

# *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*

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# *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*

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## **Cover Relief Sculpture**

Erica Lowe, B.A. (4-year major in creative arts), Brandon University, 2008  
Harding, Manitoba  
*Medium: cardboard, crayon, and pastel*

## INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

**Marion Terry, Ph.D.**

Welcome to the eighth issue of the *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, devoted to rural, northern, and Aboriginal education. Our authors for volume 4, issue 2, are current and past BU Faculty of Education graduate students. I thank these educators for sharing their work. Together, they have produced a collection of articles that address a variety of educational challenges in Manitoba schools and post-secondary institutions.

- Todd Monster's research report describes the findings that emerged from his study of the need for a substitute teacher supervision and evaluation model.
- Blaire Drader's refereed article explores ways that classroom teachers can maximize the learning experiences of English Language Learners (ELLs).
- David Schroeder's refereed article extols schools to cultivate critical thinkers through digital learning and sharing in a collaborative learning environment.
- Kimberly Dallari's's refereed article offers suggestions for improving classroom practices for teaching reading.
- Suzanne Sullivan's refereed article outlines formative assessment strategies for high school mathematics.
- Clark Gawletz's refereed article explores a balanced approach to intellectual property rights as they affect the online delivery of university courses.
- Blessing Emadedor's refereed article examines the experiences of international students within the context of their contributions to Canadian society and our post-secondary institutions.
- Lynn White's opinion paper recommends mentoring as a means to improve teacher performance.

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## RESEARCH REPORT

### **A Forgotten People: Supervising and Evaluating Substitute Teachers**

**Todd Monster**

Throughout a career as a classroom teacher, principal, and senior administrator, I have had opportunity to engage other educators in dialogue regarding the impact of substitute teachers on the teaching and learning process. As educators, we understand that the greatest factor affecting student achievement is the classroom teacher and, in his or her absence, the substitute teacher. Just as an effective supervision and evaluation model for classroom teachers improves instruction, and hence student learning, an effective supervision and evaluation model for substitute teachers will improve the quality of instruction, the conditions in which the substitute teachers work, and ultimately the learning conditions for students, which in turn will impact student achievement. The purpose of this study was therefore to collect data that would promulgate the key elements in an effective substitute teacher supervision and evaluation model for Manitoba School divisions, bearing in mind the unique working conditions of substitute teachers.

Three objectives drove the research:

1. to confirm the need for a quality substitute teacher supervision and evaluation model
2. to clarify the role of each of the participant groups (principals, classroom teachers, and substitute teachers), and
3. to identify the key components of a substitute teacher supervision and evaluation model

The study utilized a mixed methods approach, with a focus on the qualitative exploration of the individual and collective experiences of stakeholders associated with the substitute teacher programs in two rural school divisions in Manitoba, supported by quantitative data from questionnaires. The 11 research participants were 4 school principals, 4 classroom teachers, and 3 substitute teachers. The principals were from an early years school, a middle years school, a high school, and a K-12 school. The teachers had a combined 28 years of classroom teaching experience, ranging from a first year teacher to a 14-year veteran. The substitute teachers had a combined 29 years of experience as substitute teachers in K-12 classrooms, and all had worked as regular classroom teachers at some point in their careers.

Overall, respondents felt that a need definitely existed for such a model, especially in the areas of orientation, supervision, and professional development. However, there were mixed responses to whether there was a need for formal evaluation, with respondents supporting informal evaluations that focus on formative feedback as opposed to a summative report.

There was consistent agreement about the roles of each participant group in the various categories of the conceptual design. Orientation was viewed as primarily being the responsibility of the school division, in collaboration with school principals. Additionally, participants felt that principals needed to provide leadership within the school in establishing a welcoming culture and developing a plan to support substitute teachers when they are utilized within the school.

Respondents agreed that supervision is primarily the responsibility of the school principal and that part of this supervision involves gathering feedback from the substitute teacher, classroom teacher, students, and other staff. However, it was noted that classroom teachers need to be involved in providing feedback to the substitute teacher as well.

Of the three categories identified in the conceptual design, formal evaluation resulted in the greatest inconsistencies among respondents. Basically, if formal evaluations are to take place, most participants felt it should be the responsibility of the school principal. However, it was noted that formal evaluation might be better conducted by a senior administrator from the school

division who would have the ability to observe substitute teachers in multiple schools and gather input from each principal. It was suggested that this approach may alleviate some of the concerns around formal evaluation, such as the inconsistency of substitutes in a particular school and time for the principal to conduct the evaluations.

As for professional development, data indicated that school divisions should be primarily responsible for developing and implementing professional development for substitute teachers, but that school principals should have some input into the process. It was also noted that substitute teachers need to take some responsibility for their own professional development and take advantage of the sessions that are made available.

In summary, although participant groups differed slightly in their opinions of the roles that principals, classroom teachers, and the school division should play in the process, there was consistent agreement that substitute teachers should be afforded a process of supervision and evaluation that involves orientation, supervision, some type of formal evaluation, and professional development.

The following key components of a model of supervision and evaluation are derived from the findings from the questionnaires, along with the comments provided on the questionnaires, and the data collected from the interviews:

- Schools need to develop a comprehensive support system for substitute teachers in advance that creates a welcoming culture.
- Orientation sessions for substitute teachers should be provided by school divisions with involvement of school principals.
- Site tours should be offered for substitute teachers so that they can become familiar with the layout of the school and key personnel.
- A substitute teacher handbook should be available that provides key information and policies relevant to substitute teachers.
- There should be regular monitoring of substitute teachers by school principals when they are in the school.
- Comprehensive, effective lesson plans provided by classroom teachers and a “sub folder” with additional classroom information should be available.
- Systematic feedback is essential – from the substitute teacher to the classroom teacher and the school, and vice versa.
- Summative evaluations need to be kept simple, with a focus on formative feedback.
- Substitute teachers should be invited to attend divisional professional development days

Substitute teachers play an important role in the education system. With the current reality surrounding teacher shortages, the importance of professional development, and the increasing number of leaves covered within teacher collective agreements, substitute teachers will continue to be in high demand, not only for day-to-day coverage, but also to provide continuity during short-term leaves. It therefore behooves school division administrators and classroom teachers to maximize the effectiveness of substitute teachers. The results of this study indicate that developing – and carefully implementing – a model of supervision and evaluation promises to give substitute teachers the support that they need to function optimally in the classroom.

### ***About the Author***

*Todd is an Assistant Superintendent for Garden Valley School Division and has 22 years in education as a classroom teacher, principal, and senior administrator. He holds a M.Ed from Brandon University, B.A. and a B.Ed from Memorial University of Newfoundland, and a PBCE from the University of Manitoba.*

## REFEREED ARTICLES

### Best Practices in Teaching English Language Learners

Blair Drader

#### Abstract

*Teachers face many challenges, including that of educating English Language Learner (ELL) students. These students are often placed in regular classrooms and create extra demands on the classroom teacher. Many strategies can be employed with ELLs that relate to best teaching practices. Potential trouble areas are discussed, as are the strategies that classroom teachers may use in educating ELLs. When teachers use these best practices with their students, student achievement is increased and better academic results are obtained. Case study examples garnered from the writer's own teaching experiences serve as illustrations throughout this article*

Teachers in rural Saskatchewan face increased challenges in educating students who are English Language Learners (ELLs). The most obvious difficulty is the language barrier: students and teachers have difficulty communicating verbally with each other. Teachers often feel that they have inadequate training in order to teach ELLs (Berg, Petron, & Greybeck, 2012). There are also cultural differences that create difficulties in the classroom when teachers use students' body language to interpret actions and understanding. Many students who arrive in rural Saskatchewan are uprooted from their home country in hopes of a better life in Canada and feel angry because they had no choice in coming to Canada. This anger can often enhance feelings of resentment toward the school and teacher, and impair students' willingness to learn. Once students are willing to attempt to learn the English language, they often start with learning elementary vocabulary to build a base of English words. There are many techniques, tools, and strategies that can be used in assisting ELLs to develop their English vocabulary and language skills, in order to increase their chances of success in the public school system.

#### Difficulties

Teachers need to begin interactions with ELLs in a way that creates acceptance. Jane<sup>1</sup>, a grade 10 student, came to Esterhazy from the Ukraine with her family in 2012. When she arrived, she had very weak English skills and could not comprehend many verbal instructions. Jane had to leave her friends from the Ukraine. She did not know anyone at the school. She was very angry at her parents for bringing her to Canada and she did not want to be in school. Teachers need to recognize that the anger displayed by some ELLs is not attributed to a specific class or action. Teachers can ensure that ELLs feel welcome in the classroom by creating "a culture of acceptance" (Usselman, Johnson, Smith, Tiganov, & Nystuen, 2010, p. 10). This acceptance is necessary to dissolve the hostility that often sets in with immigrant ELLs who want to go back to their home country and be with their friends. Mike, Rick, and Jarret attended grade 10 in Esterhazy as Taiwanese exchange students. They returned to Taiwan after attending only one semester, because they could not cope with the challenges of learning in a different language. Jane was greeted in her Russian language by some teachers. When teachers spoke to Jane in Russian, they connected to her culture and made her feel welcome (Cipriano, 2011). Teachers assist ELLs in the classroom when they ensure that student interactions are positive and welcoming in the classroom, starting with the first class.

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<sup>1</sup> Pseudonyms are used to protect the individual identities of students used as examples in this article.



Once the initial emotional barrier to instruction is broken, teachers can focus on the other difficulties encountered by ELLs, such as idioms. Teachers should avoid using idioms if they do not first explain them to ELLs (Usselman et al., 2010), because the direct translation of idioms can be confusing. Idioms can be a motivating factor that makes learning English fun for ELLs when teachers carefully explain them (Reiss, 2008), and they help students to understand more of the English language (Cipriano, 2011). Idioms can be confusing for ELLs, but when used appropriately they can assist ELLs in acquiring English.

Learning the English language also involves difficulties with homonyms. Jack, a very intelligent grade 12 student, experienced confusion when a teacher said, "The car brakes to slow down to a speed of 30 km/h in a time period of 2 seconds." Jack understood that the car "breaks" or that it was broken, which created additional difficulty for him to calculate the car's acceleration. Jack was able to solve the problem once he understood that the car was still functional and only slowed down. Teachers of ELLs have to be careful when using homonyms.

Teachers and ELLs can sometimes misunderstand gestures and body language, due to cultural differences. Teachers may feel that a student who does not make eye contact is not paying attention, when that student may be avoiding eye contact as a show of respect (Usselman et al., 2010). Lawrence attended grade 10 in Esterhazy High School during the 2011-12 school year. Lawrence would never look at the teacher when conversing, presumably because he felt that he was displaying respect for the teacher. ELLs will not usually speak out loud in the first stage of language acquisition, as this silence is the norm when learning a new language (Berg et al., 2012). ELLs display many signals that may be confusing in interpretation for teachers. Teachers need to recognize that these signals may be misleading because of the cultural differences between students and the teacher.

Cooperative group learning can create additional difficulties for ELLs. Some cultures do not use cooperative groups in order to develop projects or solve problems (Usselman et al., 2010). Jim and Allan came to Esterhazy from Taiwan in 2008, and would not work in groups on their grade 11 physics labs. They would not discuss questions with their group members, but preferred to work on their own. Some teachers would see this lack of communication as an act of defiance; however, the students may think that it would be cheating to discuss answers with other students. Once the teacher explained that sharing information was acceptable and necessary in group projects, Jim and Allan were able to distinguish between cheating and collaborating. ELLs require time to learn how to learn cooperatively in a group, and to contribute their ideas in a safe environment without fear of being ostracized or showing disrespect.

## **Strategies**

The many difficulties in working with ELLs can be alleviated by using key classroom strategies, such as visuals. Visuals help students to connect the English words with their thought processes and make meaning of their work (Ely, 2010-2012). Students experience more engagement when teachers post visuals, such as Venn diagrams, story maps, and supporting detail schematics (Bongolan & Moir, 2005). When students are able to focus on the most important concepts immediately upon introduction, they can figure out the important ideas and begin to internalize those concepts.

One specific visual technique that teachers of ELLs can use is "chalk-talk." Teachers who write key vocabulary words on the board facilitate student understanding of those key words (Reiss, 2008). ELLs may have extreme difficulty in distinguishing between words as spoken by their instructors, but have an easier time identifying the words when they are written on the board. Joyce, a grade 11 student, would often write down all terms that were written on the chalkboard. It was apparent that she would look up each term and record its Mandarin equivalent in an effort to learn each term. Joyce was using the visual aid in order to clarify which word may have been spoken. ELLs may hear a specific word and not recognize it, because they may have previously silently mispronounced the word when they read the word to themselves.

