, which may result in higher academic achievement.

Advisory groups are student-teacher mentoring programs that also encourage positive relationships. The goal of advisory groups is to “create tighter relationships between adults and students to foster a more supportive school climate overall” (McClure et al., 2010, p. 5). Advisory groups can assist students in feeling that they are part of a more personalized learning experience, and can motivate students to achieve academically (McClure et al., 2010). Building strong relationships encourages students and teachers to nurture high academic expectations, mutual responsibility, and respect. Strong relationships also provide opportunities for positive collaboration between students and teachers. Students want relationships with their teachers. Students work “harder and smarter” (Maiers, 2011, “Relationships,” para. 17) when they understand that their education matters to their teachers. The feeling of being valued and respected plays a key role in building relationships between students and teachers. These interpersonal relationships are integral to students feeling connected to their learning, and therefore, also to being engaged in their learning.

Relationships with friends can also play a major role in a student’s ability to be engaged in learning. At a time of life when adolescents are trying to discover who they are, peers may actually be the biggest influence in their lives. Positive and supportive peer relationships can nurture positive academic growth, just as negative relationships with peers can influence academic struggles. The influence that friends can have during the middle years is so strong that it can “both undermine the effects of positive parenting and detract from the negative role of uninvolved parenting styles” (Li, Lynch, Kalvin, Liu, & Lerner, 2011, p. 330). Parents, administrators, and teachers must be aware of this powerful influence and foster positive team building opportunities among learners. Encouraging participation in extra-curricular activities such as student government, sports, and music programs can provide the opportunity for students to meet other people with similar interests on which to build positive peer relationships. Teachers and administrators must also be cognizant of the negative situations that can affect middle years students. Bullying can have a great impact on the adolescent students’ abilities to be engaged in their learning, either as the bully or the victim (Li et al., 2011). All adults in the students’ lives must provide support, and educate students on the impact bullying can have on

their lives. It is also important to educate students on the effects of poor life-style choices, such as drugs and alcohol, and provide support to choose the positive alternative when faced with difficult choices. The influence that peers have on one another can greatly affect levels of student engagement throughout the middle years, both positively and negatively. Positive relationships, with both adults and peers, can support learners through the middle years to stay engaged, committed, and connected to their education.

## Conclusion

Student engagement is a factor in the middle years students' academic success. Educators need to understand the unique needs and developmental stages of their students to engage their learners. Encouraging students to participate in their education and including them in the development of rich learning experiences that are real to their environment motivates students to exercise their independence, and engages learners. Whether teachers use large, cross-curricular projects, like multiliteracy projects, or simple differentiated instruction techniques, they will be encouraging engagement of learners. Students also need to be provided with time and support to build and nurture positive relationships with teachers and peers. These relationships are increasingly important due to a decline in the time that middle years students spend with family. All of these factors can be utilized to provide a positive learning environment in the middle years. Positive learning environments lead to engaged learners who are more likely to achieve academically, and look at school as a place they want to be. Engaged learners are learners who are connected to, and committed to, learning for the remainder of their school years.

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# Key Considerations in Developing a School Leadership Program

Hazen Barrett

## **Abstract**

*School systems throughout the world are struggling with the issue of who will lead public schools today, and in the future. The patriarchal model from the past, when authority was not to be questioned and educational leadership was viewed in a straightforward, one-dimensional perspective, has been replaced by a complicated combination of expectations and pressures. This article outlines preparation and training factors that should be considered by school boards in selecting leadership candidates, and when designing training models for school leadership. Understanding the frustrations and contradictions that exist in the modern school environment makes survival in school leadership a matter of political aptitude, and a function of technical skill. The requirement becomes a search for individuals who can guide their schools in response to local needs while meeting non-local mandates.*

One of the most daunting tasks faced by boards and senior management in public school systems throughout the world is the assignment and training of school leaders. The age-old stereotype of the school principal as a stern, father-knows-best, autocrat who is not to be questioned under any circumstances, has been replaced by a modern-day demand for school leaders who possess a considerable range of skills and characteristics. Today's boards struggle with questions that go beyond the mere educational qualifications of a candidate. Because of the diverse nature of today's school cultures, having the right leader in the right school, at the right time, is critical. Issues of training, timing, and placement must be considered concurrently, instead of being viewed as separate and unrelated factors. Societal attitudes and government policies are often juxtaposed, with the result that school leaders must skillfully manipulate limited opportunities to influence the direction of their schools. This complex mix of considerations, combined with the significant pressures inherent to the job of a principal, makes effective training and the selection of appropriate candidates essential to the success of any leadership training program. The purpose of this article is to identify the factors that necessitate a review of current practices in training programs for school leaders, and to highlight considerations in the design of leadership programs for modern schools.

## **Candidate Shortages and Training Timelines**

The reasons for placing a new principal in a school can be as important as the skills and aptitudes possessed by the successful candidate. With the rapidly approaching retirement of large numbers of principals from the baby boom, many countries are attempting to fill administrative positions that become vacant more rapidly than a suitable pool of replacement candidates can be recruited (Bush, 2011; Fink & Brayman, 2006). In Ontario, close to 8000 qualified principals and vice-principals were eligible for retirement by 2005, but only 715 teachers, on average, obtained principals' qualifications each year between 1997 and 2000 (Fink & Brayman, 2006, p. 63). School boards experiencing these shortages have been forced to place candidates in positions of leadership without a clear understanding of the specific ambitions of the individual, and without a clear picture of the needs that are specific to each school. The lack of an effective succession plan often results in new principals being placed in situations that are poorly matched to their existing skill set, without the nurturing, consistent development of strengths that comes from a well-planned training scheme (Fink & Brayman, 2006). The effects are substantial, with frequent turnover of principals resulting in significant barriers to educational change in schools.

## **Leadership in an Ambiguous World – Beyond the Acquisition of Skills**

Effective leadership development depends on changing the candidates' mental models instead of focusing solely on the new administrators' acquisition of knowledge (Boerema, 2011). New principals often enter the profession with misconceptions regarding the responsibilities that will face them, and misunderstandings in regard to the power that they possess to affect change and make decisions (Boerema, 2011). A principal's job is complicated by competing demands and high expectations from many sources, and carefully planned agendas are often disrupted by frequent interruptions, confusing situations with ambiguous solutions, and unclear information from superiors (Lortie, 2009). Many candidates become successful in their teaching careers by being organized and meticulous, often following straightforward paths to solving problems in the classroom. Administrative trainees do not realize, until they become principals, that most administrative decisions are only partly correct (Lortie, 2009). To prepare for the ambiguous aspects of school management, new principals need sufficient time to renegotiate their identities and to reflect on personal experiences within the working groups with whom they share responsibilities.

Designing a training program for aspiring principals must go beyond the mere acquisition of skills. The National Aspiring Principals Pilot (NAPP), introduced by the Ministry of Education in New Zealand in 2008-2009, provided a forum through which aspirants participated in projects designed around self-reflection and inquiry, combined with opportunities for action-research in cooperation with other aspiring principals (Piggot-Irvine, 2011). Follow-up interviews were conducted with NAPP candidates, in which participants expressed opinions of the program as a positive opportunity for evidence-based inquiry and self-directed learning. However, the aspirants expressed concern regarding unclear expectations and short project timeframes, combined with poor support, at times, on the part of principals. If self-directed leadership projects are to be effective, participants must be provided with clear and practical research guidelines, flexible timelines, and strong support from experienced administrators. The subjective process of self-reflection through projects can be rewarding for leadership candidates, but only within a framework of clearly communicated expectations and realistic opportunities to explore project objectives.

### **Beyond Knowledge – The Ability to Establish Relationships**

Programs designed around self-inquiry and project-based research require more time than the traditional imparting of knowledge around school procedures and policies, a possible reason that project-based training programs are often fast tracked before aspirants feel that they have completely explored the ideas presented for study (Piggot-Irvine, 2011; Wood, 2011). Leadership candidates do not always have enough time to embrace the ideas central to leadership projects because researchers, responsible for project design, underestimate the knowledge required to fulfill the role of a principal (Timperley, 2011). In other words, the problem often exists within the parameters presented for the program, instead of a lack of skill or will on the part of the participants. Content-based knowledge is mistakenly assumed to be the measure by which school leaders are deemed effective, at the expense of the knowledge of pedagogy and relationship development (Epstein, Galindo, & Sheldon, 2011; Timperley, 2011). However, a principal's management style has a greater positive effect on student performance when the principal is knowledgeable in regard to teaching and learning, instead of possessing expertise in a specific content area (Timperley, 2011). Pedagogical knowledge, combined with expertise in the use of data, provides an environment where organizational learning theory effectively meets socio-cultural learning theory (Epstein et al., 2011). Therefore, the framework for principal training should create a standard whereby policy and practice can be combined with theory to effectively use data within the context of learning relationships, provided that the knowledge is up to date and relevant.

