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## INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

**Marion Terry, Ph.D.**

Welcome to the sixteenth issue of the *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, devoted to rural, northern, and Aboriginal education. Our authors for volume 8, issue 2, are current and past BU Faculty of Education graduate students. The “Spotlight on Undergraduate Scholarship” section features an article by one of our B.Ed. students. I thank all of these educators for sharing their work. Together, they have produced a collection of articles that highlight educational challenges and successes in Manitoba schools and communities.

- Michael Nantais’ research report describes the findings that emerged from his Ph.D. study of the use of social media in Manitoba classrooms.
- Malcolm Oldcorn’s refereed article recommends empowering students to find their own solutions while building trust in school counselling relationships.
- Krista Reynolds’ refereed article explains the five key characteristics that ensure success in developing a professional learning community (PLC).
- Bryan Schroeder’s refereed article extols servant leadership as a model for school administrators to build respectful school communities.
- Kendall Hanus’s refereed article distinguishes the roles that teachers and parents play in helping students to learn another language.
- Kaley Cochrane’s refereed article considers inclusive education as “the least dangerous assumption” when supporting diverse learners in a general education setting.
- Cindy Swallow’s refereed article examines the balance between learning to read and reading to learn while mastering the complex action of thinking while reading.
- Tracy Grasby’s refereed article describes the Reading Recovery program as a means to help struggling literacy learners catch up to their peers at an early age.
- Lesia Jensen’s refereed article identifies the critical role that leadership teams play in implementing Response Through Intervention (RTI) in secondary schools.
- Liisa Brolund’s refereed article extols instructional leadership as a model that increases student achievement because the principal and teachers work closely together to achieve common goals.
- Lynn Nicol’s refereed article laments the dearth of resources available to teach holistic citizenship education in early years classes.
- Bob Lee’s opinion paper considers the varying expectations that different educational and community stakeholders have of student teachers.

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## RESEARCH REPORT

### **Social Media Pedagogy: A Multiple Case Study Approach**

**Michael F. Nantais**

#### **Ph.D. Abstract**

Social media are often touted to have the potential to transform education. These media enable students to connect with others from around the world, to work collaboratively, and to share their learning with an authentic audience. The literature offers support, yet raises questions about this promise. The intent of this research was to examine how and why some classroom teachers make use of social media for teaching and to determine if, and how, this changes their pedagogical practices.

A qualitative, interpretivist multiple case study approach was used to tell the stories of nine teachers in a rural Canadian prairie school as they explored and implemented various social media in their teaching practices. A hermeneutic and phenomenological approach formed the theoretical framework guiding this study. The primary source of data was a multi-part interview consisting of conversations held over the six-month study. Participants reflected upon and shared their perspectives as they made use of social media in their teaching practice. Other data sources included a variety of relevant documents such as school plans and online interactions undertaken by the participants. The analysis followed a constant comparative thematic analysis method, providing a rich exploration of the phenomenon of social media pedagogy.

The teachers in this study generally found their use of social media to be a positive experience; however, several challenges and areas of concern were identified. The teachers' reasons for using social media included communication, engagement and motivation, exposure of student work to a broader audience, and collaborative activities. Supports for implementing social media were identified and included good access to working technology and professional learning. The teachers raised concerns such as privacy, safety, and time constraints. Ethical and appropriate use of social media was seen not only as a concern, but also as an opportunity to teach. Impacts on teaching practice ranged from the addition of strategies to teaching repertoires, to change that could be considered as transformative learning. One of the most significant results was the apparent effect on the school environment. Trust and responsibility were extended to students, and the response was increased communication and connection between students and teachers.

#### **About the Author**

*Mike Nantais is an Associate Professor in the Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy in the Faculty of Education at Brandon University. Mike is a lifelong educator. He taught for 30 years in Boissevain School, including 4 years as a school administrator. In 2008, he left the public system and joined Brandon University's Faculty of Education. Mike obtained an M.Ed. in curriculum and instruction from BU in 2007, and a Ph.D. in education from the U. of M. in 2014. His research interests are in educational technology, transformative learning, and critical digital pedagogy.*

## REFEREED ARTICLES

### The Beginning School Counsellor

Malcolm Oldcorn

#### Abstract

*The most effective counsellors help their clients find their own solutions. This method often requires the counsellor to ask more questions than give answers. The positive outcome of empowering clients to take control of their own life is the end goal. Unfortunately, developing trust with students, identifying the sources of problems, and providing best practice does not happen overnight. Counsellors new to the field have much to overcome but with hard work, compassion, and an open mind, they can engender positive differences in students.*

At the beginning of their career, school counsellors face significant challenges. Counsellors assist individuals and groups who need support for a variety of reasons, many of which carry a heavy emotional toll (Merriman, 2015). Often, the students who have been referred to a school counsellor do not want to engage or trust a new face (Kertes, Westra, Angus, & Marcus, 2011; Stehn & Wilson, 2012). Overcoming this resistance to build relationships, defining the issues and staging interventions, and developing leadership qualities are all areas of concern to people entering the profession of school counselling.