Teachers can help ELLs to recognize key words when they write them down for the student to see as they talk about and pronounce these words.

Graphic organizers are another tool for ELLs to demonstrate their understanding of concepts. If the understanding of a concept is more important than the demonstration of that understanding by creating a written report, then ELLs may achieve greater success in using “sequenced pictures” (Reiss, 2008, p. 140). Students who are unable to write formal paragraphs on a certain experiment or topic may be able to explain their ideas using a set of sketches with labels. ELLs often understand a concept but lack the vocabulary to express it in formal writing. This writer has taught many ELLs who were able to create labelled sketches of scenarios over a time period, but could not write a paragraph that explained the scenario. Teachers should encourage ELLs to use a graphic organizer and sketch out a series of steps and key words in order to demonstrate their understanding of a particular process or series of events.

ELLs, who are learning a new language, benefit from having photos, maps, graphs, and sketches in front of them to represent what they are learning. Students may not necessarily know the word for an object that is shown in a photo, but as soon as the teacher speaks the word and refers to the photo, students may understand that word. The concrete representation of the referenced object will also allow students to associate other terms and descriptions that may belong with the object as well (Reiss, 2008). Pictures are universal in language and will help students to correctly match the English name of an object with the object in question.

Teachers should also ensure that they are using media, when appropriate, in the classroom. A videotape or DVD may assist in introducing or reinforcing a concept to ELLs (Reiss, 2008). Teachers should give the students lists of key words to focus their listening on, as some videos can overwhelm ELLs with new vocabulary at a pace that is too fast. Alex, a grade 10 boy from Taiwan, did not like watching some videos because he could not process the speech fast enough. Alex did enjoy using the Internet to research topics on websites, and PowerPoint software in order to provide written support for his presentations. ELLs may require different levels of supporting media: from using a pre-made PowerPoint presentation to using jot notes to debate and justify one point of view (Castaneda & Bautista, 2011). Many ELLs respond positively to interactive learning found on Internet web sites. Teachers can use a variety of media to motivate, encourage, and support student learning in the classroom.

Another visual technique used by teachers and appreciated by students is when teachers bring realia into the classroom. Realia are “real-world objects that illustrate a concept” (Reiss, 2008, p. 77). When teachers use objects that students can see and touch, the students make connections with prior experiences. Realia generate more interest in a topic by being physically present in the room when the discussion takes place, rather than just mentioning a word to which students attach no meaning. A teacher could bring in a copy of a credit card statement in order to teach students about interest and how it is calculated. Students would relate more to the concept of interest because they can see how it is calculated and charged on the statement. Teachers should use realia in order to demonstrate concepts that may be unfamiliar to students, as realia allow concrete connections to be made to pre-existing knowledge.

Performance assessments may be used as a strategy to assist ELLs in demonstrating knowledge. The instructions given for the performance assessment may be a factor in the degree of success experienced by students (Lyon, Bunch, & Shaw, 2012). ELLs benefit from the individual interaction that often accompanies performance assessments in the classroom. Graphics, portfolios, projects, debates, reports, presentations, laboratory tests, and procedures are all examples of performance assessments that ELLs may achieve well on, as compared to a traditional pen and paper test (Bautista & Castaneda, 2011). ELLs should be presented with past projects as exemplars to show the teacher’s expectations and required elements of the project (Reiss, 2008). ELLs can achieve good results on performance assessments, when given the appropriate supports.

Teachers can use other supports in the classroom that are fun for ELLs, such as handheld mobile devices (HMD). When ELLs use HMD, they experience higher levels of engagement in

learning a new concept (Billings & Mathison, 2012). Students who are genuinely interested in what they are learning along with the instructional method will achieve better test results than if they were not interested in the topic. Jill, a grade 10 student, regularly used a Blackberry playbook in class in order to help herself master the content studied in class. She can use applications on the playbook for watching video demonstrations of topics and practicing quizzes. The applications provide an extra level of motivation for her to practise and study course material. Students can use HMD to supplement other resources in the classroom and experience greater achievement when they do.

Another tool that can be brought into the classroom to enhance student learning is the classroom response system (CRS). This writer has used the Senteo clicker CRS in the classroom. Typically, when using CRS students are shown a question and use handheld remotes in order to input their answer. Teachers can encourage students to discuss the answer in small working groups before they select an answer. Immediate feedback is given to correct any misconceptions that students may have about the wrong answers, and the correct answer is reinforced. Student participation and meaning making both increase when students use CRS (Langman & Fies, 2009). Students enjoy using a CRS to learn and demonstrate their knowledge, and students volunteer their answers often when they use the CRS.

Students enjoy working on assignments with their peers, especially if their peers speak the same language. Some schools will train students as peer instructors in the classroom in order to provide supports for ELLs in their primary language. One study showed that discussion in ELLs' first language with peer instructors was effective in increasing achievement for ELLs (Gerena & Keiler, 2012). Peer instructors also used strategies that are effective in assisting ELLs to acquire English content and skills, which also increased achievement in ELLs. Both peer instructors and teachers use strategies to help ELLs in the classroom and students appreciate it, although they would prefer that teachers used these strategies more often (Webster & Hazari, 2009). It is important to consider that ELLs may learn more from their peer interactions than what they learn from the teacher (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). This peer discussion time is a relevant use of time and should not be seen as a waste of instructional time. Peer instructors can be an effective tool that teachers can use in order to help ELLs make deeper connections to the content being studied.

The classroom teacher, peer instructors and educational assistants should work together with the student to develop content-specific vocabulary. Content-specific vocabulary can present challenges to students as they read new and familiar words that are used in unfamiliar ways (Barr, Eslami, & Joshi, 2012). These challenges can be alleviated with direct instruction on key terms that are subject specific. In this writer's experience as a teacher of ELLs, if students encounter enough difficult terms in a reading passage that they do not know, they may become frustrated and give up instead of persisting through the task. Teachers can reduce frustrations when they help ELLs learn subject-specific vocabulary.

## **Conclusion**

In the past, students with a second language were often the responsibility of a second language specialist. With the recent immigration of many families to Canada from countries that do not speak English, the instruction of ELLs has shifted to the classroom teacher. These classroom teachers often feel unprepared to teach ELLs and require some strategies to deal with the difficulties of instructing ELLs. Many strategies presented here relate to good teaching practices that should be implemented in every classroom: using visuals, scaffolding off prior knowledge, and allowing group discussion in the classroom. Technology and real-world objects may be brought into the classroom to generate excitement about learning. ELLs bring many cultural experiences to the classroom, and can contribute unique perspectives and ways of knowing to a class. Teachers can use the strategies mentioned in this paper to assist in teaching ELLs. When teachers embrace the best practices used in teaching ELLs, the students are comfortable and learn more than if they had been taught without these best practices.

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### About the Author

*Blair Drader is currently completing his graduate diploma in curriculum and instruction at Brandon University. He teaches senior mathematics and science at Esterhazy High School for the Good Spirit School Division in Saskatchewan. His wife, Susan, is also attending Brandon University, pursuing her Master of Education in special education.*

# Critical Thinking in a Collaborative Learning Environment

David Schroeder

## Abstract

*Schools need to develop critical thinkers who are learning collaboratively alongside their peers and teachers. With the support of their community, nonacademic values need to be stressed outside the classroom, where students actively engage in social activities to develop their community and increase the value in their education. Combining these two skills and adding the dimension of digital learning and sharing in a global society are critical to meaningful, student-centered learning in education today.*

Cognitive and non-cognitive learning outcomes need to be developed for today's students by collaboratively learning and networking through the involvement of the community in school. Student-centered learning should focus on critical thinking, problem solving, meta-cognition, and solving real-world issues in a global society. Students also need to meet non-cognitive learning outcomes, such as social values and teamwork, by learning collaboratively with their peers. Learning alongside peers is a valuable asset in education, through digitally sharing online as well as working collectively in the classroom. Teachers must emphasize critical thinking to prepare their students for the future, and this must occur in a collaborative learning environment with the aid of digital tools. Learning and communicating in the classroom must reflect the real world in a way that is centered on the students and their interests.

## Community Involvement and Social Development

The education that takes place in the community outside the classroom can fulfil curriculum outcomes in a way that students value and appreciate. The school should open early in the morning and remain open late into the evening for sports teams, drama teams, school bands, and other school activities. Students should visit businesses during class time, to learn the values of banking, insurance, and health care facilities as part of a school-community collaboration that is continuous, rather than simply a one-day event (Sanders, 2003). A hospitable school atmosphere and interaction with the community are important to ensure healthy collaboration whereby students learn real-world values and work-related skills (Harvey & Sanders, 2002; Hunkins & Ornstein, 2012; Newby, 2006). The school needs to be known as a community where learning takes place for many different people throughout the day, and students are taught community and social values.

Students are the future of their community, and they need to have opportunities to build their neighborhood and become active, involved citizens. Students will value the information that they have learned outside the school through fundraisers, field experience, and project work, often more than what they learn in the classroom (Green & Hannon, 2007). Sanders (2003) described field experience as "working with emotionally or physically disabled children, planting community gardens, or assisting with infant care in local hospitals" (p. 169). The community can assist in this development through student-centered job shadowing, mentoring opportunities, and other career-focused activities in which everyone benefits, because an expectation of the school is to prepare the community's future workforce. Students who struggle with academic work must have opportunities to exercise their strengths through streaming into nonacademic programs (Hunkins & Ornstein, 2012; Sanders, 2003). It is beneficial for the community and school to work together to ensure that the school is developing engaged citizens, and the community can play a major role in their development.

Along with the support of the community, parents must be actively engaged with their children's learning and social development inside the school and within the community. Sanders

(2003) referred to family-centered activities as hosting workshops for parents and counselling for families as well as family fun and learning nights. Parents should feel comfortable and welcome within the school, and should be present for more reasons than meeting with teachers about the academic progress of their children. Parents should be involved with supervising and developing community projects that are engaging and develop the curriculum outside of the classroom walls (Hunkins & Ornstein, 2012). Having the support of parents can not be understated because it increases the positive learning climate within a school community, and greatly benefits everyone involved, most importantly their children.

Non-cognitive aspects of school are often the passion of the students, and the reason that they enter the building on a daily basis. Schools must prioritize these popular, non-cognitive outcomes through pep rallies, assemblies, and school pride, along with developing strong morals and good citizens, in order to increase school pride and community (Newby, 2006; Williams, 2008). Activities such as sports teams, music/dance teams, and after school clubs are important because they increase social interaction and community within a school. Teachers must be willing to spend time creating opportunities for students to develop socially through different options that are immersed in a team-building environment. Schools must focus on strengthening their nonacademic programs to develop school pride and community, in order to cultivate a passion among students to attend school.

### **Collaborative Learning, Networking, and Sharing**

In order to learn collaboratively, students must trust and communicate with each other as they study in a team-based learning environment. This is a proven method of learning, when the teacher clearly establishes the dynamics of the group by challenging the students (Chen, Savage, & Vanasupa, 2007). Students working as groups or teams will not reach their potential unless they have clear expectations of how to function as a team. Trust and communication skills are built through exercises to assist in team building. Communication skills are beneficial in all facets of life, and teamwork skills are critical in today's world of collaborative learning and sharing.

Collaborative learning, networking, and sharing are essential to learning and working in today's digital world. Students need to use these skills in an educational setting, in order to learn from their peers, in their community, and around the world in digital networks. Society communicates in a global world due to the advances of technology where instant communication is available over the internet, smart phones, iPads, and so forth. Many students are setting up networks independently, but teachers must set up a space where students can collaboratively share and generate knowledge in a supporting community (Green & Hannon, 2007; Williams, 2003). Sharing information over digital networks is an engaging way to learn and a major influence in learning and communicating, because society creates, shares, and learns collectively as a community (Green & Hannon, 2007; Hakkinen & Hamalainen, 2009). Horizontal learning through networking is a powerful way of learning in a community and is an essential part of a student's learning development.

Reflective learning and sharing are expanding in education today as teachers encourage students to write about their learning through blogs and wikis. These digital spaces allow students to share and develop ideas and reflections within an online global society, compared to the past when teachers would have stored them privately (Entwistle & McCune, 2010; Green & Hannon, 2007). Teachers must empower their students to take control of their learning and engage with stimulating digital tools (Green & Hannon, 2007), rather than filling them with outdated information (Williams, 2003). The format by which students learn in the classroom should mirror the way that students learn outside the classroom, in order to remain relevant in the world.