## **Political Awareness and Mentorship Design**

Another key consideration in the training and placement of school administrators is the context of the political environment in which the principal must work (Brewer, 2011). There is a continuing assumption that schools operate outside of the sphere of political interference, in spite of evidence from the 1970s, 1980s, and the new millennium, showing significant political influences, sometimes in contradiction to society's expectations of schools. Training programs delivered in the context of static models, whereby the standards and policies are seen as never changing, result in aspiring leadership candidates being unprepared for the fluidity of the system, sacrificing the experimental attitude that is crucial to school innovation and staff development. For example, new principals, eager to initiate professional learning groups in schools, often find their efforts stalled by government mandated reforms, such as standardized assessments, that interfere with the autonomy necessary for locally driven improvement in the school (Fink & Brayman, 2011). Therefore, school boards must be careful to ensure that new administrators have enough time and resources to pursue professional improvement in schools, while also fulfilling the mandates that are passed down from political sources.

An awareness of changes in political realities over time may also affect leadership training in regard to the wisdom that is handed down from one generation to another. Leadership candidates in programs with a mentorship component may become too dependent on their mentors, possibly stifling innovative leadership practice (Bush, 2011). For example, individual mentors who lead within the context of an earlier decade, during which they developed their own leadership personalities, may not provide adequate guidance for a candidate who is aspiring to lead a school in the new millennium, when expectations and policy structures are rapidly changing. A mentorship model that uses a variety of experienced principals, who are at varied stages of their careers, is more effective (Fink & Brayman, 2006). New administrators rely heavily on feedback from colleagues, and may be sensitive to commentaries on their performance from mentors, and from the staff in the schools where the candidates take on a leadership role for the first time (Lortie, 2009). Widely varied consultations with experienced leaders, as well as opportunities to establish a wide range of support networks result in a breadth of knowledge that underlies the confidence needed to succeed (Boerema, 2011; Bush, 2011).

## **Placement Decisions – Scanning School Landscapes**

The assumption that there is one management style that works better than all others is not useful in an age when schools are populated by diverse groups of staff and students who possess wide ranges of aptitudes, aspirations, and backgrounds (Lortie, 2011). Effective school management differs in accordance with the type of student, and with the predominant type of program offered (Hofman & Hofman, 2011). Academic, or higher performing students, achieve better test results in schools where the management structure has been developed through a consensus between the principal and staff; in contrast to lower performing students, who achieve better test scores in schools where administrators have followed a more rigid management style, with less dependence on consensus and more reliance on a specific set of standards for teaching and learning. Providing the time to acquire knowledge regarding the specific character of the school, as it relates to the needs of the students, is crucial to the principal's acceptance as an insider, if the principal hopes to exert significant influence over staff development and student performance (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Effective placements for new principals are dependent on the candidate's knowledge of the circumstances under which they will be attempting to implement school improvement measures, with the type of student central to the core of values by which a school, or program, is managed.

A new principal's influence within a school's culture may also be influenced by circumstances that occurred long before a candidate has assumed a leadership role. Significant

pressures exerted by groups who enjoyed influence under a previous principal's tenure may disrupt early plans by a new principal to affect change (Meyer, MacMillan, & Northfield, 2011; Wood, 2011). In comparison, principals who are promoted from within a school's ranks often face accusations of allowing undue influence on the part of groups with whom the new principal had a prior association, such as specific grade groups or faculties (Meyer et al., 2011). Awareness of the professional hazards of engaging in favouritism, consciously or unconsciously, may help a new administrator to avoid situations that may taint the principal's tenure for many years, making progress difficult to achieve (Bush, 2011; Meyer et al., 2011). Boards and senior administrators may ensure the success of new school leaders by providing opportunities for candidates to receive realistic information regarding the political situation in the school where the principal is assigned, and the necessary training to manage complex relationships.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important that school boards develop effective training programs for new and aspiring principals, if succession planning is to be successful. The accelerated rate at which experienced principals are retiring requires that training programs for new administrators be developed, and delivered, as soon as possible. However, ensuring that new administrators acquire only basic management skills will not provide the necessary background for administrative candidates to survive professionally in the fast-paced environment of modern, public schools. Training models must allow a gradual shift in knowledge and attitudes, causing new administrators to be developed, not created. Candidates need opportunities to engage in self-reflection and professional development, with clear guidelines and expectations regarding professional learning groups being central to any training program. Mentoring programs should be designed with several mentors in mind for each aspirant, providing opportunities to investigate various ideas in numerous schools of differing characteristics. In addition, potential administrators will need to develop skills and aptitudes with school politics in mind, if they are to thrive within the school communities in which they have been chosen to lead. The training that is provided could be one of the most important investments made by a school board, directly affecting the ability to provide the school leaders that students deserve.

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# The Role of Individuals in Creating a Positive School Climate

**Alann Fraser**

## **Abstract**

*This article reviews the importance and the roles of the stakeholders who support students throughout school. Student success is dependent on the people involved and the climate that is created within the school. The climate in a school is dependent on the people who are supporting the students throughout their whole learning experience. Stakeholders include students, teachers, administrators, and parents. Each stakeholder has a role in creating a positive school climate. As trust and support of each stakeholder grows, so does the positive climate within the school. Stakeholders fulfill their roles and responsibilities, school climate evolves, and students become successful in their education.*

School climate has a direct effect on the success of students within the school. A positive school climate is created through the collaborative work of students, support staff, teachers, and administrators who collectively support children through their school careers. Students play an important role by supporting each other as well as the adults in the school, and by creating a respectful learning climate. Teachers set up their classrooms in ways to facilitate positive interactions between the teacher and the students and between student peers in the classroom; these interactions create a sense of belonging to the school community. Strong school leaders are committed to creating a positive school environment wherein students and staff are mutually supportive, respectful, and wanting to learn. Lastly, parents and the larger community play a vital role in creating a respectful school climate. Thus, a variety of people are involved in creating a positive climate in school.

School climate is the quality of the setting and is a major factor in determining behaviour and learning. The environment includes the physical and psychological characteristics of the whole school, including the reflection of values, beliefs, and traditions of the school setting. The creation of a positive school environment provides a supportative environment for learning (Gillen, Wright, & Spink, 2011). Gillen et al. (2011) identified three variables for a positive school climate: relationships, systems' maintenance, and goal orientation. Four aspects of school culture are the nature of relationships between teachers and students, the nature of relationships between students, the extent to which student autonomy with decision making, and the extent that the school sets out clear, consistent, and fair rules (Way, Reddy, & Rhodes, 2007).

## **The Role of Students**

Student perception defines the school culture (Way et al., 2007). A positive climate is created through peer interactions within the classroom and within the school as a whole. Students with helpful peer interactions support each other with homework and group work with in the classroom. A higher level of student engagement, respect of others' ideas and encouragement supports a higher level of learning. Social aspects are related to student participation, engagement and task completion all measure the motivation to learn (Gillen et al., 2011). People who do not connect as friends are less trusting and comfortable with each other. The lack of trust will affect their attitude toward working collaboratively (Flanagan & Stout, 2010). Students will approach teachers for help when they feel that the teachers care about their academic and social needs (Gillen et al., 2011). This perception varies among students and can sometimes effect their emotional and behavioural well-being (Way et al., 2007). Students' perception of teacher support, safety, and the school in general influences their success throughout their school years (Bowen, Rose, Powers, & Glennie, 2008).

Students need to feel trusted and respected by the people around them (Gillen et al., 2011). If students experience a level of trust and respect from the adults in authority, and perceive themselves as part of a community, their growth will be positively impacted. Students who are encouraged to express their opinions and respect the view of others will bolster the positive climate. Trust is based on freedom as opposed to control. Students who feel that teachers respect their opinions and challenge them in a respectful manner will gain a higher sense of trust (Flanagan & Stout, 2010). It is important to understand that this sense of trust in a classroom will change as students transition from middle to late adolescence. Adolescents become better able to distinguish trust in friendships from trust in the generalized group of students (Flanagan & Stout, 2010). Students who feel trusted and respected by their peers and the adults around them perceive their school and education in a positive manner.

Transition between middle years and high school can be difficult for adolescents. Students who experience low attachment to school have higher levels of violent behaviour and aggressive thoughts as well as lower motivation with academics, while students who perceive school climate to be more positive have lower levels of violent behaviour and higher motivation to learn (Frey, Ruchkin, Martin, & Schwab-Stone, 2009). Students who like school recognize more caring teachers when teachers give positive attention and reinforcement (Stanley, Comello, Edwards, & Marquart, 2008). The attachment leads to higher motivation and engagement in school work (Stornes, Bru, & Idsoe, 2008). Positive transitions between middle school and high school support the students in being successful.

### **The Role of Teachers**

Teachers are instrumental in creating positive school climates wherein students are successful. Staff members who empower students to take pride in both their school and themselves, as well as encourage positive behaviours will develop positive school climates for everyone involved (Frey et al., 2009). Staff support students by having high expectations of their efforts, academic achievement, and behaviours in creating a positive climate to work in. Teachers should align their instruction and assessments with curriculum, set clear student goals, and use the data to inform their best practices (Barley & Beesley, 2007). Students may view themselves as motivated to learn; however, encouraging and supportive interactions between teachers and students will also motivate students to do well. Teachers create opportunities for students to feel supported in developing goals for themselves and reaching those goals (Hardré, Crowson, Debacker, & White, 2007).