#### Overcoming Resistance

Resistance is a major barrier to effective school counselling. People who have been referred to counselling are often closed or ambivalent to the idea of being helped by an outsider (Stehn & Wilson, 2012). In some cases, this reluctance stems from having no choice in the matter (Gasevic, 2014; Stehn & Wilson, 2012). Students are referred to new school counsellors by parents, teachers, administrators, outside agencies, or even their peers more commonly than they sign themselves up to visit a stranger. Frequently, students who have been referred to counselling have been let down by adults in the past and are skeptical of anyone's ability or motivation to help them (Kertes et al., 2011). Student resistance is shown in many forms such as questioning the level of trust, "selective mutism," and talking only about previous experiences (Yildirim, 2012, p. 130). The youth who need counselling are correct to question about the person with whom they are being asked to build a relationship.

To combat this hesitancy, counsellors need first to open themselves up to students, building trust and rapport in the process. Visibility around the school and involvement in extra-curricular activities help students to become familiar with a new staff member (M. Keown, Virden Collegiate Institute principal, personal communication, May 25, 2015). Beginning counsellors can also use humor with students as an effective way to lighten the mood around what is usually a serious topic (Berg, Parr, Bradley, & Berry, 2009). A game of cards or a board game is another simple method that a counsellor might use to create enough diversion for the client to feel safe and to make conversation more natural (L. Wotton, Green Acres School counsellor, personal communication, May 9, 2015). Lastly, a patient approach is prerequisite to overcoming reluctance by students (Jones-Smith, 2016; Young, 2012). Just as with healthy friendships, the relationship between student and school counsellor takes time to build naturally. When time has passed and the client becomes comfortable with the counsellor, the work of defining the student's problem can begin in earnest.

## Defining the Issues

Once a counsellor has opened the doors of communication with a client, defining the problem is the next step. Determining the issue is sometimes completed with the client, and sometimes decided upon by the adults in a school, without the student present (B. Lee, Waverly Park School principal, personal communication, June 13, 2015; Kimber & Campbell, 2014). Counsellors help students and staff to target the improper behaviour that needs to be changed, because students often have difficulty seeing themselves and their behaviours clearly. For example, an autistic child may be unable to explain why he/she is breaking down (K. Bonk, Crocus Plains Regional High School counsellor, personal communication, June 8, 2015). Another way that counsellors can support their clients is by identifying behavioural patterns. Most students engage in inappropriate behaviour repeatedly because they do not see their actions as a problem (Camacho, Anderson, Moore, & Furlonger, 2014). Observation and documentation of troublesome behaviour provide key evidence for counsellors to show the students that these patterns exist. Lastly, dialogue with staff and key individuals can aid counsellors in recognizing troublesome behaviours (Katz, 2012). As with building rapport, defining the true issues of the client is multifaceted.

Depending on the student and his/her level of motivation to change, adults may set behavioural goals. However, counsellors must always look for agreement from their clients. Three common goal categories identified by middle years students are increasing self-confidence or self-acceptance, controlling or reducing anger, and improving relationship(s) with family member(s) (Rupani et al., 2014). An adult's perspective on each of these conflicts is different from that of a school-aged child. When one adds in the poverty and socio-economic realities that many students who require counselling live with, collaboration on goal-setting is even more challenging (Bray & Schommer-Aikins, 2014; Stephens, Arriaga, & Lindsey, 2013). A counsellor can not simply tell students the steps to have more self-confidence or to control anger. The counsellor must work with students to set realistic goals to make progress (Bray & Schommer-Aikins, 2014; Rupani et al., 2014; Stephens et al., 2013). When the intervention objectives, clients are much more likely to invest fully in the sessions and engage in activities suggested by the counsellor to achieve these goals, thereby leading to greater success. Defining the problems and establishing goals are two key aspects to a helping relationship.