Students need to be encouraged to develop a digital footprint, which is a digital portfolio of their shared knowledge and learning process. Wikis share a never-ending sequence of learning,

which is a valuable learning tool that should be shared with the digital world (Entwistle & McCune, 2010). As modern society is constantly changing, the process of learning can be seen through this change (Albergaria-Almeida, 2011) as students reflect on their learning and increase their skills through the use of wikis. Web 2.0 includes creating wikis, blogging, and social networking through sites such as Twitter, and is an "architecture of participation such that the service is designed to facilitate mass participation" (Entwistle & McCune, 2010, p. 308). These tools are already part of most students' lives on a daily basis, and it will be a natural transition to use them educationally to tailor the learning process to center around their interests.

Learning is greatly enhanced through collaboration with peers, which makes group work a priority in every classroom to enable students to share their expertise with each other and evaluate each other's work. Teachers will benefit by modelling this type of learning for students, through collaborating with other teachers via networks and sharing their experiences with their students. Nearly all students learn the most in a collaborative group amid their peers, when they have the opportunity to learn in unanticipated ways, with the support of their teacher and family (Durlak, Weissberg, Schellinger, Taylor, & Dymnicki, 2011; Newby, 2006). Within a collaborative learning environment, students share their comprehension and evaluate each other's work as the teacher supports their learning in a structured manner, rather than broadcasting information to them in a lecture format (Reeve, 2009; Williams, 2003). Learning with and from peers in a community setting allows the students to be the experts, and it creates opportunities for them to share their knowledge, ask questions, problem solve, and improve their collective intelligence.

Education is shifting toward horizontal learning between students within a community that values communication skills, and away from a teacher broadcasting a lecture, or "banking," whereby teachers fill their students with knowledge. Horizontal learning between peers is what many children suggest as the central role in their learning (Green & Hannon, 2007), when a community of learners collectively shares information. The main benefit of communal learning is that "a group creates something that exceeds what any one individual could achieve alone" (Stahl, 2004, as cited in Hakkinen & Hamalainen, 2009, p. 871). Communication skills are essential to maximize collaborative learning in the classroom, as are digital networks, and it is the teacher's responsibility to guide the students as they practise their skills. Communication skills are needed to succeed in the workforce today (Sanders, 2003), and their importance will only increase in the future. The teacher acts as the guide and organizer, organizing the students in a way that gives them the best opportunity to learn.

### **Meta-Cognition, Critical Thinking, and Problem Solving**

The emphasis of the work that students collaboratively complete should be on learning, through meta-cognition, as students work through projects by problem solving and critical thinking. Teachers should develop a project plan to assist students in teamwork, communication skills, and evaluation of their work (Chen et al., 2007), in order to maximize their problem-solving skills. The challenge of solving the problem together will activate and engage critical thinking in a learning environment more suitable for students, as opposed to a teacher filling the students with knowledge through a lecture. These aspects of progressive education, which emphasizes teaching how to think rather than what to think (Newby, 2006), can be traced back to John Dewey (Hunkins & Ornstein, 2012). In a world that is constantly in flux, students must be adaptable to change (Ainley & Patrick, 2006); thus, the content of their knowledge is not as important as their ability to think critically and problem solve. Students must be able to apply their critical thinking skills in an adaptable manner, which is similar to worldly situations.

Teachers need to prioritize meta-cognition in order to realize each student's learning potential. Meta-cognition is "the capacity to monitor, evaluate, control and change how one thinks and learns" (Green & Hannon, 2007, p. 56). It offers students the opportunity to apply the knowledge of their learning in an engaging manner, independent of the content. It is an aspect

of school that is currently lacking, but if students are equipped with the capacity to think critically, they will be grow to be informed people who are flexible thinkers (Abdi, 2012; Albergaria-Almeida, 2011; Hunkins & Ornstein, 2012). As students develop their meta-cognition, their skills as critical thinkers and knowledgeable citizens will instill a strong desire to contribute to their own learning development.

Every lesson plan must revolve around real-world problems, and be useful knowledge for changing environments, as students need to be taught the skills that enable them to adapt to change and think in a changing atmosphere. Suresh (2009) stipulated that learning must deter from memorizing knowledge for a test to satisfy a teacher (as cited in Piaw, 2010, p. 551), which is prevalent in today's assessment (Green & Hannon, 2007) because there is no relevance in today's world, where all content is on the internet. Teachers should accentuate constructive questions, along with developing the students' argumentation skills, which are directly associated with creativity and critical thinking (Albergaria-Almeida, 2011; Yeh, 2012), rather than focusing on the answers to questions. (Green & Hannon, 2007; Piaw, 2010). Students will blossom as they focus on the skills that are needed in a changing environment (Green & Hannon, 2007), and think and reflect on their learning in a way that is applicable to the real world. Cognitive abilities, critical thinking, problem-solving skills, and higher order cognitive skills translate into real-world proficiency, and must be the focus of education.

Education teaches a broad range of abilities, which are applicable in the real world in different situations that require creative thinking. Students need to gain confidence through opportunities of solving real-world problems to work out how their knowledge can be applied to work through their troubles (Entwistle & McCune, 2011). The traits of creative thinking, which include generating and producing unique ideas, can be applied to solving distinctive real-world problems, which assist the student in gaining a broad range of abilities that can not be measured through a standardized test (Albergaria-Almeida, 2011; Chen et al., 2007; Piaw, 2010). Students will be more connected and engaged in the learning process if they concentrate on using a variety of expertise in solving real-world problems, rather than memorizing information that they will simply rewrite on a test.

Teachers should model their learning with students, by learning alongside their students as they explore new technology that will be valuable in the future. Teachers should not feel that they need professional development in order to understand all aspects of the technology that they use with students. While it is important that school leaders support and offer professional development to empower their teachers (Green & Hannon, 2007), it is more important that teachers empower students to maximize their learning through technology, even if it means that the teacher learns the technology alongside the students. Teachers would damage students' creative output if they set limitations on the students' use of technology because the teacher was not knowledgeable of its capabilities. The students should use whatever technology they want, but school leaders need to be flexible enough to empower teachers to allow this. Teachers can learn certain aspects of technology collaboratively alongside their students, as they model their own critical thinking in a way that will resonate with students.

The students need to be at the center of their learning, using options to fulfil the learning outcomes of the curriculum, while learning collaboratively with their classmates. As the use of information and communication technology (ICT) increases in education, schools need to focus on employing a learner-centered classroom, which starts with the interests of the students, as they make choices that are meaningful for their learning (Green & Hannon, 2007; Reeve, 2009; Williams, 2008). Students in low achieving environments are more concerned about their teacher's evaluation than they are on learning (Mercer, Perry, VandeKamp, & Nordby, 2010). The focus of education needs to be on learning and on the student, rather than on assessment. Students form a connection with learning that is valued in their eyes. As they decide how to accomplish the outcomes, they are more active and engaged, which is conducive to learning with ICT in open collaborative spaces (Ainley & Patrick, 2006; Hakkinen & Hamalainen, 2010; Reeve, 2009). Student learning and student engagement can be maximized if students are



given control of how to fulfil their learning outcomes through the lens of their own interests as the teacher acts as facilitator and guide.

Students need to be given options about how to fulfil learning outcomes, how to take ownership of their learning, and how to learn collaboratively with their peers, which are valuable skills used toward lifelong learning. They will use devices of the present and future, which is part of taking ownership of their learning, rather than being told what to do, with what resources, and how to do it through the controlling language of a teacher (Beyers et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2007; Hakkinen & Hamalainen, 2010). The teacher will conduct a collaborative learning environment in their classroom where students manage their learning through the assistance and counsel of their teacher.

## Conclusion

Educators must prioritize the student as the center of learning in an environment that concentrates on critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are applicable in the real world. There must be a positive learning climate in the school, with the support of the community, to inspire passionate academic and nonacademic progress in every student and citizen. Communication skills are essential, and will improve as students learn horizontally from one another in the classroom, and share their knowledge digitally over global networks. Schools must promote technology in the classroom and use digital tools to enhance collaborative learning, as teachers give students opportunities to use all available resources for learning. Students will take ownership of their learning as they fulfil learning outcomes revolving around their interests with the support of their teacher, in order to develop their passion in education.

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### **About the Author**

*David Schroeder is in the graduate studies program at Brandon University, pursuing his M.Ed. with a specialization in educational administration. He is currently teaching Algebra II and Business Mathematics at the American Creativity Academy in Kuwait, while travelling the world during his holidays.*

# Effective Classroom Reading Instruction

Kimberly Dallari

## Abstract

*As our literate society becomes aware of the gaps between education and educational achievement, teachers of reading must deliver a superior reading program. To sharpen their skills, teachers of reading must research and educate themselves on essential reading instruction components, useful professional development, the characteristics that define individual students, quality resources, informed and ongoing assessment that guides instruction, and the role of educational technology in their teaching of reading. Learning about, reflecting on, and using these five aspects will enhance the effectiveness of any teacher of reading.*

As a commonly assumed predictor of achievement, reading ability is currently the focus of many parents, teachers, administrators, superintendents, universities, colleges, cultural groups, businesses, and governments. As the public soldiers on the educational front line, teachers are expected to ensure that the majority of citizens are literate enough to sustain the economy and keep society moving forward. To educate and nurture literate, productive citizens, teachers must consider reading instruction components, professional development, individual student characteristics, quality resources, informed and ongoing assessment, and educational technology when establishing effective classroom reading instruction.

## Reading Instruction Components

Effective classroom reading instruction incorporates key teaching points and proven methodologies. The key teaching points include development of phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary building, and comprehension (Caldwell & Leslie, 2009; Limbrick, Wheldall, & Madelaine, 2012; Meier & Freck, 2012). Phonological awareness refers to an ability to distinguish and manipulate different sizes of sounds in oral language (Caldwell & Leslie, 2009). Phonics instruction involves the teaching of letter-sound relationships. Word work that focuses on phonics and increases phonological awareness provides a solid foundation for reading instruction (Limbrick et al., 2012; Slavin, Lake, Davis, & Madden, 2011). Variety in words presented during word work, as opposed to similarity in words presented, increases the possibility of acquired skills and improved application of new skills (Adresen, 2012). Fluency and vocabulary building are the bridge between word work and comprehension. When students are able to read smoothly, automatically reading the words and knowing the word meanings, they are able to comprehend what the text is about. Comprehension, as the sole purpose for reading, is enhanced through the teaching of before, during, and after reading strategies. The five focal teaching points of phonological awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary building, and comprehension are most effectively taught through proven methodologies.

Proven methodologies of effective reading instruction include quality, organization, explicitness, cooperative learning, balance, and enthusiasm. First, quality practices of reading instruction involve teachers who use research-based methods and quality texts suitable for their students (Rosenman & Madelaine, 2012). Second, organized, methodical lessons that focus on the five teaching points are the most effective in teaching students how to read. Third, explicit teaching of reading skills and strategies through modelling, prompting, and practice support student reading success (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001; Lyons & Thompson, 2011). Fourth, establishing cooperative learning opportunities for students to learn from each other through strategic small-group composition reinforces decoding skills and enhances comprehension (Slavin et al., 2011). Fifth, balanced lessons incorporating pre- and post-writing activities, together with opportunities to improve oral language skills, have a positive effect on reading

skills, especially comprehension of a text (O'Sullivan, Canning, Siegel, & Oliveri, 2009; Rosenman & Madelaine, 2012). Finally, inspiring students to be passionate about reading inherently solidifies the skills and strategies students are learning (Reading Rockets, 2011). The proven methodologies of quality, organization, explicitness, cooperative learning, balance, and enthusiasm are best incorporated into the effective classroom practice of guided reading.

The Brandon School Division (BSD) has chosen guided reading as the framework for effective classroom reading instruction (Early Years Literacy, 2008). Guided reading has been part of early years' classrooms for decades, but has only recently been introduced in middle years' classrooms. Most stakeholders in students' reading development have assumed that students can adequately navigate their way through necessary print text when they reach middle years. However, due to the number of students failing to achieve standard expectations in the middle years and high school, "explicit instruction" in reading is necessary in the upper grades as well (O'Sullivan et al., 2009). The BSD has therefore implemented guided reading in several of its best practices literacy documents, and there is a general expectation that guided reading will be part of kindergarten to grade 8 classrooms within a few years (C. Nevill, BSD Literacy Consultant, personal communication, May 29, 2012). This implementation of guided reading will require teachers trained to run quality guided reading programs.