Student performance is influenced by teachers' attitudes, strategies, and expectations. Teachers who offer a warm and friendly attitude and allow students to know them as people increase student achievement. When students are interacted with frequently during a lesson, provided with praise and positive feedback, they will feel valued and respected. Students need to perceive that their teachers are available to help with their needs, committed to planning, and working collaboratively with other teachers, and are making an effort to develop themselves professionally. Ideally, teachers align their lessons to the curriculum, and use appropriate strategies and materials to teach the lessons.

It is imperative that teachers feel valued by their administrator. Teachers require the opportunity to attend meaningful professional workshops and conferences, and time to collaborate with their teaching peers. Goals and expectations need to be clear and direct. Teachers must have support from administration in ensuring that manageable class sizes, student behaviours, and support staff are in place (McCoach et al., 2010). Furthermore, teachers must be allowed to spend more time delivering direct instruction, and less time dealing with discipline issues. Teachers will be able to present material in different ways to reach their students' needs. An environment that focuses on collaboration and communication also supports the teachers and the students (McCoach et al., 2010).

Teachers who support students to understand that they are not on their own in the learning process will create a positive learning environment. Open classroom climates, in which teachers value students' opinions and listen to diverse perspectives, build trust between the teacher and the students. Respect is necessary for this trust to happen. Respectful teachers engage their students in open discussions and allow students to become authorities on their own learning. Trust and respect must grow and go hand in hand in this supportive process (Flanagan & Stout, 2010).

Students who perceive their teachers as being involved in their learning are more focused on their learning and not comparing themselves to others. Involved teachers have a genuine interest in the social and academic needs, and overall well-being of each of their students. Close relationships are built between the students and the teacher when the teacher supplies appropriate feedback to the student. Students know they can make mistakes and will receive the validation they need. Teachers encourage students in feeling responsible for their learning; students and teachers, in turn, will put forth the appropriate effort. Goals can be met. An organized, structured classroom fosters positive social interactions while supporting student learning. When students can follow instructions as told, do not disturb others, and wait their turn, the teacher can focus on individual student needs. Teachers must carefully monitor school work and student behaviours. Students are treated as individuals (Stornes et al., 2008). When teachers can support students to set their own learning goals and help them to reach their goals, students know that they are valued by the teacher (Stornes et al., 2008).

### **The Role of School Counsellors**

Effective counsellors are a resource to both teachers and students by ensuring that students receive the information that they need to be successful. They are crucial in supplying resources in the areas of personal, social, and academic development, including career choices as well as social and life skills (Cooper, & Liou, 2007). Unfortunately, counsellors in the high school area sometimes spend their time completing other duties instead of supporting students directly (Copper & Liou, 2007). Nevertheless, counsellors find ways to support teachers and students with providing important information.

### **The Role of School Administrators**

Strong school leaders prove to be critical in providing positive school climates. They promote and deliver a clear vision to parents and staff, and uphold high expectations for students; these expectations build trust and a foundation for success. Principals need to ensure that governmental standards and curricula are met while emphasizing continual professional development and school improvements (McCoach et al., 2010). Just as relationships built on trust and value between teachers and students are necessary to student success, it is crucial to have the same type of respectful relationship between the teachers and administrator. Educators need to feel that they are supported by the administration and valued for the work that they do (McCoach et al., 2010).

Administrators need to have a regard for the teachers' behaviours and capabilities. Administrators and teachers need to be more focused on the needs of the students than on issues that may result in tension among staff members. Administrators need to be effective instructors and dedicated to using data to make instructional decisions (McCoach et al., 2010). Leaders help teachers to create opportunities for students and to see the reasoning of fundamental learning within the school (Hardré et al., 2007). While administrators are supporting teachers and students, they must also promote pride in their communities, neighbourhoods, themselves and others. Respect and support must be fostered (Frey et al., 2009). Teachers and students look to administrators for direction and support for implementing curricular change and

professional development, and bringing people together for the good of the school (Barley & Beesley, 2007).

While supporting staff, students, and parents, administrators also need to look at information that needs to be shared to create a positive environment. Two types of information exist: functional and high stakes. High-stake information leads students to understand the culture, policies, and practice that they can access for success throughout their school years. Functional information includes focusing on policies, technicalities, and directions to ensure that everyone is safe within the building. High-stake information also includes directives from the governmental organizations, course offerings, and everyday knowledge of lockers, schedules, and activities (Cooper & Liou, 2007). Administrators who can support more ongoing opportunities to engage in positive interactions and constructive activities will help students to avoid troublesome behaviours (Bowen et al., 2008). Schools with positive cultures will lead to close relationships with the administration, staff, students, parents, and the community (Barley & Beesley, 2007). Information that is shared by administrators leads to a positive culture being developed.

### **The Role of Parents and the Community**

It is essential that parents are involved in the education of their students. When parents discern the teachers in a positive manner, they are more willing to support and encourage the activities and lessons of the classroom. Parents identify three essential qualities of a good teacher: respect and love for the students, frequent communication with the parents, and visits to the communities of their students (McCoach et al., 2010). Parents who feel welcomed and are communicated with are willing to support teachers and the school in the education of students.

The community plays an important role in creating a positive school climate. The school is often seen as a place of pride, a social center, and a building that is used by many different groups. The community provides financial, volunteer, and moral support for the school. Teachers and administrators who are supported by the community are more likely to remain in the community to support the students. Parents who volunteer at the school and support the learning, activities, and culture of the school will support the climate that the students bring to the school (Barley & Beesley, 2007). Students who are exposed to negative behaviours and incidents outside of school will exhibit a lower attachment to school (Frey et al., 2009). When the school and community work together to support students, decrease incidents of violence, and support positive relations, students will become positive members of society.

### **Conclusion**

School climate is crucial to the success of students during their school careers. Many people play a role in creating a positive climate. Each student has his or her own unique perspective, which is formed and developed by attitudes, actions, and perceptions of other students, teachers, administration, parents, and the community that the students are in contact with. The various stakeholders play an active role in shaping the climate. Positive interactions, respect, and valuing each other lead to successful students, teachers, administrators, parents, and communities.

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# The Shortage of Male Primary School Teachers and the “Not-So-Hidden” Consequences

Kyle Prevost

## Abstract

*There is little doubt that the male elementary school teacher has become an endangered species across Canada and the rest of the western world. While there is a body of literature that argues this reality does not have negative effects on the student body, this assertion is simply not true. A shortage of male role models in early-years classrooms has negative consequences for female students, and especially for their male classmates. With growing numbers of male students disengaging with primary schooling, it is essential that we utilize strategies to address the underrepresentation of male teachers in elementary school classrooms.*

There is a widespread shortage of male teachers in primary schools across North America. Although a number of people claim that this is not a major issue, this lack of diversity is having negative consequences on young males in primary schools due to a lack of male role models. One solution is affirmative action-style programs that have seen success in other minority underrepresentation situations. Such solutions are important to explore if we hope to change the gender dynamic that currently affects primary schooling in North America.

The call for more male primary teachers is not new, but the number of male teachers in kindergarten to grade eight is currently at an all-time low (Blatz, 2008; Davison & Nelson, 2011; Fox, 2005). Recent media attention has highlighted the problem (Ferguson, 2005; Kersten, 2007; “Why, ‘Sir,’” 2008), but relatively few suggestions have been put forth to solve the predicament, and fewer still have had any visible effect on the situation. Whether one analyzes the statistics in Manitoba, where a mere 4.5% of the people involved with early years education are male (Blatz, 2008, para. 4), or in England, where the England Training and Development Agency For Schools has seen the percentage of male trainees dip to 14% (Szwed, 2010, p. 303), the consistent finding is that there is a shortage of male teachers elementary and middle school classrooms. The debate within the academic world and among educational stakeholders is whether this shortage of males has negative effects on the school system as a whole, and on young male students in particular, especially those in kindergarten to grade eight (Gosse, 2011; Marcus & Vairo, 2006). Although the call for more male teachers is not a new issue, it needs to be answered if we hope to reverse the negative effects of gender inequity.

## Background

It seems logical to assume that students are best served by interacting with a diverse set of teachers who can provide a broad range of models. While having a more equal balance of male and female teachers in primary schooling would have positive effects for female students, the larger beneficiaries would likely be male students (Abraham, 2010). The extent of the problem is evidenced by the fact that the *Globe and Mail* recently published a six-part series titled “Failing Boys,” focusing on the fundamental ways that the current public school system is failing to engage male students (Abraham, 2010). While these results were considered to be fairly surprising to the mainstream public, they did not come as a surprise to many in the world of education (Gosse, 2011). Male students are dropping out at much higher rates than female students (Abraham, 2010; Fox, 2005; Orr, 2011). Evidence that males are falling behind their female counterparts can be found by simply looking on any post-secondary campus in North America, where about 60% of the undergraduate student population is female (Gosse, 2011, p. 117). These numbers are beginning to filter into professional faculties such as law, medicine, and especially education, where male teachers routinely make up about 5-15% of admitted students in primary schooling streams (“A Few,” 2005, p. 47;

Szwed, 2010, p. 303; "Why, 'Sir,'" 2008, p. 10). The fact that falling numbers of male primary school teachers have occurred at the same time as the drop in male students' academic performance may not be coincidental, but is instead causal.