## Staging Interventions

The next challenge for counsellors is delivering the correct form of intervention to achieve progress. To beginning counsellors who have limited experience in the field, matching the type of help to the issue at hand can be difficult (Merriman, 2015). One method of dealing with this lack of experience is through educating oneself through coursework and seminars (B. Aston, Waverly Park School vice-principal, personal communication, June 14, 2015). Researching successes of other types of therapy is another way to overcome inexperience. An example of research guiding intervention is a study that used group therapy to help people with disabilities who were struggling with drug or alcohol addictions (O'Sullivan, Blum, Watts, & Yates, 2015). Although peer support groups are a common therapy for substance abuse problems, the researchers found a program called the Self-Management and Recovery Training (SMART) as best serving persons with disabilities who suffer from substance use disorders (O'Sullivan et al., 2015). Another example is a study that used the Solution Focused Therapy (SFT) approach to school counselling and more specifically posing the "miracle question" to students (Lines, 2011; Jones-Smith, 2016). SFT provides an effective, step-by-step approach to help many students work through their problems successfully. Finally, counsellors must use the support of experts within their school divisions and communities, such as mental health workers, occupational therapists, and psychologists in order to give the best care possible to clients on their caseload (Stephens et al., 2013; Young, Tanganyika, & Kneale, 2013). With the multitude of issues

students bring to counsellors, one would need to access as many resources as possible to offer up the best therapy option for each particular case.

### **Developing Leadership Qualities**

Counsellors have a unique role in relation to the leadership of the school. On one hand, counsellors work closely with administrators to create supports for students and staff (Stephens et al., 2013; Young et al., 2013). On the other hand, counsellors often find themselves at opposition with principals (Kimber & Campbell, 2014). Whereas a principal's first priority is to meet needs of the school as a whole, a counsellor's priority is to meet the needs of individual students. Because of these opposing views, administrators often leave counsellors as mere gatekeepers, maintaining the status quo, rather than collaborative leaders with their colleagues who make systemic changes (Stephens et al., 2013). Unfortunately, counsellors often lack the leadership skills necessary to guide professional staff because they have no leadership training (Paradise, Ceballos, & Hall, 2010). Too frequently, counsellors are expected to learn their leadership skills through on-the-job training (Paradise et al., 2010). Working to become more than mere gatekeepers is a major challenge to school counsellors.

One significant benefit that a school can accomplish through elevating the counsellor to a leadership role is improving the social justice within that school. School counsellors can facilitate family involvement in schools and assist teachers in connecting particularly with families in poverty (Paradise et al., 2010). The collaboration between school and home helps both sides to understand each other better. When handled correctly, this diversity makes students and schools stronger (Katz, 2012). It creates an open environment wherein the student's welfare and success are emphasized. It recognizes that equity does not always mean delivering the same program to all students or staff of a school (Katz, 2012; Stephens et al., 2013). Counsellors as school leaders can improve the lives of those less fortunate.

In addition to advocating for social justice, counsellors also need to develop leadership skills to manage the staff working with their clients. For any counsellors, especially those with limited experience, convincing teachers to handle a student in a different way is difficult (Young et al., 2013). Teachers do not enjoy hearing that their methods are not working and that they must adapt their ways. Much like working with students, counsellors must build rapport with staff in order to convince them to implement the adaptations suggested. Rapport is built through having counsellors as valued members of school programs such as parent support groups, staff professional development, and student leadership teams (Stephens et al., 2013). As with students, when counsellors can open themselves up to their school and community and contribute to school-wide success, staff will begin to see the counsellor as a leader (Miller, 2015). A significant part of a counsellor's job is collaborating with professional staff to support their clients as much as possible.

New school guidance counsellors have many hurdles to navigate in order to become effective professionals. First, they must be able to build rapport, break down resistance, and create an open dialogue with the students they are trying to help. Next, they need to define the specific issues students have, set goals for the interventions in collaboration with each student, and find the best type of therapy to achieve these objectives. Lastly, counsellors must develop their leadership qualities within their school and broader community. These challenges can be daunting to a person new to the profession. However, with an open mind, a caring heart and a willingness to work hard, counsellors can and will succeed.

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### **About the Author**

*Malcolm Oldcorn is currently working on his Master of Education in guidance and counselling. He has enjoyed his first year as a counsellor at Green Acres School in Brandon, Manitoba, after twelve years of teaching middle years students. Malcolm believes that all students have a voice that deserves to be nurtured and respected.*

# Creating Effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

**Krista Reynolds**

## **Abstract**

*Professional learning communities (PLCs) are increasingly providing opportunities for school teachers to collaborate in order to develop shared beliefs about learning. Five key characteristics ensure the PLC's effectiveness. A PLC requires collaboration and a learning culture of trust among teachers. A goal-oriented plan is needed that involves data-driven conversations while ensuring that students remain the focus of the PLC's work to benefit all learners. A trustworthy leader is required to support teachers with challenges and successes along the journey together. With a focus on student achievement, PLCs can provide a school with significant gains in student growth.*