### **Professional Development**

Professional development and ongoing training are vital to the success of an effective classroom-based guided reading program. Teachers of reading require training to plan effective and structured lessons in order to make the most of the time available for reading (Early Years Literacy, 2008; Lyons & Thompson, 2011; O'Sullivan et al., 2009). With only approximately half of the students in the BSD reading at their appropriate grade level, we need qualified teachers of reading (Reading Rockets, 2011). Quality training is necessary to meet the needs of the students, choose appropriate texts, and guide instruction and conversation (Slavin et al., 2011). To augment quality reading instruction, teachers need to find out what resources are available within their school community and keep informed about current research (Meier & Freck, 2012). Whether they be classroom teachers or educational assistants, the best training for teachers of reading involves initial up-skilling, ongoing collaborative sessions with other teachers of reading, opportunities to reflect on teaching, and autonomy in planning and running guided reading groups (Fried, Konza, & Mulcahy, 2012). As the BSD implements mandatory guided reading programs, literacy support teachers and administrators will be responsible for supporting the efforts of the teachers of reading with appropriate training in their pursuit of effective reading instruction. All students deserve well-trained teachers making informed decisions about their reading programs, as reading ability is considered a reliable predictor of achievement in life (O'Sullivan et al., 2009). Teachers must not only be trained in implementing, planning, and running effective guided reading programs in their classrooms, but they must also attend professional development sessions to learn about their students.

### **Individual Student Characteristics**

Teachers of reading will have more success facilitating development of reading skills if they know their students. Educators should find out about their students' reading abilities, preferences, and families before planning effective reading instruction (Meier & Freck, 2012). However, they should avoid any bias that background knowledge may create, concentrating solely on the pursuit of informed, effective reading instruction (Limbrick et al., 2012). Reading teachers need to be prepared to utilize all resources in helping their students achieve reading success (Meier & Freck, 2012). Students' needs and abilities, including diagnosed learning disabilities, are the primary considerations when planning for effective reading instruction, whether students are reading below, at, or above their grade level, or whether they are English

as Additional Language (EAL) students, Aboriginal students, boys or girls, or struggling and disengaged students.

With the rise in immigration in the local community, the BSD teachers of reading must be aware of the unique challenges that EAL students face. The most effective reading instruction for EAL students is highly structured and balanced (Rosenman & Madelaine, 2012), with a strong focus on syntactic features and skills (O'Sullivan et al., 2009). When approaching reading lessons, educators need to be aware that phonological awareness, rapid naming and letter knowledge, oral reading fluency, and morphological awareness are good predictors of reading achievement in EAL students as well as other learners (Rosenman & Madelaine, 2012). Whether students are EAL or English first language, average language ability students do better academically than below average language ability students (BSD, 2008). EAL students benefit from regular, organized, well-planned lessons that focus on grammatical features in text, and that consider pre-assessments of language ability levels.

As is the case with EAL students, Aboriginal students benefit from particular considerations by their reading teachers. For effective reading instruction, teachers should engage Aboriginal students by incorporating their interests in using technology, by honouring and accepting their experiences, and by inviting them to use their awareness of literacy (Pirbhai-Illich, 2010). Meeting Aboriginal students where they are in their reading development and scaffolding further development is the most effective approach to supporting their reading progress. Reading abilities in Aboriginal students will grow in a positive atmosphere if the reading instruction reflects Aboriginal language, culture, and identity (O'Sullivan et al., 2009). Guided reading supports the best way Aboriginal students learn, by incorporating storytelling, observation and imitation, community support, scaffolding, and explicit teaching at their pace with visuals in a collaborative small group enhanced by teacher respect and warmth (Kanu, 2002). The most effective reading instruction for Aboriginal students uses technology, honours their experiences and culture, and incorporates their traditional methods of learning.

In addition to culture, many educators and academics believe that gender should be a consideration when instituting an effective reading instruction program. Effective reading instruction, however, is no different for boys than for girls (Early Years Literacy, 2008; Limbrick et al., 2012). Despite apparent differences in achievement, interactions, or preferences, reading instruction is the same for either gender. Boys and girls do equally well with high quality, effective reading instruction, individualized for their specific skill set and preference in kinds of texts.

Struggling or disengaged students require more specialized consideration to benefit more fully from effective reading lessons, particularly when learning disabilities are involved. First, structured, systematic lessons that move along quickly develop self-esteem and familiarity in struggling students who commonly experience a slower pace of instruction (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). Second, including time at the beginning of a reading lesson to read familiar texts, and giving struggling students time for self-selected reading each day, further supports their reading progress (Caldwell & Leslie, 2009). Rereading known texts and being able to choose books according to personal interests builds confidence in developing readers. Third, engaging lessons focus struggling or disengaged students on acquiring or practicing new skills and strategies. Fourth, student engagement and reading level improve through the use of technology such as Kerzweil. Incorporating technology into extending comprehension exercises or word work enhances positive reading development in struggling and poor students who have little access to technology outside of school (Cheung & Slavin, in press). Fifth, making connections with home and parents or guardians, can be an immense support for struggling students and their reading development (Meier & Freck, 2012). Parents and community programs provide opportunities for struggling students to share and practise their reading skills and abilities. Not only does reading improve with community support from parents or tutoring groups, but small-group effective reading instruction improves classroom behaviour (Early Years Literacy, 2008), which facilitates the learning process. Finally, quality, small-group

reading programs influence behaviour positively, cultivate engagement, and boost confidence in reading and talking about reading, which usually result in an increase in reading level for struggling and disengaged students in a few short months (Lyons & Thompson, 2011). Fast-paced, structured lessons, reading familiar and self-selected texts, technology use, home support, and the comfort of working in a small group, produces positive effects in reading skills, behaviour, interest, and confidence in reading for struggling or disengaged students.

Teachers of reading need to consider the needs and abilities (including learning disabilities) of the different students in their classroom, and one way to meet the needs of a student and develop their reading ability is to get to know them. Each student will have unique background knowledge and a unique learning style. Honing their reading instruction by differentiating for the various needs of EAL students, Aboriginal students, boys or girls, or struggling and disengaged students, will lead educators to appraise the various resources available to them.

### **Quality Resources**

As educators focus on teaching all students to become literate, productive citizens, they must seek out and utilize quality print and human resources. Using high quality texts in reading instruction lessons will engage students (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009), and provide opportunities for students to develop their reading skills in a variety of ways (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Using non-fiction texts, in addition to fictional texts, is vital to developing a complete reading skill set in students (BSD, 2008). Texts must always offer opportunities for students to explore a variety of text features, themes and ideas, language and literary features, content, sentence complexity, and vocabulary (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Teachers of effective reading instruction should become familiar with the people and print resources in their school community (Meier & Freck, 2012), which includes employing the teacher-librarian and using the Internet as dependable sources of information about quality resources (O'Sullivan et al., 2009). Educators need to invite all stakeholders in a child's reading achievement to be supportive and be aware of their part in a child's literacy success (O'Sullivan et al., 2009; Reading Rockets, 2011). With the support of families, communities, and colleagues, teachers should continually assess the types of resources available to them, in order to determine which resources contribute to effective reading instruction for their students.

### **Informed and Ongoing Assessment**

Informed and ongoing assessment of students and resources ensures effective reading instruction. Assessment is critical to the set up and continuation of focused, individualized reading instruction (Lyons & Thompson, 2011) in guided reading sessions. Continuing assessment is necessary for ongoing guided reading groups since students develop at different rates, and it becomes necessary to adjust reading groups to reflect variations in reading development (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). The best teachers observe, take notes, analyze behaviours, and reflect to make informed decisions about their students (Pinnell & Fountas, 2009). Regular authentic assessment informs instruction and reduces the effects of bias in order to have a clear picture of students' abilities and, together with evaluation, provides evidence of reading achievement (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). Feedback of assessment results provides students with an awareness of their skills, challenges, and goals as readers. Assessment focuses individualized instruction, facilitates strategic change in groupings, reduces bias, provides evidence of reading achievement, and helps students to become aware of themselves as readers. Assessment of all aspects of reading instruction also enables educators to incorporate technology, in order to enhance reading instruction.

## Educational Technology

Educators of reading should incorporate educational technology from two perspectives. First, educators must teach students how to interpret our ever-changing technological world. Students need to know how to use the Internet to research, how to utilize programs like Powerpoint and Publisher to present information, and how to communicate responsibly through instant messaging and email (Fountas & Pinnell, 2001). To improve online or digital reading, students need explicit instruction and guidance in navigating the research potential of the Internet to become more effective online readers and avoid unnecessary risks. Social networking does not improve digital reading as much as information-seeking activities do (Gil-Flores, Torres-Gordillo, & Perera-Rodriguez, 2012). Second, educators must consider how technology can enhance the teaching of reading skills. On its own, technology does not make students better readers unless those students have had very limited access to technology outside of school (Cheung & Slavin, in press). The greatest effect on reading development is seen with comprehensive programs wherein technology and teacher instruction are used together. Educators should consider technology that enhances teacher instruction as the ultimate way to use technology. SmartBoards, eBook readers, iPads, laptops, and a plethora of reading software are some examples of educational technology that can be used to enhance reading instruction, engage students in their reading development, and teach students how to become literate, productive citizens.

## Conclusion

As stakeholders in a child's reading achievement debate literacy development, educators focus on teaching students to become literate, productive, global citizens. Classroom teachers running guided reading programs develop confidence and community among their students. By considering reading instruction components, professional development, the defining characteristics of individual students, quality resources, informed and ongoing assessment, and educational technology when establishing effective classroom reading instruction, educators on the front line augment students' reading development.

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### **About the Author**

*Kimberly Dallari recently started her M.Ed. as an ELA specialist in the curriculum and instruction program. Kim currently works in the Brandon School Division as an English as an additional language (EAL) teacher and as a middle years transition teacher focusing on literacy support.*



# **Formative Assessment: Strategies for a High School Mathematics Class**

**Suzanne Sullivan**

## **Abstract**

*Formative assessment has become a focus of classroom teachers as a quick method to assess students' progress in their classrooms. For students to be prepared for summative assessments, it is important to separate the traditional forms of summative assessment from the everyday practice and feedback that is formative assessment. Mathematics teachers can modify current classroom processes to meet the qualities of true formative assessment and, in the process, improve student learning through engagement.*

In the beginning of this author's career as a high school mathematics teacher, there was little discussion about the differences between formative and summative assessment. The focus of assessment was the accumulation of marks, and there was little mention of assessment as a learning tool (Black & Wiliam, 1998). The collection of student achievement data seemed obvious: teach a lesson, give some questions, mark all questions, and record a cumulative mark. In this model, assessment and evaluation was focused on ranking and sorting students from the highest to the lowest achiever, which resulted in some students succeeding and others falling into failure (Stiggins, 2006). Black and Wiliam's (1998) ground-breaking assessment research has caused many educators worldwide to re-evaluate their assessment methods. Adoption of their assessment practices has not been an overnight process or overnight success. This situation raises two key questions: (1) what are the differences between formative and summative assessment? and (2) what are the strategies of formative assessment that can be implemented in a high school mathematics class?

## **Defining Formative Assessment**

Before implementing formative assessment strategies in the classroom, it is important to define clearly the difference between formative and summative assessment. Both formative and summative assessments are required for a course to have balanced assessment ("Summative and Formative Assessment", 2011). Formative assessment is the "formal and informal processes teachers and students use to gather evidence for the purpose of improving learning" (Chappuis, 2009, p. 5). These assessments occur while learning is going on, and the goal is for the teacher to adjust the teaching and the student to adjust the learning, based on the results (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2006). From a mathematics perspective, formative assessment can be used to identify "what students understand, what they are struggling with, and whether a child might need additional diagnostic testing" (Koellner, Colman, & Risley, 2011, p. 49). In contrast, summative assessments are "assessments that provide evidence of student achievement for the purpose of making a judgement about student competence or program effectiveness (Chappuis, 2009, p. 5). These assessments are given occasionally, usually at the end of a unit, term, or course, in order to determine what the student knows at that time (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2012). Summative assessment is used to assign grades, to give a student's standing in the course. It happens after the teaching has been completed, which is often too late for the teacher to make an adjustment to his or her teaching techniques (Stull, Varnum, Ducette, Schiller, & Bernacki, 2011). The major difference between formative and summative assessment is the use of the results in the classroom. Formative assessments are tools to make student learning better, and summative assessments are measuring devices to determine what learning has occurred.