### **Diversity versus Feminist Ideology**

The debate about whether we need more males in early and middle years education has two main poles of thought. Proponents of one side argue that while there may be some fringe benefits (that are not quantifiable) to having more males involved with youth education, as long as a teacher is a good one, the sex of the teacher should not matter (Martino, 2008). However, the majority of recent research supports the opposing position, which claims students need a diverse range of role models in order to achieve their maximum learning potential (Gosse, 2011; Marcus & Vairo, 2006; Szwed, 2010). The logical extension of that position is that an extreme lack of diversity in the sex of primary school teachers will negatively impact the learning environment of all students, especially students who are in need of male role models. Until recently, proponents of the anti-diversity agenda have generally "carried the day," and we are seeing the negative effects in today's young male students.

Opponents of increasing the number of male teachers in early and middle years education often claim that the "pro-diversity" movement has been fuelled by a "re-masculization backlash," and not legitimate research (Martino, 2008, pp. 190-191). These individuals believe that recent gains made by the feminist movement have sparked widespread fear amongst white-males specifically, which has manifested itself in the call for more male primary school teachers. Thus, male teachers are said to be "emerging as central to a project of re-masculinisation" (Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2010, p. 249) of white-males who are threatened by the perceived feminization of boys (Martino, 2008). These critics also devalue supporters of the call for more male teachers as people whose views are not relevant since they are based on "common-sense assumptions" that are influenced by a "real men" view of masculinity (Martino, 2008, p. 193). They attribute any public support for more male teachers to the "cult of true manhood" (Martino, 2008, p. 198). Proponents of the "any teachers will do, as long as they are good teacher-models" premise use this argument to justify their view that the lack of male teachers in primary schooling is not an important issue.

The anti-diversity position is flawed in three primary ways. The failure to recognize the pivotal link between students observing role models that represent their own identity in a positive manner, and an improvement in educational outcomes, can not be overstated. The anti-diversity argument bases many of its criticisms on literature and views from the 1960 and 1970s. While this response may be appealing on a raw emotional level to some, it does not effectively address 21<sup>st</sup> century realities. Ultimately, the diversity problem in primary school teaching staffs should not be addressed from a confrontational, ideological perspective, but rather a practical problem-solving perspective that places student needs before political agendas.

Role models are an important aspect of education and, consequently, a lack of diversity amongst the role models in a school will hurt students' engagement and performance levels. The value of seeing male role models in academic settings is difficult to quantify, but that does not make it any less important. The same rationale has been used to justify female students seeing female teachers in math and science roles at the secondary level (Gosse, 2011), as well as ethnic minorities seeing themselves represented in the public school system (Branch & Kritsonis, 2006). The benefits of having male role models in primary school classrooms would not be realized by male students alone, but by female students as well. A prime example would be seeing male-female interaction modeled among staff members. Without any male counterbalance to the substantial emphasis on female role models, boys will inevitably begin to link education with femininity, and "if boys associate schooling with femininity the connections might be rather difficult to break" (Orr, 2011, p. 281). To continue to ignore the connection between a lack of male role models and the underperformance of male students in primary schooling would be an unjustified error going forward.

Individuals who believe in the anti-diversity claims base their argument on cultural norms from over thirty years ago, and fail to acknowledge the situation as it exists today. The sexist views of the

1960s and 1970s present a convenient ideological framework that anti-diversity proponents use to further their emotional argument (Martino, 2008). Their strategy to present individuals who seek a more diverse teaching staff as anti-feminist is buoyed by referencing these inflammatory texts; however, it is also irrelevant to the fact that young male students are suffering due to a lack of male role models in primary school classrooms. One example of this strategy is when anti-diversity authors refer to the traditional male administrator vs. female classroom teacher model that was prevalent in past eras, as part of the reason that there are not more males in classroom (Martino, 2008). This myth is based on a completely obsolete premise, as evidenced by the fact that in 2008 Canada had 20,015 administrators, 13,680 of whom were male and 15,335 were female (Gosse, 2011, p. 118). Supporters of the anti-diversity argument seek to justify their criticism of the call for more male teachers through the illogical critique of literature and opinions from a bygone era. This appeal to feminist-based emotions only diverts attention from the important structural problems that are occurring in early and middle years schools across North America.

The idea that any response to the current negative academic climate among male students has to be seen relative to recent feminist movements is a flawed analytical framework. The criticism of recruiting more male primary school teachers is strongly influenced by ideological feminism, which “presents all issues from the point of view of women, and in the process explicitly attacks men as a class” (Gosse, 2011, p. 121). Education is not a “zero-sum” game. Just as the surge in female math and science teachers did not hurt male students (who had already seen themselves represented in such areas), an increase in male primary school teachers would not damage the education received by female students. Hiring a more diverse group of teachers should not be analyzed from a confrontational, ideologically feminist point of view, but rather from the widespread belief within educational circles that a diverse teaching staff helps all learners (Branch & Kritsonis, 2006).

## Solutions

When exploring solutions to the problem of a lack of male primary school teachers, government administrators and educational stakeholders should consider three proposals. The first is an affirmative action-type program similar to those found in other areas of government to address minority underrepresentation. The second is a public informational campaign that would focus attention on male primary school teachers incorrectly being portrayed as inappropriately motivated to work with children, and having homosexual tendencies solely because of their chosen profession. Finally, a practical approach to encouraging more males to enter into early and middle years educational streams would be to offer male-only scholarships that target these specific areas.

An affirmative action-style program, such as ones seen in other publically funded areas, is needed in order to remedy the problem of having too few male role models in primary school classrooms. The most direct comparison that can be made is the concerted effort over the past few decades to place more female math and science teachers into secondary classes (Bae & Smith, 1997). The rationale behind this movement was that females were not meeting their potential in math and science courses at least in part because they were not shown enough positive female role models in math and science roles (Davison & Nelson, 2011). This affirmative action-style program has been largely successful, as proven by the rise in female numbers in math and science courses at post-secondary institutions (Bae & Smith, 1997; Koehler, 2008). Logic dictates that the same sort of reasoning could be used to increase the performance of boys throughout the education system, beginning in primary education. It is not coincidental that in fields where there are relatively few male role models, such as English Language Arts, boys continue to struggle. The connection of male teachers to improving the low literacy rates of male primary school students has been strongly defined (Gosse, 2011). Just as affirmative action policies were used to boost female performance in targeted areas, they should be utilized to fill the gaps that are developing among males and females in the primary school grades.

A focused effort to combat negative stereotypes about male primary school teachers must be made as part of any overall solution to the central problem of a lack of males in classrooms. Studies

are virtually unanimous in their conclusion that one of the main reasons we do not see more male teachers in primary schooling classrooms is the culture of distrust and negative stigmas that surround male interaction with young children ("A Few," 2005; Gosse, 2011; Marcus & Vairo, 2006). Males routinely cite the fact that homophobia-influenced criticism, and immediate suspicion of males in early years classrooms, are strong reasons for the underrepresentation of males within the field. A public education campaign showing the benefits of having a diverse group of role models involved with students of all ages would have positive effects on this mainstream attitude. Another focus of a proposed public education campaign would be the dissemination of the fact that males do not interact with children inappropriately any more than their female counterparts, and the statistics for both sexes reveal the extremely low rates (Gosse, 2011). If educational stakeholders recognize that having more male teachers in primary schools is a worthwhile venture for primary school students, they should be proactive in finding solutions to the problem, instead of hoping that the problem will solve itself.

A final step to draw more males into the primary school teacher profession would be targeted male-only scholarships. Similar scholarships have been utilized to increase the number of women in math and science pursuits such as engineering, and the results have been extremely positive (Koehler, 2008). Males are more extrinsically motivated than females, and cite financial motivation much higher on their lists of reasons to become a teacher than do females (Szwed, 2010). A scholarship program that offers extrinsic benefits in the form of partial tuition payment would be very effective in attracting males to primary school teaching roles.

### Conclusion

While it is not debatable that males are underrepresented in early and middle years schools throughout Canada, the USA, and other Western World countries, educational stakeholders must decide whether they believe this phenomenon is having negative consequences on their young learners. A lack of male role models is considered by some to not be a legitimate concern; however, evidence clearly shows that a diversified teaching staff has positive outcomes for students of all levels and backgrounds. There is equally compelling evidence that our current educational system is failing young male students, and that having male primary school teachers would make a positive difference. We must not delay in utilizing solutions to the problem of underrepresentation of males in early and middle years classrooms. Nothing less than the future of our boys is at stake.