In order for a professional learning community (PLC) to be effective, the team needs collaboration, a learning culture of trust, a goal-oriented plan, a trustworthy leader, and a committed focus on student achievement. Although teachers work together in a common building, the collaboration needed for a PLC requires them to have thoughtful conversations and provide each other with ongoing interdependent social support. While collaboration is important, it is not possible without a learning culture of trust, which includes shared beliefs about learning while recognizing that might be difficult when teachers do not share the same values about learning together. A goal-oriented plan that focuses on student learning is needed to help teachers maintain strong communication. When a trustworthy leader in the school supports the PLC'S plans, he or she provides teachers with autonomy and helps them to overcome challenges while recognizing and celebrating success along the way. Effective PLCs have student achievement at the heart of their work; they ensure that school and system goals align with this achievement while having appropriate student data driven conversations. As teachers work together with these key characteristics of PLCs, the ultimate reward is improved student learning for the entire school.

## **The Power of Collaboration**

Collaboration that includes thoughtful conversations and social support leading to interdependency and vulnerability is a key characteristic needed for a professional learning community to be successful. Collaboration requires teachers across multiple grade levels and disciplines to be engaged in meaningful conversations wherein sharing knowledge is a back and forth process (Routman, 2008). These conversations require teachers to experiment with ideas, problem solve, and reflect together as they develop and improve beliefs about their practice (Pyhalto, Pietarinen, & Soini, 2015). When teachers work in isolation, they have "limited confidence in their ability to raise student achievement" (Black & William, 1998, p. 13). As teachers offer different ideas, approaches, and perspectives on learning, they become mutually accountable and supportive of one another (Massey & Crouch, 2015). When teachers have an opportunity to support one another through collaboration, teachers can increase work engagement, develop confidence, and persist in challenges (Pyhalto et al., 2015). Undertaking the challenging work together, teachers create collective motivation that nudges teachers to improve their practice in a supportive way (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Through collaboration, teachers develop an interdependency that includes an appreciation of mutual agreements and strategies that encourage them to ask each other for help (Pyhalto et al., 2015). While teachers work collaboratively, they make themselves more vulnerable to the group which motivates them to become a powerful social resource for each other, in order to create reflective dialogue

leading to de-privatization of practice and a learning culture of trust (Hallam, Smith, Hite, Hite, & Wilcox, 2015).

### **The Importance of Trust**

A learning culture of trust, developed through shared beliefs, is necessary for professional learning communities to be effective, but it can be challenging when teachers' attitudes about learning do not support their working together. A culture of trust is created when teachers feel like they can make mistakes, take risks, and openly admit errors without fear of being judged by colleagues (Hallam et al., 2015). The learning culture of trust can be developed within the PLCs when teachers create shared beliefs that include having an appreciation for different learning processes, understanding how to use different learning approaches to meet individual students' needs, and being open to new strategies (Owen, 2014). Teachers' shared beliefs are a starting point that can lead to establishing group norms and developing a common vision necessary for building a team (Venables, 2011). However, when teachers have attitudes about learning that require them to overcome an isolated culture of traditional teaching, teachers struggle to develop trust and devote a minimal amount of energy to professional learning activities (Tam, 2015). There is no simple solution to teacher resistance, understanding the challenge of resistance and addressing it might be a starting point (Tam, 2015). In authentic PLCs, teachers work together to move the culture of trust from teachers working in isolation to sharing and becoming dependent on one another, in order to collectively improve student learning across grades (Venables, 2011). Working together in a trusting relationship, teachers can focus on student learning through long-term planning with identifiable goals.

### **The Necessity of Planning**

A professional learning community is effective when there is a well-developed plan with goals that focus on student learning and thereby prevent teacher communication breakdown. Planning requires that teachers are aware of what they want to learn, identify what they have already learned, and develop learning goals that model principles of assessment for learning (Davies, Herbst, & Reynolds, 2008). As teachers work to develop their goals, the plan needs to include regular meetings with a long-term approach that is three to six years in length, in order to develop routines and work through goals within the PLC (Provini, 2012). During this multi-year plan, teachers need a variety of opportunities and resources for a plan to be multi-layered with feedback and differentiated with multiple entry points to meet the needs of every teacher (Davies et al., 2008). When teachers learning together through co-planning, and implementing fun and creative learning experiences, the results can lead to improved student engagement and changes to thinking about pedagogy (Owen, 2014). While the focus of the goals is on student learning through student achievement, teachers determine what the goals will be and how they will evaluate whether the goals have been met (Owen, 2014). When PLCs operate without an established plan and goals, there are communication breakdowns that cause dysfunction within the team (Weber, 2011). An effective leader can counteract a communication breakdown, in order to bring the PLC back together and support teachers moving forward.