## Strategies for Formative Assessment

Once a clear understanding of formative assessment is reached, a teacher can begin to implement specific formative strategies into the classroom. The strategies of formative assessment that a teacher uses in his or her classroom encourages better learning and understanding (Chappuis, 2009). Many of the strategies already used in the classroom can be adapted to be used as formative assessment. The utilization of the results of the assessment is what will distinguish these activities as formative. Formative assessment in the mathematics classroom encourages students to become active participants in their own learning, and this participation enables quality learning in the form of “considering, proposing, testing and applying mathematics concepts” (Jones, Vermette, & Jones, 2012, p. 172). Four strategies that can be implemented into a mathematics classroom include good questioning, providing feedback, setting examples of desired work, and self-assessment (Stiggins et al., 2006). The author has chosen the four strategies listed above to implement in her high school mathematics classes, and the students have accepted these new practices in their daily routine.

The strategy of asking good questions will help teachers to lead students through their learning, as opposed to dictating the learning that is to take place. Asking good questions seems like an obvious expectation of all teachers in any classroom, yet many times this practice has been ineffective in promoting student learning (Davis & McGowen, 2007). In mathematics, there is a need for a deeper understanding of simple procedures that are combined to form more difficult concepts (Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall, & William, 2004). It is important to create questions that will help students to link simple concepts such as adding, multiplying or factoring, to more complex strategies such as finding the maximum height of a projectile at a certain time. Often when a question is asked to students in a classroom setting, one of two things happens: either the brightest student answers the question right away, or there is silence which is quickly filled by the teacher who provides the answers (Black et al., 2004; Davis & McGowen, 2007). Taking the time to create good questions will engage students in their own learning, and the responses provided by the students also help the teacher to determine the level of understanding from the students.

A number of different strategies can be used to improve questioning in the classroom. To develop good questioning practices, the teacher needs to take the time to create questions that push student answers beyond recall (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007). Teachers must also give students time to formulate an answer for themselves, rather than getting it from the teacher or another student (Black et al., 2004). After asking a question, it is important to take a step back and be content with the silence that may follow. To be effective, good questioning strategies should be integrated directly in a lesson, instead of being a stand-alone activity (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007). The author has used good questioning strategies in her classroom to engage students in what they are learning by asking one or two “big questions” (Black et al., 2004, p. 12) about the topic to be discussed in that class, before the lesson has begun. This strategy encourages the students to discuss what they already know about the topic. This discussion is an important part of being involved in their learning (Black & William, 1998). A change to the classroom dialogue can be an effective form of formative assessment, but to occur, a teacher needs to examine the imperfection of past practices and spend time refining questions and practices to encourage the desired discussion.

Setting out clear learning expectations and demonstrating what acceptable work for student submission looks like is another strategy in formative assessment. Often, students are not provided with samples of the type of work a teacher is expecting. When given the opportunity to see ahead of time the work that is expected from them, students have a clear understanding of the teacher’s expectations (Chappuis, 2009). An important strategy in formative assessment is to take the time to work with students, in order to identify what good learning looks like by providing samples of student work that is both strong and weak. In this author’s experience with the grade 9-12 Manitoba mathematics curriculum, the need to demonstrate to students a clear

expectation of work has become important. Students are being asked, more than ever, to communicate mathematically and they are being asked to explain in words what their mathematical calculations mean (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2009). To help students understand what a quality response to an explanation question might look like, the author has developed a set of examples that demonstrate a full-marks response, a part-marks response, and a no-marks response. These examples alone are not enough information for students. Students need to be involved in the discussion process of why each sample would receive which grade. Provided with a clear idea of what the teacher's expectations are, as well as setting their own expectations for what a strong answer might look like, only continues to strengthen the students' involvement in the assessment process.

Providing students with comprehensive feedback, rather than just a final grade, will improve student learning by focusing students on the learning outcomes, rather than a final mark. Sharing feedback with the students is a key component to formative assessment (Garrison & Ehringhaus, 2007). The results of providing students with feedback include making clear the areas that require improvement and drawing attention to the outcomes that have been successfully achieved (Stull et al., 2011). Providing feedback to students is a far more effective way of improving student learning. A review of the research on feedback used in the classroom has found "improved performance in 60% of the studies" (Black et al., 2004, p. 18). Feedback in mathematics is traditionally accompanied by a grade and often "purely formative feedback is rare" (Havnes, Smith, Dysthe, & Ludvigsen, 2012, p. 23). For feedback to be effective, it should not be combined with a grade, as students will not focus on comments when grades are also provided (Black et al., 2004). The sharing of feedback from teacher to student through unmarked assignments is a difficult strategy to implement in the classroom because it takes time on the teacher's part to provide consistent feedback, and it takes time for students to accept feedback instead of a mark. Assigning a grade to a completed assignment is a natural process for most teachers, and for students grades have long been the main motivation for completing an assignment (O'Connor & Wormeill, 2011). To be successful in using feedback in the classroom, teachers need to become practised in producing comments that give clear and insightful information about the students' progress, and students need to be given the opportunity to respond to that feedback.

Using self-assessment in the classroom can not only be a valuable form of formative assessment, but can also help the teacher to stay on top of student progress. If students can understand the criteria set out in front of them, and can determine what they need to do to be successful, they can achieve the learning goals set out for them. Using self-assessment in the classroom is an important part of student learning (Black et al., 2004). A suggested strategy to implement self-assessment in the classroom is a system of traffic lights: "red, yellow, green" (Black et al., 2004, p. 14). This strategy has been used in two ways in the author's mathematics classroom: as a way of self-assessing homework and as a review before a summative assessment. For the purpose of homework checks, students are asked to evaluate how they feel that they progressed through the assigned questions, using red to represent no understanding, yellow to represent a general understanding but with assistance required, and green representing complete understanding of the concept. The students who have recorded a red require immediate intervention before moving on to the next topic, and the students who have recorded yellow are monitored, and provided assistance when necessary. For the purpose of preparing for summative assessments, students are given a red, yellow, and green math block. As questions are presented for review, students are asked to reflect on their level of understanding of the concept being reviewed. As the teacher circulates throughout the classroom, his or her attention can be focused on the students who are presenting red or yellow. Self-assessment is an important skill for a teacher to develop with his or her students, but it can also be used as a simple, time-saving strategy during homework review or test preparation.

## Conclusion

Through reflection and investigation, teachers can implement a system of formative assessment in their own classroom. After establishing the content of the course, teachers need to spend time organizing strategies for assessing student progress. The goal, as the teacher, should be to find a balance between formative and summative assessments in the classroom. To be successful, formative assessments must involve cooperation between the teacher and the students, and its purpose is to identify to both student and teacher where the learning should go from there. Formative assessment should not be an isolated event in the classroom. It should be integrated in everyday classroom life. Students should use formative assessment to prepare for the summative assessments that will take place in the course. Within formative assessment there lies flexibility for teachers to give the strong students the praise and support that they desire, while building the confidence of the struggling student. There are a number of strategies that can be used to implement formative assessment into the high school mathematics classroom. Teachers need to find a balance of activities that work for them and their students. The strategies suggested in this paper have worked in the author's mathematics classroom, and new strategies are continually experimented with as the author's comfort with formative assessment grows.

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### **Biography**

*Suzanne Sullivan is currently a grade 9-12 mathematics teacher at Vincent Massey High School in Brandon, MB, and plans to complete her M.Ed. in curriculum studies. She has lived in Brandon for the past 10 years, and with her husband is raising two children.*

# Intellectual Property Rights, Copyright Law, and Technology: Implications for Online Course Development

Clark Gawletz

## Abstract

*There is a need for a balanced approach to the notion of intellectual property rights (IPRS) and the development of online courses in higher education. Emerging digital technology has created challenges involving IPRS policy advances, resulting in an environment that lacks clear and cogent legal definitions of how copyright law is applied to the development and use of online courses in higher education. Two landmark Supreme Court of Canada decisions concerning the concept of fair dealing illustrate the need to consider the rights of users of digital content in course development, in concert with the concerns of the course creators.*

The development of online courses in post-secondary education has resulted in a major shift in the delivery of higher learning programs. Entire institutions, such as Athabasca University in Alberta, are predicated on distance education using digital technology. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century model of higher education, instructors may be required to build their course offerings in a digital format, often with links and postings from other online sources (such as resources in a library database). The use of digital technology has revolutionized the way that information can be accessed and used. However, it has also created an environment of uncertainty in terms of the legal ramifications concerning creators, and users, of intellectual property. Intellectual property rights (IPRS) have provided a valuable instrument for academics interested in maintaining ownership for the work they have produced at institutions of higher learning. Conversely, many university and college faculty are dependent on resources and course materials that are, in turn, subject to IPRS conventions. In today's digital environment, the ability to navigate the often uncharted waters of IPRS requires diligence and an understanding of the concept of copyright.

Copyright is an integral component of IPRS, and forms the basis of legal dealings associated with IPRS. According to the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT, 2011), "Copyright protects the interests of creators, owners and users of expressive works such as art, literature, film and music. It is a limited set of rights, not a grant of absolute control" (p. 1). Harris (2001) provided an explanation of copyright law as an aspect of intellectual property rights:

Copyright law is one area of a larger body of law called 'intellectual property.' The word "intellectual" is used to distinguish it from "physical" property. Intellectual property law refers to and protects the intangible or intellectual nature of an object, whereas physical property law refers to and protects the tangible or physical aspect of an object. (p. 1)

Presently, a debate exists between two constituents, creators and users, about the legality of what falls under the concept of fair dealing. CAUT (2008) defined this term as "the right to access and use part or all of a work in certain circumstances. There is no precise formula stating exactly what fair dealing is, but the law is guided by the nature, character, purpose and amount of use" (p. 2). Recent developments in digital technology have caused the traditional view of copyright to become, to some extent, an antiquated notion. Although the phenomenon of online course delivery is considered a relatively recent development in education, the challenge for instituting intellectual property rights mirrors the growth of the World Wide Web as an access point for information.

In an article published in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Maxwell and McCain (1997) offered the following observation regarding the relationship between copyright and the expansion of educational technology as a mode of instruction:

Copyright was founded in a transmissional view of communication, with its emphasis on freezing intellectual creativity in a tangible form of some permanent media, centralized control of access and distribution through a gatekeeper, and a linear view of the interaction between sender and receiver. Contemporary communication media are disrupting this arrangement. (p. 156)

The disruption that Maxwell and McCain referred to forms the crux of the debate. Digital technology now provides anyone with access to an online computer the means to wade into the mire of potential copyright woes, either as a creator or as a user. This situation results in a sort of unfettered virtual landscape where one is limited only by imagination. As Craig (2010) argued, "In our digital environment, facilitated by new technologies and their accessibility, the transformative use of cultural content – mixing, mashing (re)making and disseminating – is increasingly fundamental to the processes of cultural engagement and democratic participation" (p. 187).

As a result, it is important that academics teaching and developing online distance education courses become aware of the vagaries of IPRS, and the impact of copyright law on the use of education technology utilized to deliver courses and programs in an online environment. The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of intellectual property rights, and, in particular, copyright law, in relation to online course development. I hope to provide background information about recent Supreme Court of Canada decisions regarding copyright law, and how these cases have influenced the present state of creating digital environments for course delivery. My intention is to present a summary of copyright law in the literature, especially the idea of fair dealing in terms of copyright, and the often conflicting view of creators and users of digital information in the present environment. Finally, I intend to illustrate how my own experience has influenced my view of intellectual property rights, and my notion of a balanced approach to the development of copyright laws.

## **Background**

The development of a connected world has created a myriad of challenges for almost every aspect of daily life, including the delivery of higher education. As advances in Internet-based academic databases and search engines produced quicker and more complex methods of accessing, processing, and delivering information, IPRS and copyright policies became increasingly outdated. Maxwell and McCain articulated a warning that traditional notions of copyright were insufficient to deal with the dynamics of digital technology. More importantly, they drew attention to the necessity of considering the rights of users in concert with the rights of producers of educational resources. They were particularly concerned with establishing parameters regarding the controlled flow of information. In a prophetic statement, Maxwell and McCain (1997) contended, "Copyright represents a delicate balance between society's need to access important and enriching material and the rights of the creators. As technology transforms the means for creating and exchanging information, the challenges to copyright carry serious implications for education" (p. 141).