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# **Student/Teacher Interaction Behaviours**

**Miranda Weenusk**

## **Abstract**

*How teachers interact with students can have damaging effects on students' self-esteem, which is quite often the antecedent to students' disruptive behaviours in the classroom. The purpose of this article is to encourage teachers to take the initiative step toward improving their classroom climate by identifying their response styles and types of classrooms. The types of misbehaviour of students and teachers are identified. Specific classroom management strategies and leading authors in behavioural theories are closely examined. The premise is that teachers need to monitor their behaviours when interacting with students during instructional activities, and students need to be taught how to behave.*

For teachers and school administrators, the most problematic issue in schools today is the increasing levels of school violence. However, school violence has already begun to make its way into elementary schools, and the increasing number of incident reports for students' misbehaviours in the classroom has been the main topic for discussion between teachers and parents as well as school administrators. To remedy this problem of students' misbehaviours in the classroom, school administrators need to support teachers by giving them more opportunities to attend professional development workshops in classroom management strategies.

## **The Myth of the Good Teacher**

Teachers with problem behaviour students tend to be manipulated into feeling guilty whenever they seek assistance from school administrators and parents. The general belief is that teachers should have all the necessary skills to handle problem behaviour students, when in reality they are well-trained to teach only certain school subjects. This belief has often misguided parents into thinking that teachers are accountable for their children's problem behaviours in school. It is not uncommon for school administrators and principals to share this belief, but they too have their own interpretations of teachers' roles and responsibilities in the classroom. Their expectations of teachers are reflected in Canter and Canter's (1976) "Myth of the Good Teacher" (as cited in Cangelosi, 2004). Cangelosi describes the "Myth of the Good Teacher" as follows:

"A good teacher should be able to handle all behavior problems on her own, and within the confines of the classroom." This means if you are competent, you should never need to go to your principal or the child's parents for assistance. (p. 300)

This myth often prevents novice and experienced teachers from seeking assistance from parents, principals, and school administrators. Without adequate assistance and support from parents, principals, and school administrators, eventually teachers burn out and leave the teaching profession because of having to deal with disruptive students on their own too many times.

## **Types of Classrooms and Teachers' Response Styles**

To help teachers regain control of their classrooms, Hardin (2008) recommended that teachers identify which of Coloroso's (1900) Three Types of Classrooms they might have: the

jellyfish classroom, the brick-wall classroom, and the backbone classroom. The jellyfish classroom is without adequate structure. Teachers' expectations and punishments are inconsistent. The rules are often vague and leave students guessing what is expected of them. In the brick-wall classroom, teachers and students are ruled by dictatorship. The rules and punishments are unyielding. Students are manipulated and controlled by physical threats, humiliation, and bribes. Basically, students are told what to think and the teacher has all the power and control. The backbone classroom offers consistency and flexibility in discipline. Students are listened to and given second chances whenever mistakes are made. Students are taught how to problem-solve and to think before they react. After the teachers identify the type of classroom they have and decide which type they wish to have, the next step is to shift their attention to how they respond to students with disruptive behaviours in the classroom.

When teachers interact with students, Hardin (2008) advised using Canter and Canter's (1976) Teachers' Response Styles when setting the tone of the classroom. The three basic response styles of teachers are nonassertive, hostile, and assertive. Nonassertive teachers fail to make their needs and wants known; they allow students to take advantage of them. These teachers often threaten students, but students know there will be no follow-through so aggressive students tend to take over the class. These teachers become easily frustrated and secretly have inner hostility toward disruptive students. Hostile teachers respond in a negative, condescending, sarcastic, or hostile way that violates the students' rights, and disregards the feelings and needs of their students. They usually make unprofessional comments in front of the disruptive student, the student's peers, and other teachers. Punishments are often severe and physical. Assertive teachers clearly and firmly express their needs and the expectations of students. In other words, they say what they mean and mean what they say. Therefore, students know their limits in the classroom.

### **Behavioural Classroom Management Strategies**

Marshall's (2001) Raise Responsibility System (as cited in Charles, 2008) promotes responsibility in students. For this system to take effect, teachers are advised to do the following: "(1) Teach students about the four levels of social development and relate the levels to behavior and learning, (2) *check for understanding* of the four levels when students behave inappropriately, and (3) *provide guided choices* for acceptable behavior when disruptions continue" (p. 149). Rather than teachers, students suggest ways to conduct themselves more responsibly.

The fundamental ideas of Marshall's (2001) Hierarchy of Social Development (as cited in Charles, 2008) are that "(1) students will cooperate willingly in the educational program if they see a clear reason for doing so and find the experiences enjoyable, and (2) good discipline occurs as students are influenced to conduct themselves more responsibly" (p. 73). The four levels of the Hierarchy of Social Development are Level A (Anarchy), Level B (Bossing/Bullying/Bothering), Level C (Cooperation/Conformity), and Level D (Democracy and taking the initiative to do the right thing). Students who function at Level A are at the lowest level and they hardly accomplish anything worthwhile. At Level B, these students like to boss, bully and/or bother other students without any regard for their safety and well-being. The only time that these students are willing to comply with teachers' requests and/or instructional tasks is when authority is used. In Level C, students are willing to cooperate with teachers and others. They conform to the expectations set by the teacher and their motivation comes from the teacher and peer pressure. Most teachers would like to see their students function at Level D. In this level, students do not need to be told or reminded what to do. They have the desire to do the right thing and they take responsibility for their actions whenever they have done something wrong. They live up to their expectations and achieve the goals that they set for themselves. Before implementing the Hierarchy of Social Development into the classroom and using it on students, teachers should first observe their students then identify the level each student is at.

From then on, teachers can determine which students need the behavioural intervention the most.

The first part of Marshall's (1998) instructional model of the Social Development Program is to teach the vocabulary and concepts to students, and the second part consists of checking for understanding. At this stage, when a disruption occurs in the classroom, the teacher simply moves into a guidance mode and asks the student to identify the level of the behaviour. The main purpose of checking for understanding is to have the disruptive student acknowledge the level of social development, rather than punishing the student being asked. At this point, the teacher's only interest is helping the student to develop self-control and social responsibility in the classroom. It is very important that questioning students about their behaviours is not done in a coercive and negative way. However, if a student continues with the disruptive behaviour after acknowledging disrupting the lesson, then the teacher moves on to guided choices. At this stage, authority is used, but without being confrontational and without punishment. Students are not asked questions about their behaviour by the teacher. Instead, on a sheet of paper, the teacher gives the student predetermined choices that are listed as questions. This way, the person who asks the questions controls the situation and the student makes the final decision whether to complete the form. Three questions are asked: (1) What did I do? (2) What can I do to prevent it from happening again? and (3) What will I do? When the form is handed over to the student, one of the following questions is asked, depending on the current situation: (1) Would you rather complete the activity in your seat or in the rear of the room? (2) Would you rather complete the activity by yourself or would you prefer to have someone help you? (3) Would you rather complete the activity in the classroom or in the office? Again, the student is given the choice and responsibility for his or her actions.

Marshall (2006, as cited in Charles, 2008) advised teachers to modify his raise responsibility system when working with adolescent students who are disaffected with school. Disaffected teenage students have concluded that school has nothing to offer them. Quite often, these students have little interest in completing assignments, especially when it comes to complying with teachers' instructions, requests, and/or commands. They will attend school only when threatened by their parent(s). When speaking to disaffected students in the classroom, teachers should avoid doing the "seven deadly habits": "criticism, blaming, complaining, nagging, threatening, punishing, or rewarding/bribing to control" (Marshall, 2006, as cited in Charles, 2008, p. 85). Marshall thus cautioned teachers that they, too, should keep their behaviours in check. Most importantly, those teachers should remain calm and unaffected, such as when students start cursing in the classroom, especially when foul language is directed toward the teacher or other students.

Ford's Responsible Thinking Process (2006) was adapted from Powers' Perceptual Control Theory (PCT), which theorizes that our behaviour is controlled by our perceptions of the environment and we act accordingly in order to get what we want (as cited in Charles, 2008). In the Responsible Thinking Process (RTP), teachers teach students to acquire the necessary (cognitive) skills to get what they want in life without violating the rights of others. We determine our understanding of the world through the three highest levels of perceptions: the systems concepts level, the principles level, and the program level. At the systems concepts level, our beliefs and values help us to determine what we want to be as a person and how we should treat others. At the same time, we make an effort to achieve the goals that we set out for ourselves. At the principles level, we determine how we want to live by setting our priorities and guidelines in accordance with our beliefs and values. At the program level, in order to have structure and order in our lives, we develop a plan that assists us to live a harmonious and satisfactory life. Our behaviours are therefore not entirely influenced by the environment, but rather how our perceptions interpret the environment predetermines our behaviours.