### **Trustworthy Leadership**

An effective professional learning community has a leader who is trustworthy while helping to overcome conflicts, who provides teachers with autonomy, and who recognizes and celebrates success. Trustworthy leaders make developing trust a priority by modelling and mediating when the trust breaks down within the group (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). As leaders build trust with teachers by modelling authentic thoughtful conversations, teachers are more motivated in their work, feel more satisfied in their jobs, and are more likely to trust their

colleagues (Hallam et al., 2015). When there is a breakdown in trust, the leader is responsible for ensuring that teachers have the conflict resolution skills to move past hurt feelings and make decisions with the highest quality (Tschannen-Moran, 2004). While the principal's role influences how the PLC will develop, it is important that the team retains ownership. Promoting the teachers' commitment to the learning community increases their autonomy and mutual support (Tam, 2014). When leaders overstep, courageous leaders are humble and self-reflective; they own their actions, fix their mistakes, and remain committed to the teachers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Teacher autonomy enables teachers to help themselves and their students, so administrators must avoid "manipulating teachers into complying with eternally imposed requirements or delivering someone else's vision" (Hargreaves & Fullan, p. 137). As success is achieved, leaders intentionally and thoughtfully celebrate this success in a public way to ensure transparency in the professional growth (Dewey, 2015). With celebrations, principals show what is possible in an effective PLC, by using a strength-based approach that affirms and showcases the positive yet specific actions connected to student achievement that have been accomplished by the collective group (Routman, 2008).

### **A Focus on Student Achievement**

Student achievement is a critical focus for professional learning communities. Effective PLCs align student achievement with school and system goals, and maintain appropriate student data-driven conversations. When teachers embrace the idea of success for all learners, they begin to ask questions such as "How could we adopt characteristics and practices in our own school that will ensure all students are learning? What indicators could we monitor to assess our progress?" (Dufour, 2004, "Big Idea #1"). When shared knowledge is created collectively as a group and aligns with the school and system goals, teachers have active involvement school reform policy work that is owned and promoted by the teachers themselves (Pyhalto et al., 2015). When this professional development is connected to school goals and priorities, and the relationship among teachers continues to grow, student achievement is highly impacted (Owen, 2014). Teachers maintain a focus on student achievement by using data to support the conversations around instruction. Conversations that include data such as student products, student observations, and conversations with students help teachers to see the concrete gains in student learning and their achievement while also determining required changes to instructional practices (Venables, 2011). When these conversations are "structured, sustained, and supported instructional discussions the relationship between instructional practices and student work produce significant gains in student learning" (Owen, 2014, p. 60). Teachers use the data as an indicator of individual student progress rather than using the average student grades to analyze student achievement (Dufour, 2004).

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, an effective professional learning community requires collaboration, a learning culture of trust, a goal-oriented plan, a trustworthy leader, and a committed focus on student achievement. While collaboration is needed for a PLC, it is the thoughtful conversations and ongoing interdependent social support that create a collaborative team. A learning culture of trust is formed within the community, which includes shared beliefs about learning and recognizing the challenge of overcoming teachers' different attitudes about learning. As the PLC creates a goal-oriented plan that focuses on student learning, teachers are able to develop strong communications. A trustworthy leader who provides teachers with autonomy, while recognizing and celebrating success along the way, will also contribute the effectiveness of the PLC. Strong professional learning communities ensure that school and system goals align with the importance of student achievement. The most wonderful reward of having an effective PLC is that every student in the school will benefit from the inspirational work of the team of teachers.

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# The Effectiveness of Servant Leadership in Schools From a Christian Perspective

Bryan Schroeder

## Abstract

*Servant leadership remains as one of the most effective models of leadership today. School principals who embody this leadership paradigm encourage and enable teachers, and demonstrate a desire to build school community. Teachers' effectiveness increases as they are honoured and served by their principal, thereby impacting students, colleagues, and parents positively. Servant leaders often put the needs of the organization ahead of personal needs and honour people, not programs and politics. Students ultimately benefit from this leadership approach as their teachers learn to serve them first as people, and then confidently lead them into their learning.*