Indeed, Maxwell and McCain's assertions that technology would prove to be a major challenge for enforcement of copyright law have been justified by current trends. The number of courses and programs offered by post-secondary education institutions has increased exponentially in the past decade. Universities and colleges now provide an increasingly diverse group of programs and disciplines, from continuing education classes to doctoral programs. Open source software, and the collaborative nature of Web 2.0 applications, illustrate the impact technology has played in creating a less-than-clear picture of what constitutes infringement of copyright. Developing policies that consider all variables in building an online course has become a challenge, owing to the rapid expansion of web-based information, open source

software, and the nature of technological change. The expansion and ubiquity of the use of digital applications in modern society have left legislators of copyright policy scrambling to keep pace with technology. Irving (2010) stated, "Since 1997, Canada has acknowledged that its copyright laws need to be updated to attain relevance in the age of digital technologies and the Internet" (p. 141).

The contemporary state of copyright in Canada can trace much of its existing influence to two influential legal cases concerning the perceived infringement of copyright (although the circumstances were quite different). These particular Supreme Court of Canada rulings set the tone for recognizing the rights of users of creative material in the early part of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The main theme of both cases is the movement of the Court's interpretation of copyright toward the notion of fair dealing for both creators and of users of material covered by copyright. A term that occurs in much of the literature is "balance," an element that was lacking before these decisions were handed down by the Court. The main benefit from the rulings is that the rights of users has been accounted for, providing a strong statement from the Court that modern society must examine the nature of copyright from both the creator's and user's perspective.

The first case, *Thèberge v. Galerie d'Art du Petit Champlain*, was a ruling from a Supreme court decision dating from 2002 that involved renowned Quebec artist Claude Thèberge. As Chan (2009) stated, "The case dealt with a copyright infringement claim in which lawfully purchased posters of the plaintiff's artwork had been chemically transferred onto canvas backing and resold by the defendant" (p. 244). Chan (2009) wrote of the balance arrived at in the *Thèberge* ruling:

After *Thèberge*, copyright is better understood as a system of dual objectives, providing incentives for authors by rewarding them for their efforts, while also providing adequate access for users and encouraging a strong public domain. Such a conception is a considerable departure from earlier notions of copyright as a regime with a single objective of protecting authors rights. (p. 245)

One can sense the Court's movement toward a balanced approach in the *Thèberge* judgement. This was considered a ground-breaking decision, owing to the consideration of user's rights in the copyright equation. Gervais (2009) summarized the importance of the case in terms of users of particular types of works:

The court tells us that users, who are also very often owners of copies of protected works, have "rights," exceptions that limit the reach of the authors exclusive rights. It is the combination of both sets of rights that creates the appropriate "balance" in copyright law, that is, a level of protection that sufficiently protects authors and other owners of copyright. (p. 446)

The second judgement occurred in the 2004 Supreme Court of Canada case *CCH Canadian Ltd. v. Law Society of Upper Canada*. The particulars of this case dealt with a group of legal book publishers contesting the Ontario Bar's Great Library's policy of providing photocopying of various types of legal works to its members. As Gervais (2009) explained,

The court had to decide whether the photocopies were reproductions of (original) works and, if so, whether copyright had been infringed. The court found that most of the material were original, but that the photocopies were not infringing because the Bar could invoke the fair-dealing exception of research (on behalf of its patrons). (p. 443)

The Court's ruling was a landmark decision for users of copyright material, and built upon the work set down in *Thèberge*. Together, these cases provide the framework for the development of further changes to copyright legislation, including Bill C-32, an act to amend the



Copyright Act (AUCC, 2011). Craig (2005) commented, "The *CCH* decision at the Supreme court represents the first occasion on which a Canadian court has taken the public interest side of the copyright 'balance' seriously when defining and applying the originality standard" (p. 425).

## Research

I conducted a review of the literature using a variety of sources, including several databases. I analyzed articles, books, Supreme Court of Canada decisions, and publications from professional organizations in relation to their relevance to the topic and their usefulness as examples of educational design research. These sources fall into the categories of intellectual property rights, copyright legislation, especially in relation to fair dealing, and future challenges for IPRS and online course development. The information acquired through the review of the literature had to meet several criteria. First, the material was from peer-reviewed journals or from established, reputable education publishers. Second, the information was obtained from relatively recent sources, owing to the topic of copyright matters and emerging educational technology. Finally, the majority of the sources portray the Canadian context of the subject matter, owing to the implications for online course development related to my own experience.

Several authors emerged as invaluable sources of information regarding balanced copyright policy in the Canadian context. D'Agostino, (2008), Chan (2009), and Gervais (2009) have all contributed important work about a topic that has become a critical factor in public discussion, owing in part to the spread of digital technology. In particular, Carys Craig, an associate professor of law at York University's Osgoode Hall Law School in Toronto, has produced an extensive body of work on intellectual property matters concerning copyright laws, the Supreme Court of Canada ruling in the *Thèberge* and *CCH* cases, and explanations of fair dealing and the ramifications of implementing anti-technology.

## Discussion: Implications for Education

The development of intellectual property rights policy has important ramifications for online course development in terms of course content and ownership issues. The direction of copyright legislation will have a significant impact on the types of information available to instructors for use in their course offerings. The nature of online course delivery itself is also a point of contention. Mann (2009) commented, "There can be no such thing as 'typical intellectual property ownership in online distance education', because there is no such thing as 'the typical distance education course'" (p. 1). The movement toward open source course material and creative commons licensing agreements will also play a role in the way faculty deal with creating online courses. As Mann (2009) stated, "The most commonly used type of Creative Commons license is the attribution license in which the author licenses all scholarly uses or just nonprofit scholarly and research uses of their work and requires that when the work is used, she receives attribution" (p. 4). This type of solution to the copyright dichotomy has been championed by some as a means to alleviate contentious situations surrounding present copyright challenges. Although this is an important element in further research involving this topic, the notions of solutions such as "copyleft" (Murray & Trosow, 2007) are beyond the scope of this article.

During my research for this article, I was mostly successful obtaining access to the resources I wanted to use to build my topic, and, ultimately, present my case. However, I was stymied on more than one occasion by sites that would not allow me access to scholarly papers that I thought could contribute to my research, or, at a minimum, my general knowledge on my chosen subject matter. As an individual who enjoys the research component of academic study, these instances are frustrating examples of the over-judicious use of copyright to protect a piece of work. It also makes me appreciate the sites that do allow access to scholarly works, and the importance of fair dealing with academics interested in pursuing further knowledge on a given topic. As Craig (2010) contended,

By creating the necessary breathing space in the copyright system, the fair dealing defence acknowledges the collaborative and interactive nature of cultural practices, recognizing that copyright-protected works can be used, copied, transformed, and shared in ways that actually further – as opposed to undermine – the purposes of the copyright system (p. 177).

The movement toward blended and online delivery of educational instruction is at an interesting crossroad in terms of intellectual property rights policy development. As online courses become more prevalent, and increasingly offered as an alternative to traditional face-to-face program delivery, there will be greater need to produce clear policies concerning intellectual property rights. As Irving (2010) cautioned,

Copyright reform in Canada is an urgent matter. The law of copyright has not kept pace with technological advancements. The law as it currently stands embodies an outdated statute which was written prior to, and not for, the digital world. Accordingly, the law provides insufficient guidance to creators and content users as to their respective rights - it no longer adequately safeguards the interests it was created to protect. (p. 141)

A major point of contention, in terms of issues such as fair dealing with regard to copyright and the use of digital locks to prohibit access to particular works, is the idea that each side of the debate has particular rights and responsibilities to consider. Vaver (2007) observed, “We should recognize that copyright owners have duties as well as rights. Among these duties are the provision of fair access to content at fair and non-discriminatory prices” (p. 750). Ultimately, intellectual property rights policy must consider all actors in the process of online course development. In the post-secondary situation, there are potential disputes between faculty and administration. Kranch (2008) outlined a potential solution to the challenge faced by the various actors within institutions of higher learning:

Granting intellectual property rights of distance education materials to the sponsoring institution best preserves the institution’s investment of staff, resources, and name. Including in this ownership the provision that authoring faculty retain the perpetual right of use, augmentation, and remuneration best preserves the faculty member’s investment of creativity. With these two principles as the foundation, the interests of both administration and faculty can be served, with the details concerning the use of distance education property decided by a negotiated committee decision at the local institution. (p. 355)

My own experience developing online courses has provided me with some insight into this dynamic. The standard bearer for distance education at Brandon University has traditionally been the Brandon University Northern Teacher Education Program. It began in 1974 as a two-year teacher education degree, and now offers a three-year Bachelor of Arts (BA) along with a two-year After Degree (AD) in Education to students in rural and remote locations. In late summer of 2009, I collaborated with a BUNTEP travelling professor to build an interactive course blog for a comparative native music course. A dozen students required a third year Native Studies course, and the instructor intended to mail out a set of readings and a small text. I approached her to inquire about putting the course in an online format, and she agreed to provide the content for a web-based platform designed to host the course. I was able to use her material (including digitized music and a link to a text she had written) on a blog I designed to accommodate her entire course. The course, the first stand-alone online course ever offered by BUNTEP, was a success. It was launched again in the fall of 2010, with all nine students enrolled successfully completing their coursework.

My role consisted of creating an environment that could host a course dealing with music in an online milieu. I was able to accomplish this using freely available web 2.0 applications. I worked on the blog during work hours, using the instructor's intellectual property. The instructor provided all the content, including music and a text that were protected by copyright. Ostensibly, this course is her own, as she developed the course based on her own research, recordings, and publications. Nevertheless, I "own" the WordPress blog site that hosts this course – the domain name belongs to me, along with several other BUNTEP online courses. However, I do not view my ownership as a means to reap any sort of financial benefit for my work. The exercise made me realize that the digital world has in some ways surpassed previous notions of copyright. My perspective is that it is beneficial to create resources that allow the most people to benefit from creative work. Once again, there needs to be a balance between compensating creators without building impediments to users.

In conclusion, the topic of intellectual property rights, in concert with the concepts of copyright and fair dealing, requires a more in-depth discussion than the scope that this article is able to provide. When considering the overarching theme of intellectual property rights and their implications for online course development, the term *balance* emerges in much of the literature. Indeed, there is a need to establish an agreeable degree of balance in the realm of copyright. Both *Thèberge* and *CCH* rulings have succeeded in moving the discussion toward favourable involvement of the user in the IPRS equation. As Chan (2008) observed, "Recognizing that a healthy copyright balance includes user rights, is crucial to enabling a more open and flexible interpretation of copyright" (p. 248). However, there is pressing need for all individuals in academia, and particularly those involved in online learning, to become familiar with the present state of IPRS and digital technology. In the field of education, the evolution of a connected world will demand our attention.

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### **About the Author**

*Clark Gawletz is currently employed as a bookstore assistant at Brandon University Campus Books. Clark's M.Ed. thesis is focused on the use of a social networking site to develop communities of practice in higher education. He spends his leisure time reading, playing piano, and skiing with his seven-year-old daughter.*

# Transition of International Students in Post-Secondary Institutions in Canada

Blessing Emadedor

## Abstract

*This article develops an understanding of international students' transition in Canada throughout their study period in post-secondary institutions. The author reveals how well international students cope with cultural differences and adjust to new lifestyles and the new educational environment that presents them with new challenges, and the support systems available to them by the institutions. He also discusses culture shock, cultural perception, and the importance, need, and benefits of having international students in Canada. The experience of international students in other countries is reviewed, as well, and the writer (who also is an international student) shares his personal experience.*

I believe that Canada has an educational system that is of sufficient quality to attract foreigners or international students. According to Savage and Kane (2002), "The Canadian Bureau for International Education (CBIE) is dedicated to keeping international education on the agenda of Canada's political and academic leaders, and to forging academic links of value to Canada with individuals, organizations, and institutions across the globe" (p. 2). International students are a vital component in Canada's education. As international students, we contribute immensely to the academic internationalization, economic development, and cultural exchange in institutions like Brandon University. We are a strong link between different countries and provide local students with avenues of communication exchange with other cultures. However, we go through a transitional process that I, who also am an international student, refer to as metamorphosis. Metamorphosis is used here to describe the transition and transformation of a caterpillar to a butterfly. The transition process is overwhelming, complete, positive, dynamic, and transformational. Just as the caterpillar goes through that change process to become a butterfly, it is a full and complete cycle of dynamic and life changing experience.