Many of the behaviours that teachers find disrupting can be controlled by simply controlling the teachers' own responses (Thomas, Becker, & Armstrong, 1968). Gable, Hendrickson, Young, Shores, and Stowitschek (1983, as cited in Shores, Gunter, & Jack, 1993) compared

teacher approval and disapproval statements across classrooms of different exceptionalities and found that approval statements (praise) occurred at a rate of only 16 per minute. Strain, Lambert, Kerr, Stagg, and Lenkner (1983, as cited in Shores et al., 1993) found that 82% of the students who had low social development ratings never received positive social behaviour from the teacher, even when they complied with the teacher's request. Shores et al. (1993) emphasized that teacher praise is an essential component of positive interactions between teachers and students.

Teacher/student proximity is an effective classroom management strategy that ensures minimal classroom disruptions because it increases teacher interactions with students (Gunter, Shores, Jack, Rasmussen, & Flowers, 1995). Gunter et al. (1995) found that "elementary students spend 70% of their time assigned to independent seat work and 91.7% of the time, paraprofessionals remained seated in their assigned work areas while monitoring (targeted) students" (pp. 12-13). For effective proximity control while monitoring independent seat work, teachers should stand within three feet of the student and they should briefly interact with every student while circulating the classroom. Students' disruptive behaviours can also be greatly reduced if students' desks are appropriately distanced from one another. To implement these simple strategies, teachers need to develop ways to monitor their own movement patterns in the classroom.

### **Types of Teachers' and Students' Misbehaviours**

Charles (2008) identified five types of teacher misbehaviour that teachers need to avoid whenever they discipline and interact with students: "inducing fearfulness, denigrating students, being demanding and abrasive, presenting poor models of behavior, and not making classes interesting and worthwhile" (p. 28). The ten most likely causes for teachers to misbehave in the classroom while interacting with students are the following:

Poor habits, unfamiliarity with better techniques, presenting poor models of behavior, showing little interest in or appreciation for students, succumbing to personal frustration, succumbing to provocation, providing ineffective guidance and feedback, using ineffective personal communication, failure to plan proactively, and using coercion, threat, and punishment. (Charles, 2008, pp. 25-28)

It is very important for teachers to know what the real reason behind their anger is and to think of positive ways to improve their behaviour without having the students feel the heat of their anger.

Charles (2008) also listed thirteen types of students' misbehaviours that commonly occur in the classroom and on school grounds: "inattention, apathy, needless talk, moving about in the room, annoying others, disruption, lying, stealing, cheating, sexual harassment, aggression and fighting, malicious mischief, and defiance of authority" (pp. 19-20). Identifying the reasons behind students' disruptive behaviours not only nurtures a safe learning environment for students, but also helps to repair deteriorating student-teacher relationships. The ten antecedents of students' misbehaviours are attributed to the following: "unmet needs, thwarted desires, expediency, urge to transgress, temptation, inappropriate habits, poor behavior choices, avoidance, egocentric personality, and neurological-based behavior (NBB)" (Charles, 2008, pp. 21-23).

Hardin (2008) identified four main goals of students' misbehaviour in the classroom: (1) to seek attention, (2) to gain power, (3) to seek revenge for some perceived injustice, and (4) to avoid failure. However, Cipani (1995) argued that students' disruptive behaviour in the classroom is intended not only to seek teachers' attention, but also to escape or avoid an instructional task or assignment. Escape behaviour functions to terminate an existing event, and avoidance behaviour occurs in anticipation of an aversive event. These kinds of behaviours are

negatively reinforced when teachers continuously give students aversive instructional tasks and assignments.

### **Positive and Negative Reinforcement**

Despite the evidence that positive reinforcement techniques can change students' challenging behaviours, many teachers continue to use punishment instead, because it is still widely accepted in school discipline and teachers find it easier to administer than positive reinforcement. Of the various strategies in behaviour modification, positive reinforcement in the form of teacher praise is the most effective strategy in modifying students' behaviours.

Negative reinforcement is the contingent removal of an aversive stimulus, which results in increased behaviour production to escape or avoid the aversive stimulus (Cipani, 1995). Students' off-task behaviours were most likely reinforced by escape or avoidance of teacher instruction.

Once the teacher determines that negative reinforcement is indeed a key factor in maintaining the student's disruptive behaviour in the classroom, Cipani (1995) recommended that teachers try altering their instructional approaches during instructional activities and instead implement positive reinforcement strategies to modify students' behaviours. However, Axelrod (1996, as cited in Maag, 2001) believed that "techniques based on positive reinforcement lack popular and professional acceptability because they are time-intensive, offer little compensation for educators, contradict popular views of developmental psychology, threaten special interest groups, are socially unacceptable, and demean humans" (p. 174).

Generally, educators agree that there is no single cause for students' problem behaviours. Gable, Quinn, Rutherford, and Howell (1998) found that even when students' behaviour topography (what the behaviour looks like or sounds like) is similar, the causes of the behaviours can be very different. Sanson, Smart, Prior, and Oberklaid (1993) found that early behaviour patterns during infancy and preschool years can explain behaviour problems in school-age children:

Children who were rated as having externalizing problems when they were 7 years old were rated by their mothers as having more difficult temperaments as early as when they were infants. Thus, for preschool children with difficult behavior, certain temperamental characteristics in infancy, such as colic and excessive crying, may be important to consider. (as cited in Stormont, 2002, pp. 127-128)

It is unreasonable to expect parents and teachers to know all of the risk factors of externalizing behaviour problems in children, but it is not unreasonable to expect parents and teachers to closely work together to find possible risk factors for individual children.

To assist in the prevention and intervention of problem behaviours in schools, Hester (2002) recommended that teachers implement the following strategies: (1) Redefine the culture of the school. (2) Increase predictability in daily routines. (3) Give clear instructions, consistent, and follow through. (4) Teach students appropriate replacement behaviours that serve the same function as the misbehaviour; and (5) Affirm positive behaviour.

Once children with conduct problems enter school, whether preschool or grade school, negative school and social experiences further increase their adjustment difficulties (Webster-Stratton, 1993). Aggressive children with noncompliant disruptive behaviour also develop poor relations with teachers, and they typically receive less support and nurturing in school.

### **Behavioural Assessments and Intervention Plans**

A functional behavioural assessment is an effective tool to use when identifying the cause or causes of students' problem behaviours, but behavioural intervention plans are also effective

in terms of preventing students from interfering with academic instruction (Gable et al., 1998). Discipline referral forms are also handy when used in conjunction with functional behavioural assessments and behavioural intervention plans. In schools, all of these three forms help teachers and school administrators deal with students who have problem behaviours. Tobin, Sugai, and Colvin (2000) found that certain patterns in individual students' discipline referrals predicted school failure in high school, delinquency, referral for special education and placement in alternative settings, and future incidents of violence at school. Discipline referral forms not only predict possible school and student failures, but they can also provide a clear picture of the most troublesome grades and months of the school year. Thus, the next school year, school administrators and teachers will be more informed and prepared to deal with problematic grades and disruptive students.

When dealing with off-task students daily, Cangelosi (2004) recommended that teachers use the Teaching Cycles Model, which assists teachers in redirecting students' off-task behaviours into on-task behaviours. The six stages of the Teaching Cycles Model are (1) identifying the students' needs, (2) determining the learning objective, (3) planning a learning activity, (4) preparing for the learning activity, (5) conducting the learning activity, and (6) evaluating how well the learning objective was achieved. These stages look simple, but they take more time to implement and prepare when dealing with more complicated student problem behaviours in the classroom.

When dealing with students who have disruptive behaviours, Charles (2008) recommended that teachers ask these students the following six questions from Ford's RTP: (1) What are you doing? (2) What are the rules? (3) What happens when you break the rules? (4) Is this what you want to happen? (5) Where do you want to be? or What do you want to do now? And (6) What will happen if you disrupt again? These questions teach students how to look within themselves and decide how they want to be in the classroom. In order to achieve the desired outcome, it is important that teachers not ask these questions in an angry tone. Students who are approached in anger become angry themselves, especially once they feel threatened.

Teachers' behavioural expectations of students determine the climate in the classroom. Classroom rules are "general behavioral standards or expectations that are to be followed in the classroom. They constitute a code of conduct intended to regulate individual behavior in an attempt to avoid disruptive behavior" (Burden, 1995, p. 93). Students should also have input in establishing appropriate rules in the classroom, but the rules that they establish must be fair, realistic, and reasonable. When selecting rules, teachers need to consider their teaching styles, the age and maturity of their students, and the type of classroom climate they would like to have – and to make sure that the rules are in conjunction with the school rules and expectations.

However, Rhode, Jenson, and Reavis (1992) disagreed with Burden's (2000) recommendation that students be allowed to select their own rules in the classroom. Students tend to make up too many nonspecific rules, and some students feel that they do not have to follow rules that have been created by other students. Therefore, Rhode et al. argued that the teacher should establish appropriate classroom rules that apply to all students without exceptions – even for special needs students. It is also very important for students to understand the rules and the consequences for obeying and breaking the classroom rules. Otherwise, the rules were made in vain and are worthless in maintaining students' disruptive behaviours in the classroom.