Principals who model servant leadership increase teacher effectiveness in their schools. Principals must understand the servant leadership role of modelling a servant heart (Cerit, 2009), enabling teachers to act (Taylor, Martin, Hutchinson, & Jinks, 2007), encouraging teachers' hearts (Grothaus, 2004), and communicating a larger vision (Taylor et al., 2007), in order to optimize the paradigm of servant leadership. Servant leadership increases teacher effectiveness by positively impacting their personal beliefs and values (Cerit, 2009; Spears, 2004; Taylor et al., 2007), interactions with colleagues (Crippen, 2010; Taylor et al., 2007) classroom leadership and pedagogy (Russell, 2012; Stewart, 2012), interactions with students (Herman & Marlowe, 2005; Sultan & van de Bunt-Kokhuis, 2014), and desire and ability to build school community (Cerit, 2009; Crippen, 2012). The definition of servant leadership and the associated personal characteristics will be established, and false notions of it revealed, so that a comprehensible perspective can be maintained throughout this paper. Servant leadership is multi-dimensional, and requires deep understanding in order for more principals to acknowledge its potential to increase teacher effectiveness, change schools, and meet organizational needs (Taylor et al., 2007). I am currently in my fifth year as principal of an independent Manitoba school, which has kindergarten to grade eight classes, and upholds Christian values and perspectives. This article includes several of my experiences of serving and leading the staff members, students, and families at the school where I serve.

## Defining Servant Leadership

Servant leadership starts with desire. Stewart (2012) and Crippen (2010) agreed with Robert Greenleaf's original notion in the 1970s about servant leadership, which highlighted the intrinsic feeling of leaders wanting to serve. That selfless desire to serve (Herman & Marlowe, 2005; Taylor et al., 2007) establishes servant leaders as being servants first (Crippen, 2005; Russell, 2012; Taylor et al., 2007), and leaders second. A leader's greatness is built upon the practice of serving other people (Spears, 2004) and although servant leaders are servants first, they can be great leaders because "leading and serving are two sides of the same coin" (Sultan & van de Bunt-Kokhuis, 2014, p. 2). The essential skills, knowledge, and character traits that are consistently understood as leadership staples are still required to lead people (Buskey, 2014), the difference becomes apparent in the leader's value system based on the leader's actions and interactions with people. Servant leaders genuinely care about people and will sacrificially serve and focus on their followers' needs (Buskey, 2014; Cerit, 2009; Taylor et al., 2007) and leaders are often developed and discovered by those acts of service and stewardship (Crippen, 2005). Servant leaders stretch beyond meeting the needs of individuals in the

organization, but also put aside personal desires, in order to meet the needs of the organization (Taylor et al., 2007).

Cerit (2009) believed that the practice of servant leadership is embedded in the understanding that the self-interest of the leader comes second to the good of those being led. Servant leadership can be defined “as an attitude of leading others from a perspective of placing the organizational purpose, the needs of the organization, and the needs of people over the needs and desire of the leader” (Herman & Marlowe, 2005, p. 601), and as “an action-oriented state of mind that compels leaders to provide followers with what the followers need in order that the followers might be able to do what needs to be done” (Taylor et al., 2007, p. 405). Hansel (1987) defined a servant leader, with more of a balance between the “servant” and the “leader” portions, by emphasizing the leader’s vision, skill and creativity and the servant’s values, attitudes, and heart. Whichever way a servant leader is defined on paper, he or she consistently transforms people and organizations (Crippen, 2012; Spears, 2004; Sultan & van de Bunt-Kokhuis, 2014) and creates effective, growing, healthy communities (Crippen, 2010) in schools today.

### **False Notions of Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership has been criticized for various reasons, most of the accusations are isolated and do not prove to be accurate; therefore, they lead to false notions of the servant leadership paradigm. Cerit (2009) acknowledged that some authors have described servant leadership as sometimes being unrealistic, related to an idea of slavery, and containing passive and weak views of leading (Cerit, 2009). These descriptions are possible for someone who is only a servant, and not a leader. Otherwise such criticisms of servant leaders are misinformed ideas trapped in the traditional model of hierarchal leadership, wherein submissive subordinates serve their controlling leaders (Taylor et al., 2007) and the term “servant” becomes decidedly associated with slavery. Hansel (1987) countered that idea by pronouncing that “servant leaders are the freest of all leaders” (Hansel, 1987, p. 159), because there is less conflict between personal desires and organizational goals.

Servant leadership has also been directly aligned with transformational leadership; however, this is an inexact conclusion because organizational accomplishment is the key motivating factor for transformational leaders, whereas “servant leaders would be more focused on the emotional welfare of followers than transformational leaders” (Cerit, 2009, p. 603). Despite the criticisms regarding servant leadership, it is gaining more attention and growing as a widely acceptable leadership ideology and practice (Cerit, 2009). Spears (2004) confirmed that the criticisms listed above are indeed false notions, largely because the effectiveness of servant leadership is being recognized globally by companies that have decidedly accepted the value system of servant leadership as part of their philosophy.