## Culture Shock

We can not talk about the transition we go through, without talking about the culture shock involved in the process. According to Pedersen (1995), "culture shock is the process of initial adjustment to an unfamiliar environment" (p. 10). The difficulties that we face in our transition as international students affect our life experiences and academic achievement. We must be able to rise above the difficult circumstances and transition successfully, so that we can reach our academic goals. Having a good understanding of the difficult circumstances we are faced with as international students and how to best deal with them can reduce culture shock and anxiety, and make our transition smooth and successful. We have different strategies and levels of ability in acclimatizing to our new environment. Jimenez and Lechnitz (2003) stated that it was important for "international students to evaluate their circumstances and makes decisions on how to best handle the situations" (p. 5). Wang (2009) found that "resilient characteristics gauge one's ability to cope with change" and that "adjusting to university life is a major change for international students" (p. 38). He also found that international students who are more resilient adjust to change better than others. We face many changes in many aspects of our lives, such a geographical location, culture, politics, weather conditions, food, language, behavioural patterns and values, social interactions, and educational systems.

## **Cultural Perception**

How people of other culture, race, colour, and gender are perceived in Canada plays a big part in the whole transition process, because the perception of a people affect their attitude and disposition toward life. If we are not perceived in a positive way by Canadians, we will not be welcomed openly and such attitudes would definitely show how we do not belong here. Such could go a long way in making our transition as students even more difficult and stressful. However, if we are positively perceived and wholeheartedly welcomed, our transition journey will be very fast, enjoyable, and more rewarding. I have discovered that the experiences we gain on our journey are even more rewarding than what we gain at the end of the day when we arrive at our destinations. Those experiences are what make us what we are in life. When a university accepts international students, should it also accept the responsibility and duty to provide services and facilities to meet their special needs and requirements in order to ensure a smooth transition and a successful academic journey? I ask this question because getting integrated into the university social network system, and transitioning successfully through the whole process, takes a lot to accomplish. The role of an institution in helping to make the process easy and enjoyable is very crucial, because most, if not all, of us have not been trained or prepared to live in a foreign country. The experiences are different for each individual. It is like playing a role you have not been scripted for. You will never be able to determine how well you will do in such role until you actually get involved and start playing it. However a positive perception of a people can help them make a smooth transition.

## **The Importance of International Students in Canada**

The transition of international students is especially important to Canadian colleges and universities, because Canada now has a market for international students. International students contribute immensely to the economy of Canada, and also help to create a more diversified society in terms of culture in different parts of the country. It becomes a matter of great importance to find out how we do as international students in terms of the process we transition through and how they affect us and help us to evolve and become acclimatized and transformed in the system. When we come as international students, we bring with us global perspectives, different cultures, values, experiences, and some level of knowledge and information that are relevant to the society. Canadian universities and government have made tremendous efforts and have progressed greatly in encouraging us to come to Canada to study. They have attracted us through their comprehensive academic programs, scholarship opportunities, and immigration policies. It becomes paramount to write about international students, so that the post-secondary institutions in Canada can even further expand and increase the influx of international students by making deliberate efforts to encourage and improve the services provided for international students as they affect their present conditions, not only to attract and retain them as students, but to make them great ambassadors of the institutions.

The purpose of this paper is to develop an understanding of the academic, social, physical, and economic transitions that we as international students experience in Canada. We constitute a significant portion of the population of students in Canadian post-secondary institutions. We have difficult times adjusting to Canada's educational system due to the difficulties we face, such as linguistic, academic, interpersonal, emotional, cultural, social, and financial problems. As international students, we come to Canada with very high expectations, because we hear good things about Canada and its educational system. We hear that it has a reputation as one of the world's most developed countries, in terms of its capacity to generate wealth, its provision of services, its economic stability, and its traditions of peace, compassion, and fairness. We also hear that it is ranked as one of the best places in the world to live and its education quality is one of the best in the world. It therefore behooves us to examine the issues faced by us

international students in our transition to living and learning in Canada. We need to address the challenges and determine how the institutions could improve on the provision of support services. The goal is to help us to acclimatize and integrate faster and better into the Canadian educational system, as well as the society at large, in order for us to be successful in our educational pursuits.

## **Difference in Culture**

I perceive Canada as a rich country that has the ability to attract the brightest minds from any part of the world. My experience so far proves that Canadian institutions place a high premium on the educational excellence of its students. However, as Lochhead (2003) explained, "Upon arrival in Canada, immigrants experience a `transition period` a period of time in which they must establish their self- sufficiency within the social structure," (p. 2). He also further explained that finding a place to live, and learning and adapting to new laws and regulations are of critical significance to all international students, because they are individuals who are culturally different. According to Bentley (2008), international students experience sharp changes in cultural habits, language, and environmental surroundings, and are as well faced with unique adjustment issues in the process of living and learning in the new environment. Bentley (2008) also noted that international students upon arrival find a place to live, register for classes, get a social insurance number, get a driver's license, and become used to the transportation system.

Post-secondary institutions help international students in learning how to adjust to their new cultural environment through orientation activities that help them in understanding the cultural differences, so as to be able to stay focused in the pursuit of their educational goals. One of the biggest challenges I was faced with before coming to Canada was being told by the university that I would have to find my way to Brandon from Winnipeg, when I asked whether there were any airport reception and conveyance arrangements by the university. If the situation were reversed such that a Canadian citizen would be coming to study in my home country of Nigeria, there would be a formal reception for the newcomer, and transportation would be only the first step in making the international student feel welcome. When we understand the difference in culture, then we are able to understand, appreciate, and form the right perspective of the culture here, which eventually engenders a feel at home mindset. Thomson, Rosenthal, and Russell (2006) highlighted the factors that influence international students` adjustment to the host culture as background variables such as the difference between the culture of origin and host culture, language proficiency, gender, age, education level, status, self-esteem, and prior cross-cultural experience. They also highlighted situational variables such as length of stay, the information and support provided, social interaction with host nationals, networking with co-cultural, academic or professional performance, and physical health.

## **International Students in Canada**

According to Khwaja and Bosselman (1990), "the process of adapting to a new culture is crucial to international students" (p. 76). They also noted that "most international students come from educational systems where they were accustomed to speaking in class only when they were asked or called on, and they have little or no contact with faculty outside class" (Khwaja & Bosselman, 1990, p. 76). This shows that international students require different approaches to assist them in their adjustment to the host country`s educational system. Butcher and McGrath (2004) discussed the academic needs of international students with respect to their proficiency in English and ability to understand textbooks and their lecturers. They lack an understanding of nonverbal communication, and experience difficulty in responding to the socratic mode of teaching, especially if they have been educated in rote-learning and taught not to question authority. They had difficulty in understanding questions, assignments, and research skills. They

may be unable to communicate effectively in English for academic purposes in order to attain good marks, and have attendant difficulties surrounding plagiarism and cheating, together with a lack of cultural connectedness with the material being presented to them. It is important to help international students with everything they need to adjust and succeed in their new environment.

According to Popadiuk and Arthur (2004), international students in Canada deal with a wide variety of transition issues throughout their sojourn. Amundson (1999) discussed his experience working with international students who had just arrived Canada and the difficulties they faced in adjusting to academic and residence life at the University of Regina. He stressed how the difficulties almost led to suicidal feeling, physical aggression, communication problems, and social withdrawals. He also noted the considerable differences in accessing social support networks in the university and community, and how some of the students were left with their own coping strategies such that each one who succeeded was entirely dependent on his or her own gender and ethnic lines.

International students are faced with the challenge of adapting to new lifestyles, different values, and a new pace of living, while dealing with communication problems and social adjustment issues. The refinement of our attitudes and thoughts as we journey through life is what gives us the initiative to profoundly embrace the change that life brings. According to Kirk (2009), transitions are an individual's personal response to change in his or her environment. How the individual responds to a change or transition process is dependent on how prepared the individual has been. One can not sail through a transition process successfully without the right attitude, because it is a very challenging process of growth and development. The process is also filled with pain and tears sometimes; courage, perseverance, patience, not giving up, self-motivation, determination, believe in oneself, and hope are all needed to sail through successfully.

Parsons (2000) reported that Memorial University, due to a decline in enrolment, took an "aggressive initiative in creating the office of student recruitment and promotion, with the purpose of promoting the university locally and internationally" (p. 12). According to Cameron (2006), international students are recognized for the internationalization of Canadian universities, cultural diversity, educational enrichment, institutional revenues, and the economy. Canada witnessed an increase of 59,000 international students in 2001 (Cameron, 2006, p. 2). This marked a new phase in the influx of international students to Canada. There is a very high level of competition for the intake of international students among developed countries. Therefore, it is important in a university setting that the faculty, administrators, and residence professionals who work with students understand the nature of the cross-cultural transitions, and the experiences that these students have in their university life. They are faced with the realities of transitioning through different lifestyles, a changed pace of living, and communication problems, in addition to fundamental differences in values, behaviours, and feelings of inadequacy. I believe that it is important for institutions to promote cultural diversity within the university community, in order to encourage students to share their cultural and ethnic backgrounds and talents, and appreciate and reward one another and learn from one another. Many international students are confronted with developmental and environmental issues such as changes in identity, family support, academic challenges, social life and personal freedoms, encompassed within the multiple impacts of transition.

Arias (1999) surveyed international students to know about their well-being, expectations, and perspectives on services provided by the university. The survey revealed that international students left their countries to seek better educational opportunities, to gain a better competitive edge after acquiring an international education, and to be in a developed country. However, Arias also found that most international students become afraid to go back home after graduation, and experience culture shock in their countries of origin, which largely have become a "new" environment for international students. Arias (1999) described his experience as an international student as "windows to the world" (p. 42), as there have been times when he put



his head through the window and experienced Canada and, at other times, others put their head through his window and asked about his life experiences, heritage, and culture. It fosters understanding and respect, and builds a foundation for better cooperation. In conclusion, Arias stated that international students bring more than just money; they bring rich experiences and knowledge, social interaction beneficial to Canadian students, and information about international students so help can be accessed and provided.

### **Cultural Immersion**

Cultural immersion is the process by which one is completely involved in the way of life and standard of a people as a result of physical association. It entails being submerged in the system of another class of people different from what one has always known and belonged to. Cultural immersion creates great experiences, as it affords one the opportunity to see and live life differently. Being immersed in new culture poses new challenges for international students. My personal experience, for example, has put me in a place where I have completely forgotten some aspects of my culture back in my home country. The aspects I still remember feel and sound very strange to me sometimes, because I have become so immersed in the culture of Canada. I think this would make it hard for me to accept the Nigeria culture when I eventually go back there. Canada, being a country of immigrants, seeks to address some basic economic issues such as the aging population, low birth rate, and skilled labour shortage. Reitz (2002) discussed that Canada's immigration policy allows immigrants access into all major institutions of the society and a simple entrance to citizenship. Cultural immersion helps to foster a sense of belonging and community among international students. According to Bucklaschuk, Moss, and Annis (2011), the federally regulated temporary immigration programs that offer employers the opportunity of hiring foreign workers are a mechanism designed to address the labour shortage in every sector across Canada. However, Arthur (1997) expressed that "international students bring unique issues to counselling, which requires understanding of the ways in which the culture impacts the experience of living and studying in Canada" (p. 260).

Bucklaschuk and Sormova (2011) described how rural immigrants suffer from inadequate service provision by their host rural communities. They also identified that there are no established institutions to assist with the provision of the adequate services needed by immigrants. Communities must take steps to ensure the settlement and retention of new immigrants through the provision of resources and services. Manitoba was the first province to implement the provincial nominee program, which identifies economic, cultural, and social needs with other priorities (Bucklaschuk & Sormova, 2011). Over the years, Canada has developed organizations as a result of the influx of people from other countries. According to Bucklaschuk and Sormova (2011), ethno-cultural and settlement organizations have the capacity to create crucial link between immigrants and the new environment. Nevertheless, they identified language barriers, loneliness, restricted admittance, culture shock, food, weather, and displacement as some of challenges that immigrants go through in their quest to settle in Canada.

New international students have the natural propensity to gravitate toward the older international students for support, because of the common issues and challenges that they face. Those international students from the same countries share common cultural heritage and those that have settled are better able to help the new ones settle in a way that is very easy for them, in what I call a smooth transitional process that ensures retention and success. According to Foster and McPherson (2007), orientation programs and participation in orientation activities by newcomers, eases the stress of daily living in Canada. I have through a personal committed effort been able to support many new international students from Nigeria with orientation within and outside the university and showing them around different places in Brandon. As well as room and board for their first few months, I have helped them to set up phone plans in my name, because they do not have credit card and Canada government-issued identity cards,

which are required by the communication companies. I have also transported some of them from Winnipeg airport. In addition, I have helped them in setting up bank accounts, getting social insurance numbers, and job searches for those who need employment within the university and outside the university after they get their off-campus work permits. We have also been able to help them in greater measure, through the Association of Nigerians in the City of Brandon (ANCB) of which I am an executive member. We are committed to building a strong and positively vibrant community of Nigerians who promote and obey the laws and culture of Canada. The successful integration and settlement of the new immigrants/international students and the preservation of culture, family values, faith, and cultural infusion is a priority to us.