### **Student-Teacher Interaction Behaviours**

Jack et al. (1996) defined interaction as a social exchange between a target subject and another person (adult or peer), and interaction sequence as the sequential scoring of events from one stop code to the next stop code. In their research study of classroom interactions, Jack et al. (1996) organized their sequences of interactions into four types:

Positive interactions were sequences in which the teacher and/or student emitted a positive social behavior (e.g., praise statements) and no negative behaviors. Negative interactions were interaction sequences in which the teacher and/or student emitted a negative behavior (e.g., disruptions, protests, aggression, or negative verbalization) without a positive behavior being recorded before the stop code. Mixed interactions were interaction sequences in which sequences in which both positive and negative behaviors were emitted by the teacher and/or student. Neutral interactions sequences were defined as those interactions in which no positive or negative behaviors were emitted. (pp. 68-70)

The results of their research study indicated that most of the interactions across the 20 classrooms were negative. Students and teachers were engaged in negative interactions over 20% of the observed time and less than 5% of the time, students and teachers were engaged in positive interactions, which is very low. However, there were no significant statistical differences between the high group and low group on the rate or duration of negative, neutral, or mixed interactions.

Gunter, Jack, DePaege, Reed, and Harrison (1994) indicated that Negative interactions—i.e., interactions involving disruptive, aggressive, negative verbal/gestural, or negative consequences but no positive behaviors – between teachers and students occurred 22% of the time spent in the classroom. In contrast, positive interactions—i.e., interactions involving praise or positive consequences and no negative behaviors—occurred only 3% of the time. When the sequence of negative interactions was broken down, negative interactions were typically started by the students engaging in a disruptive act, which was followed by the teacher telling the students to do an academic task or “talking” to the students. Negative interactions often ended in students engaging in additional disruptive behaviors (as cited in Gunter et al., 1995, pp. 13-14).

Surprisingly, the actual percentages of negative and positive interactions between teachers and students are quite alarming, but this evidence proves that teachers need more training in classroom management, especially positive reinforcement strategies.

### **Conclusion**

Student-teacher interaction behaviours are in a desperate need of a repair and makeover. Our children’s education and safety in school is being comprised when teachers do not upgrade their teaching and responsive styles, and especially when school administrators do not provide teachers with the necessary training in classroom management strategies. As a society, we are all educators and it is our responsibility to ensure that every child receives quality education, without fear and punishment.

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# Understanding Quality Teacher Induction

David Gillingham

## **Abstract**

*Beginning teachers need high quality induction supports in order to successfully transition into the teaching profession. The last three decades have seen the evolution of comprehensive induction programs to meet the support needs of teachers in their first three years of teaching as they take on ever varied roles in the school system. Central to an effective induction program, and, ultimately, the strengthening of beginning teacher teaching and student learning, are the identification and training of appropriate educative mentors, effective professional development plans, targeted feedback to the beginning teachers, and a supportive school culture.*

As new entrants into the teaching profession, beginning teachers require high quality induction programs in order to transition successfully from pre-service to in-service teaching. Acknowledging the importance of induction for beginning teachers, schools, school districts, and school systems have worked to develop induction programs that will provide beginning teachers with the support they need in order to be successful. Although all beginning teachers bring their own personal strengths and needs to the teaching profession, and require specific, individualized, supports, there are also some consistencies in the induction programs offered. The key to high quality induction is an understanding of the induction frameworks, the provision of ongoing educative support at the school level during the first three years of teaching, the selection and training of appropriate educative mentors, the need for developmentally appropriate professional development, planned formative assessment of each beginning teacher, and supportive school administration. It is important to understand that quality beginning teacher induction combines these features into a program that supports beginning teachers in order to help them become successful classroom teachers, thus strengthening their teaching and student learning.

## **Trends**

The definition of quality beginning teacher induction has changed markedly over the last thirty years, resulting from an increased understanding of teacher development by school system administrators (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Early induction programs for beginning teachers focused on informal one-to-one mentoring, whereas the most recent, high quality induction programs are characterized by a comprehensive system of organized, educative mentor assistance, professional development, and formative assessment of beginning teachers in their first three years of teaching (Alliance for Excellent Education [AEE], 2004; Wood & Stanulis, 2009). In addition to officially planned induction during the first three years of teaching, quality induction programs link teacher preparation and practice, which supports the distinct learning needs of beginning teachers, before, and during their transition into the teaching profession (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). For example, induction programs are gradually expanding in order to provide structured support to beginning teachers before the beginning teachers take up their first teaching position, especially when beginning teachers already know the school and grade-level at which they will be teaching (Paris, 2010). Defining the nature of quality induction programs, and the important role they play in the successful integration of beginning teachers into the teaching profession, has resulted in specific, focused support for these teachers, and is tailored to each teacher's distinct learning needs.

## Frameworks

Irrespective of the wide variety of schools and teaching assignments that beginning teachers experience, which play a significant part in determining their induction support needs, there are key frameworks that influence the way an induction program is designed. Firstly, induction is often considered a transitional phase in teacher development between pre-service and in-service professional development during which beginning teachers are evolving from students of teaching to teachers of students (Carver, & Yusko, 1999; Feiman-Nemser, Schwille, Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Thus, one component of a comprehensive induction program involves a guidance plan for beginning teachers during their transition to teaching emphasizing activities such as setting up the classroom or implementing classroom management routines. These are typically the immediate concerns of beginning teachers at the beginning of their careers.

A second framework considers induction as a socialization process in which beginning teachers acclimatize to the school and divisional culture, whereby powerful cultural norms often persuade beginning teachers to adapt to the status quo of schooling (Patterson, 2005). Induction focused on socialization stresses the development of skills that help beginning teachers feel like they fit into the culture of the school or division (Wood & Stanulis, 2009; Patterson). Socialization induction programs highlight school and divisional policies and procedures, teaching expectations, standards, commonalities, such as curricular materials to be used, and the amount of homework to be done per night. These programs are conducted through an orientation process that emphasizes beginning teacher acclimatization to the school or divisional climate (Winstead Fry, 2009). Thus, these programs often involve meetings to discuss the school expectations and culture, with the expectation that beginning teachers will adapt to become part of the staff, and school, environment.

A third framework of induction is the provision of intensive support, professional development and formative assessment for beginning teachers (AEE, 2004). This view of induction concentrates on developing beginning teachers' subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills over time, and places a heavy reliance on a substantive mentorship process (Cherian & Daniel, 2008). This support is provided over a longer term, and is based on reflective discussion, questioning, modelling, and feedback between beginning teachers and their educative mentor. Although very helpful in isolation, these three frameworks each contain critical elements of a successful induction program, which are all necessary for an effective induction process at the school level.

## Mentors

Providing this ongoing education and support for beginning teachers is required at the school level since it is not possible to cover all of the issues and topics that beginning teachers encounter on the job during an orientation or socialization induction process (AEE, 2004; Bartell, 2005). In a school setting, this ongoing support is most commonly provided by educative mentors, who interact with beginning teachers in ways that help them learn in, and from, their practice (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Individuals who take on the role of educative mentors commonly have personal attributes that allow them to interact comfortably with beginning teachers, conduct formative assessment observations, reflect with the beginning teachers on their strengths and areas for future growth, and have the team skills to co-plan and co-teach to strengthen each beginning teacher's instruction and classroom environment (AEE, 2004; Feiman-Nemser et al., 1999). Accordingly, the selection of appropriate educative mentors is a critical component of a quality induction program.

Appropriate educative mentor candidates demonstrate quality instructional practice in their own classroom, reflective approaches to their own teaching, content knowledge and expert subject-based pedagogy, the commitment to ongoing personal and professional growth, excellent interpersonal skills, and empathy to the needs of beginning teachers (Wood &

Stanulis, 2009). Furthermore, it is ideal that educative mentors be matched to beginning teachers according to school size, grade level, and subject (Bartell 2005). The selection of appropriate educative mentors is critical in providing ongoing professional education and support for beginning teachers. Additionally, educative mentors need professional development themselves, in order to maximise their effectiveness in the mentorship role.

Training and professional development for educative mentors before, and during, the induction program, helps the mentors develop the skills necessary to help beginning teachers improve their practices. Gaining competence in understanding beginning teachers' needs, participating in mentorship simulations, and working with other mentors to share and learn, helps educative mentors develop their own sense of confidence and efficacy in their ability to support beginning teachers (Schwille & Dynak, 2000). This development of educative mentors' skills helps beginning teachers cope with their responsibilities and roles as teachers, and helps them to learn how to teach in ways that promote the successful engagement and learning of all of their learners (New Zealand Teachers Council, n.d.). Thus, mentor preparation is an important factor influencing beginning teachers' classroom practices.