### **Characteristics of Servant Leaders**

If principals want to be excellent servant leaders and increase the effectiveness of teachers in their schools, then they must develop many strong character traits that are embodied and exemplified by successful servant leaders. The ten most popular characteristics were originally identified by Spears in 1998, based on Greenleaf’s writings, and then confirmed over the last fifteen years by a multitude of authors and experts on leadership. The characteristics are listening, empathy, healing, persuasion, awareness, foresight, conceptualization, commitment to the growth of people, stewardship, and building community (Crippen, 2005; Crippen, 2010, Herman & Marlowe, 2005; Spears, 2004; Stewart, 2012). Additional characteristics that are recognized and developed in servant leaders are care and compassion (Cerit, 2009; Hansel, 1987; Sultan & van de Bunt-Kokhuis, 2014), integrity (Grothaus, 2004; Taylor et al., 2007),

humility (Cerit, 2009; Crippen, 2010; Sultan & van de Bunt-Kokhuis, 2014), and ethics (Grothaus, 2004; Stewart, 2012).

My father is a servant leader in his rural community and was an excellent role model for me as I grew up and was taught and disciplined according to what was believed to be right or wrong. I learned the importance of honesty, humility, listening, and other characteristics because I made poor choices at young ages that negatively affected my relationships, but I was corrected by caring adults based on the biblical teachings of Jesus Christ. My views and values changed, as I experienced the love and grace of Jesus, from hopeless selfishness, anger and arrogance to hope-filled and purposeful love for people and God. I also developed leadership skills and knowledge through opportunities in high school, church, sports, college, and university, whereby I was being prepared to serve and lead in my current role as principal.

### **The Role of Principals as Servant Leaders**

The principal's role of leadership is vital for a school's progress. In order for a principal to operate as a servant leader and increase teacher effectiveness, he or she must not only personify the characteristics of servant leaders, but also model the way, enable teachers to act, encourage teachers' hearts, and communicate a larger vision to pursue. Servant leaders are "what they say and do" (Taylor et al., 2007, p. 416), and they transform their followers by modelling what they desire to see and hear from them. Therefore, teachers will increase in self-efficacy as principals employ consistent and vivid experiences of modelling behaviour that builds trust and reinforces the verbal commitment that a principal has expressed to serve teachers (Cerit, 2009). Part of a principal's role is to make teachers the best that they can be (Barna, 2009), and this partially occurs by enabling them with personal and professional development, the freedom to take risks, and opportunities to fully strive for the shared vision. Teachers become effective and caring leaders as they are enabled by principals, who serve, develop and empower them (Barna, 2009; Crippen, 2010). As principals set effective examples and teachers are provided with what they need to excel in their roles, both will be enabled to collaboratively meet the shared purposes in the school.

I believe the best method for me, as a servant leader, to model the way for teachers is by consistently demonstrating love, honour, and respect in the way that I interact with the teachers, students, parents, and any other person that enters the school. This does not imply that I flatter people or put on a fake smile or avoid people with whom I have experienced conflict. It does imply that people never lose their intrinsic value, whatever age, race, background, socio-economic status, or religion that they are associated with; people are important to me because I believe each one is created by a living and loving God who loves all people the same. My ability to lead is based on my ability to follow, therefore as I seek to follow Jesus Christ and model His values and heart with many different types of people, I trust that the teachers on staff will be inspired and empowered to follow my example as they interact with different people at school.

Principals who are committed to a larger vision will continually encourage teachers (Taylor et al., 2007) to persevere, be positive, retain core values, and strive to meet the short term goals that will eventually lead to developing the vision into reality (Sultan & van de Bunt-Kokhuis, 2014; Taylor et al., 2007). Principals who believe that they can make a difference are able "to envision the future, creating images of what the organization can become. The leaders' excitement and enthusiasm enlists others to join the leader in his or her vision" (Taylor et al., 2007, p. 413), embrace personal sacrifice, and work hard to see it come to fruition. Servant leaders also recruit others by caring deeply for the people that they are leading, and principals need to perpetually invest into relationships with teachers to demonstrate care and respect, in order to maintain moral and respectful environments and encourage teachers' hearts (Cerit, 2009; Taylor et al., 2007). Leadership will always reflect personal character, values, desires, and relational strengths and weaknesses (Taylor et al., 2007), but then must translate into mobilizing people to share the struggles of ambition toward the larger vision.