Immigration in Canada seems to me as a deliberate design and effort to furthering the development of a multicultural country. I think the immigration policy of Canada reflects the aspirations and desires of the Canadian people to embrace racial diversity and multiculturalism. Immigration works only when the citizens of the host country are hospitable and open to people of other races and cultures. Some of the immigrants who are not from commonwealth nations do lose their original nationality when they become Canadian citizens. They gladly embrace their new home country Canada, because it offers more than what their country of birth could ever offer. Thus, "immigration presents new possibilities for rural communities" (Bucklaschuk & Sormova, 2011, p. 11). When community effort is united, the benefits of a diversified Brandon community can be reaped. Canada as a country is a great example of where immigration policy has been very successful. According to Lochhead (2003), "immigrants come to Canada with high expectations" (p. 1). The high expectations, I think, are based on the reputation and attractiveness of Canada to immigrants and other nations of the world due to its richness in natural and human resources.

### **The Need for International Students**

Countries could be self-sufficient to a certain level, after which they learn to depend on each other in order to bridge the gap in their areas of weakness and vulnerability, thereby advancing their own countries' standards and developments socially, politically, economically, educationally, culturally, industrially, and intellectually. According to Popadiuk and Arthur (2004), "increased attention is paid to international students through internationalization of higher education" (p. 125). Also, Popadiuk and Arthur (2004) stated that "the export of education is a competitive process for the delivery of curriculum off-shore and for attracting greater numbers of international students to educational programs in host countries" (p. 125).

According to Reitz (2002), "population growth in Canada has been boosted significantly by immigration" (p. 10). He noted that as a result of the low birth rate in Canada, immigration has increasingly become more important for population growth. International students are one way to increase the country's population through immigration. One of the ways that a country achieves such goals is through positive sets of immigration policies that have been proven to work, and allow students or other people from other nations of the world to come and study and settle so they can contribute to the development of that country.

Every country, both rich and poor irrespective of race, colour or gender, has seen the importance of having international students and has fully embraced and opened its doors to international students to come in. According to Arthur (1997), "recruitment efforts by universities to attract more international students in the post-secondary education must be accompanied by adequate infrastructure and support services" (p. 259). I believe that the Government of Canada over time has structured and restructured the economic, political, educational, cultural, social, and intellectual system to reflect the present reality of multiculturalism, diversity, and pluralism that exist in Canada as a result of the influx of international students and immigrants.

## **Benefits of International Students to Canada**

The benefits of having international students in a country like Canada can not be over emphasized, because they affect every sphere of the society positively. Some of the benefits are discussed as follows.

### **Economic Benefit**

When international students come, we bring with us money for tuition, accommodation, transportation, feeding, clothing, entertainment, and other necessities that are needed during our studentship in the post-secondary institutions. Some of us even work while we study and make money and pay taxes to the government, thereby improving the economy through the input of more money. According to Dawson and Conti-Bekkers (2002), thousands of international students invest millions of dollars and countless hours of efforts in Australian education on a yearly basis. International students are considered when economic decisions are being made by the leaders of a country like Canada.

### **Education**

The quality of education is improved on as a result of more students, thereby bringing about expansion of the institution and increasing the quantity and quality of its graduates. A high percentage of those graduates will remain in Canada to utilize the knowledge and skills they have acquired and gained over time to work for the advancement and development of that Canada, thereby increasing skilled manpower and the workforce.

### **Culture**

As international students, we bring our culture, values, food, dressing, festivals, and oral traditions with us when we come to Canada. Though we must imbibe the culture of Canada, the host country, to be able to successfully live here, we eventually express and display our cultural characteristics. Those cultural characteristics gradually and inevitably get infused into the host country's culture as we become a community, thereby creating multiculturalism and diversity in the society.

### **Industrial Growth**

International students in the sciences have the potential to contribute immensely to the industrial sector of the society through science and technology, thereby advancing the existing industries and creating new ones that are of world class standard, which will create new jobs.

### **Social Interaction**

Social interaction is everything, because that is where communication begins and no one can communicate in isolation. Social interaction is what enables communication to take place, and it is the means by which international students contribute socially to the host country. Through the introduction of social characteristics from foreign countries, intelligent social interaction, diverse music, entertainment, movies, comedies, sports, current social events, new trends, friendships, marriages, and ideas that the people of the host country are not familiar with, such contribution is achieved. International perspective is gained by local students both in the classroom and society.

## **Politics**

The political system of a country could be altered and restructured as a result of new ideas from international students, through sharing of political ideas. The government considers the presence of international students when making political decisions and immigration policies.

## **Population**

Population growth is constantly being experienced in Canada as a result of the influx of immigrants, especially international students. The government certainly put into consideration the population when making decisions that affect the citizens and immigrants.

## **Intellectual Capacity**

International students come with some level of intelligence and intellectual capacity and creativity, which grows over time and is unleashed in the academically conducive environment and atmosphere that Canada provides. According to Savage and Kane (2002), "The government of Canada's innovation strategy outlines the importance of attracting international students to strengthen Canada's innovation capacity and enhance economic competitiveness" (p. 11). This creates and encourages healthy competition and competitive spirit among local and international students in Canada. The Canadian Bureau for International Education recognizes that international education is constantly evolving (CBIE, 1981). This results in the production of more academically balanced students ready to make impact in the society and be great ambassadors of their institutions.

## **Summary**

As a country of immigrants, Canada has fully embraced diversity as required for new developments in the twenty-first century, largely made possible by international students. Immigrants also help in building strong and sustainable relationships with other countries, but the Canadian government and post-secondary institutions must as a matter of urgency focus their attention on the process and transition of international students.

## **Conclusion**

International students have become part of the very core of every developed country, and Canada has become a home for thousands of international students from all over the world. Canadian post-secondary institutions must therefore strive to provide the necessary fundamental support in the recruitment, retention, and the overall success of all international students. The process of transition means being involved in that which has the ability to change you, and we international students do feel very vulnerable going through this process. We believe that the transition process could be made easier and better through collaborative efforts of the Canadian government, Canadian post-secondary institutions, and international students, because we are all in this together as a team to achieve an ultimate purpose of a better society and world. I am proud to be part of this process.

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### **About the Author**

*Blessing Onovwakpo Emadedor is an international student from Nigeria, in the Master of Education degree in educational administration at Brandon University. He is a self-motivated person who enjoys teaching, singing, travelling, making friends, and cooking. He also enjoys volunteering in church and singing in the choir, and he is a team player.*

## OPINION PAPER

### Mentorship: A Collegial Approach to Teacher Improvement

Lynn White

In any profession, there are people who are able to meet the demands of their jobs, and there are others who struggle, or are considered marginal by their employers. The teaching profession is no exception. In many Manitoba school divisions, if a teacher is considered to be performing at a substandard level, the teacher is recommended for the intensive supervision program. This program is time consuming and costly, and often results in a break-down in the collegial relationship between the teacher and the administrator. Often, teachers will cycle through the intensive supervision program several times in the course of their career, because the program seldom brings about sustainable change. School divisions must find a better solution to support teachers who struggle. One alternative to the intensive supervision process is mentorship, a collegial approach that fosters a collaborative atmosphere in a classroom.

Collaboration is something that is sorely lacking in many classrooms today. Being a classroom teacher can be a very isolating experience, because the teachers work for hours at a time with little or no interaction with other adults. This feeling of isolation increases when a teacher is struggling to meet the demands of the classroom. Struggling teachers tend to keep to themselves, are embarrassed by their lack of skills, and are not comfortable asking colleagues for assistance. Teachers who undergo the intensive supervision process may work very hard to implement the changes that the administrator recommends, but the changes are not sustainable because they are not fully integrated into the teachers' skill sets for practice. Some teachers react so negatively to this process that the result is a request for stress leave, while others are passed from building to building, a process often referred to as "the passing of the lemons" – which does not help to build a collaborative working relationship among colleagues in a building.

A former colleague was one such teacher who was identified as a candidate for the intensive supervision process. Once the process began, her increased level of stress was noticeable. She put in very long hours in an attempt to implement the changes that were being suggested by her administrator. She stopped participating in collaborative planning sessions with colleagues, as she became increasingly overwhelmed with the day-to-day management of her students. Fellow teachers did not know how to support her, as she either rebuffed their offers or simply allowed them to come in and take over. There was a high level of frustration and some resentment on the part of these colleagues, as they had worked with the individual for several years and had made many attempts to assist her with no success. They started to avoid her, and then gradually pulled away altogether.

After the intensive supervision process, the teacher was unable to maintain the changes that she had made. These changes were forced and labour intensive, and therefore were not sustainable. This particular teacher had gone through the intensive supervision process two times previously, been transferred from building to building, been placed in different grade levels, and gained a reputation of being a marginal teacher. In the minds of her colleagues, it was a foregone conclusion that she was not going to be successful.

Instead of transferring the teacher to another school, only to have her and her next administrator begin the intensive supervision process again, the administrator requested a mentor to come and work with the teacher. This individual was a highly successful educator who knew how to communicate with struggling teachers. Most importantly, the mentor was not in a position of power over the classroom teacher, who agreed to work with the mentor for a specified time period and then be re-evaluated by the administrator.

The teacher and mentor worked collaboratively together for six weeks. The process began with the mentor visiting the classroom several times to make observations of the mentee's teaching practice. Then the mentor and mentee met to discuss the observations and to make a plan. They worked together to reorganize the classroom and set up structures to assist with classroom management. The mentor coached the teacher through curriculum planning and implementing a thematic unit.

In the first phase of the mentor process, the mentor spent full days in the classroom with the struggling teacher. The mentor began by modelling effective teaching practice, followed by a gradual release of responsibility to the mentee. Strategies were introduced and implemented in manageable chunks so that the teacher did not become overwhelmed.

In the second phase, the mentor attended half days in the classroom, giving the teacher the afternoons to practise the strategies and make adjustments based on her own personality and teaching style. Once each week, the teacher had the opportunity to visit other classrooms and observe master teachers working with their students in other schools. Following the school visits, the mentor and mentee met to debrief the teacher's observations and make revisions to their plan accordingly. In this phase of the mentorship process, the mentor, with the consent of the mentee, invited colleagues into the classroom to co-teach with the mentee. The co-teaching experience helped the teacher to begin to rebuild her collegial relationships with colleagues.

At the end of the mentorship process, the administrator did a follow-up evaluation, and noted a marked improvement in the teacher's practice. She had a renewed level of confidence in her teaching ability, was more effective during her planning time, had gained the respect of her students and colleagues, and was actively collaborating with her grade level team. The time spent with the mentor gave the teacher a solid start to improving her teaching practice.

In a follow-up meeting, the teacher was asked to evaluate her participation in the mentorship process. The teacher reported feeling supported and appreciated having the mentor come and work with her in the classroom. The teacher felt confident in her ability to move forward independently, and she was happy with her relationships with her students and colleagues.

An interview was also conducted with the mentor following the mentorship process. The mentor also considered the process a success and credited the administration with communicating accurate information in the beginning of the process, and allowing time for the struggling teacher to plan, collaborate, and debrief with the mentor throughout each phase. There was also an understanding that the mentor was not in the classroom in an evaluative role, which encouraged a collegial relationship. The mentor was also able to act as a liaison between the teacher and her colleagues, inviting teachers into the classroom in a co-teaching role.

Mentorship is presently used predominantly with beginning teachers in school divisions in Manitoba. It should also be used with seasoned teachers who struggle in their teaching practice, because the current intensive supervision process does not result in sustainable improvement in a teacher's professional practice. Mentorship offers an opportunity to assist teachers in a way that is collaborative and collegial. Teachers participating in mentorship programs feel valued and supported, and are able to maintain positive relationships with their administrators. Mentorship offers an appropriate alternative to the current processes that school divisions utilize, by supporting the needs of struggling teachers in a positive way.

### ***About the Author***

*Lynn White is currently in her final year of the Master of Education in educational leadership. She works as a Student Services/ Literacy Support Teacher in the Louis Riel School Division. She lives in Winnipeg with her husband, daughters Rileigh and Samantha, dogs Ebony and Shadow, and fearless cat Boomer.*



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