### **Professional Development**

In addition to educative mentor training, developmentally appropriate professional development for beginning teachers, which to be effective has as its core goal the notion that participation in professional development activities improves teaching practices, is a requirement for quality beginning teacher induction (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Quality induction programs deliver this professional development in many ways, but all focus on deepening beginning teachers' content knowledge, classroom management skills, and ability to establish and maintain good relationships with students and their families (AEE 2004; Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Professional development must offer beginning teachers the opportunity to focus on critical problems of practice that are school based, and embedded in teacher work, and, when provided often enough and long enough, ensures progressive gain in knowledge, skills, and confidence (Lieberman & Miller, 2000). Additionally, professional development provides an opportunity for interaction between the mentors and beginning teachers focused on questions, research-based inquiry, and reflections of new understandings of subject matter, students, and teaching and learning, which emphasize learning as the centre of teaching, for both teachers and students (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Thus, effective induction requires that developmentally appropriate professional development be strategically planned, in order to focus on improving student learning through improving teacher performance, and encouraging authentic collaborative learning between the mentors and the beginning teachers.

### **Formative Assessment**

During this collaborative process, formative assessment needs to be provided to beginning teachers, with the goal of improving teaching practices. Frequent observations, mentor feedback, and reflective questioning by the mentor teachers are all part of a series of structured formative assessment activities carried out by the mentors and beginning teachers, whereby the beginning teachers learn how to self-assess their professional competence (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). In turn, beginning teachers are able to become more professionally self-sufficient, to feel more competent, and to be more confident about the quality of education that they are providing to students in their classrooms (Winstead Fry, 2009). Increasing these traits in beginning teachers frequently leads to enhanced job performance and satisfaction, resulting in better student learning and higher rates of teacher retention (Winstead Fry, 2008). Consequently, a quality induction program must include ongoing, planned formative assessments, which provide beginning teachers with the chance to learn about, and improve, their practices over time.

## Role of Administration

Administrators, especially principals, play vital roles in providing beginning teachers with opportunities to learn about, and improve, their teaching practices (AEE, 2004; Bartell, 2005). Although most beginning teachers cite their mentors as the most important people in their entry to teaching, many also cite having supportive principals as the most critical factor in their professional development (Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Effective implementation of the induction components depends on the site administrator's leadership and commitment to induction (Cherian & Daniel, 2008, p. 8; New Zealand Teachers Council, n.d.). The role that principals play in quality induction is extensive and includes acting as facilitators of educative mentoring through approving and providing sanctioned time and resources for the induction program, advocating for beginning teachers by visiting their classrooms regularly, talking to them about their lessons, expressing an interest in their progress, and giving them advice on how to avoid teacher burnout (AEE, 2004; Wood, 2005). Thus, supportive school administration is essential for high quality induction programming, and for creating a school culture that welcomes, values, and supports beginning teachers.

Principals have key roles in building a supportive school culture for beginning teachers and often set the tone for how easy or difficult it is for beginning teachers to be accepted into the school's learning community. Supportive principals understand that beginning teachers placed in poor working conditions, with large classes, high numbers of students with learning or behavioural difficulties, insufficient classroom resources, and new assignments each year, are likely to fail (Patterson, 2005; Wood & Stanulis, 2009). Principals also have the responsibility to encourage shared definitions of knowledge, teaching, and learning, in order to establish a common language with which beginning teachers and mentors can discuss teaching and learning (Arends & Rigazio-DiGilio, 2000). Thus, administrators in high quality induction programs must work to ensure that beginning teachers are treated fairly in the school environment, which promotes their development and learning.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is essential that beginning teachers receive high quality induction, in order for them to successfully transition into the teaching profession. Over the last thirty years, the definition of quality induction has evolved as schools, school divisions, and school systems have developed comprehensive systems of support for beginning teachers, based on the needs of each beginning teacher. The wide variety of roles that beginning teachers fill, requires that quality induction programs engage them in ongoing educative support over the first three years of teaching. Essential to this support is the selection and training of appropriate educative mentor teachers who will engage beginning teachers in developmentally appropriate professional development, and provide formative assessment of beginning teachers to strengthen their teaching and learning. In addition, supportive school administrators are needed to create a school environment that reinforces and validates a high quality induction program. Therefore, in order to ensure that beginning teachers are successful in their first three years in the teaching profession, it is necessary to understand the components of induction, and to implement high quality induction programs for all beginning teachers.

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### **About the Author**

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## OPINION PAPER

### The Argument for an Aboriginal Art Curriculum

Eric Lowe

Regardless of the subject matter, successful education has to be grounded in skills that students can take beyond the borders of the classroom. The desire to continue meaningful and relevant learning experiences takes root and grows. Some of these are not noticed as great life-changing experiences, but the accumulation of positive understandings empowers individuals to attain a higher level of personal development. This development is especially important for Aboriginal children, who have not been served well by an educational system grounded in Western traditions. As Chief Sitting Bull once said, "Let's put our minds together and see what we can do for our children" (AERC, 2010, p. i). I believe that an Aboriginal art curriculum is one of the best things that we can do for our Aboriginal school children.

The traditionally Western school system endeavoured to change children and dictate how they lived, spoke, dressed, and ate – it did not include Aboriginal philosophies. Aboriginal students and Elders resented this education as an insult to the history of their ancestors, because it ignored the fact that "First Nations peoples had complex social and economic systems that had organized their lives for thousands of years" (AERC, 2010, p. 2). Before contact, the history of Aboriginal cultures began with traditional Aboriginal images carved, drawn, or painted on stone, bone, hide, or wood. Because of the nomadic nature of these hunters and gatherers, most of these artifacts have disappeared today. But these traditional images served as symbols to recall events of the past. An understanding of these visual images is important because it gives Native individuals an opportunity to express themselves confidently. Aboriginal education needs to reclaim traditional values and beliefs by infusing them into the art curriculum. In addition, it builds upon values as the basis for learning.

Aboriginal Elders are keepers of cultural knowledge, which is passed on by telling stories that usually have a moral or lesson, such as the teaching of *The Sacred Tree* (Lane, Bopp, Bopp, & Brown, 2003) or the stories in *The Trickster: Shift, Humor and Irony in Contemporary Native art* (Ryan, 1999). This knowledge helps individuals to understand their culture. Aboriginal Elders have insight that is truly "down to earth" and in touch with reality. Educators should count on these Elders for their advice and guidance, and encourage them to affect the direction that is taken with the curriculum subject matter, including art. Traditional Aboriginal teaching methods naturally blend into hands-on learning, which is the pedagogical basis for teaching art. An Aboriginal art-integrated curriculum focuses on the relationships between people and the natural environment without necessarily labeling the instruction as "First Nation."

For 18 years, I taught art in Brandon School Division. Some of my Aboriginal students were my brightest lights. They exhibited amazingly high skill levels and dedication to their artistic projects. Through their art, they achieved success and a personal pride of accomplishment. I'm sorry to say that a number of times this success did not transfer into other subject areas and they dropped out. Some extremely creative and talented students stand out for me. All they did is draw; the problem was that they would draw in every class, so the administration was going to throw them out. I asked, even pleaded, with the principal to keep them in school by putting them in art. I offered to create classes for them. In art, they were on-task, sixteen-year-olds mentoring students in grades eleven and twelve. There was a climate of mutual respect, and admiration grew. A light inside them came on, and personal success was achieved. A relevant need to complete grade twelve and attend art school at university in the future was born – and they did.

My curricular vision is to integrate art lessons with environmental topics, such as traditional Aboriginal hunting, trapping, and gathering, and the knowledge related to these

skills. This learning may stimulate student discussion of current issues and solutions to local environmental problems. Such discussion can be reinforced by practical art lessons that use hands-on activities. These approaches integrate traditional teachings, natural science, and contemporary knowledge, in order to involve students in local problems and environmental concerns. Following are my goals for art in school with lessons for implementation:

- to integrate Aboriginal traditional customs across the general K-12 curriculum through a series of visual art-integrated projects
- to engage students in the learning process by integrated Aboriginal lessons
- to develop an improved understanding and acceptance of traditional Aboriginal values
- to enrich and energize the general K-12 curriculum, by bringing awareness and an appreciation for contemporary Aboriginal issues that can empower learners through knowledge

Here at Brandon University, I've been a sessional lecturer teaching the PENT Bachelor of Education students in course 02:312, Art Media and Techniques. I've encouraged the adult students working as teacher aides to develop art-integrated lesson for the core curriculum for their students in northern communities. Student teachers do hands-on art assignments, developing inventive and challenging lessons for students. Following are some goals that I have identified for teachers:

- to stimulate the students' curiosity (so they can experience a creative process)
- to develop students' skills in observation
- to engage the students in practical experiences that provide individual ownership of their education
- to develop creative thinking by developing unique one-of-a-kind art-works
- to develop critical analysis and self-assessment skills
- to understand a variety of new instructional methods in art
- to evaluate and understand traditional crafts and techniques, for example, how hand-made products can be produced and appreciated
- to develop lifelong learning and procedural skills in artistic creation

It is my hope to inspire my students to inspire others. Sharing my successes will give them confidence to share their successes with their own students. A success circle is achieved that can only keep increasing in size, through an Aboriginal art curriculum.

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