I work at a Christian school for a reason. It is more than a job to me. I believe in a larger vision based on what Jesus described as the kingdom of God. I believe that the teachers and I are educating and equipping students to go into the world, as Jesus did, and effectively and powerfully serve and lead people in truth, humility, and purpose. These beliefs are rooted in my biblical worldview and affect the way that I make choices and the way that I encourage the teachers with whom I work. Three times a year, I hand write “thank you” cards (and give a small gift) to all my staff members, that include words of appreciation and encouragement so that they experience those feelings and thoughts that build confidence and confirm their energy laden investments. Many challenges come with educating different students with different learning needs, therefore I intentionally encourage teachers to persevere in their efforts and connect their daily investments to the larger vision of students impacting their community and world with biblical love, service, knowledge, reasoning, creativity, excellence, and hope.

### **The Effects on Teachers**

Principals who emulate servant leadership directly impact the teachers whom they serve and lead. The foremost and sincerest effect on teachers is how their personal values and beliefs are influenced when they are served and led by their principals. This effect produces growth for the teachers and causes them to become wiser, freer, healthier, (Crippen, 2005; Grothaus, 2004; van de Bunt-Kokhuis, 2014) and highly likely servant hearted as well (Stewart, 2012). Through these personal connections and empowering experiences (Crippen, 2010; Sultan & van de Bunt-Kokhuis, 2014), teachers’ minds and perspectives are changed positively (Taylor et al., 2007), and result in an increase of job satisfaction (Cerit, 2009) and a meaningful shift in teachers’ beliefs and values. Committed servant leaders change the people that they serve and lead, and as principals prioritize meeting the needs of teachers rather than fulfilling a checklist of administrative duties, they will see the change that they hope to see.

Teachers who are internally transformed by their principal’s servant leadership will transfer the modelled relational behaviour into their daily interactions with colleagues. An increase of sincere love, a sense of responsibility to one another, and open and honest communication are proven to be some of the advantageous effects of servant leadership (Buskey, 2014; Sultan & van de Bunt-Kokhuis, 2014; Taylor et al., 2007). A clear and consistent difference between organizations is “how people relate and how they actually function” (Crippen, 2005, p. 15), therefore the ability of teachers to work together with humility and integrity are necessary components to collaborative success (Cerit, 2009; Taylor et al., 2007); it begins with servant leadership. Such care and unity exhibited among teachers reflects the emerging of other servant (teacher) leaders due to the principal’s servant leadership (Taylor et al., 2007), and the fruit of confidence, professional growth, and internal motivation.

Principals who model servant leadership will not only affect teachers’ values, beliefs, and interpersonal interactions with colleagues, but also teachers’ classroom leadership and pedagogy. Enhanced work performance and task achievement, and the improved cultivation of a nurturing classroom, are the outcome of teachers choosing to imitate servant leadership in their classrooms and instructional practices (Cerit, 2009; Taylor et al., 2007). Trust needs to be developed between the teacher and the students, and when the teacher strives to demonstrate other characteristics of servant leadership through his/her instruction then students feel cared for, valued, and perhaps willing to see the teacher more as a person (Herman & Marlowe, 2005; Stewart, 2012; Taylor, 2007). Effective teachers are relational and prioritize serving (Russell, 2012), and deeply influence their students to believe in themselves, have confidence in their abilities, and set and reach their goals (Barna, 2009). As principals serve and lead teachers, the teachers will incorporate many of the learned and adopted characteristics into their classroom practices, and therefore have a greater effect on their students’ learning and lives.

Teachers whose pedagogy has been changed by their principal’s servant leadership will naturally interact with students differently than they used to (Cerit, 2009), and create

environments where students have the freedom to be themselves because they know they are cared for (Herman & Marlowe, 2005). Professional relational boundaries must continue to be respected between the teacher and the students; however, as teachers model servant leadership they will build a community of togetherness and a sense of belonging where students are authentically valued (Stewart, 2012; Sultan & van de Bunt-Kokhuis, 2014). As a team of classroom teachers each fulfills the role of being a servant leader, fostering understanding, empathy, respectful student dialogue, responsibility, hard work, and a desire to learn among students (Herman & Marlowe, 2005; Stewart, 2012), which will lead to a community focused and academically improved environment (Russell, 2012). Teachers who are affected by their principal's servant leadership will demonstrate more servant leader characteristics in their interactions with students, "thereby setting up the potential for raising the quality of life" (Spears, 2004, p. 10) within the classroom.

Everyone involved in the community of a school desires unity, healthy interactions and positive growth, therefore teachers who are impacted by servant leadership will strive to improve the school community. Building community has already been established as a characteristic of servant leaders (Russell, p. 2012; Sultan & van de Bunt-Kokhuis, 2014); however, if the principal influences the teachers and they influence the students and the parents that they connect with, there is much more potential for relational reciprocity to nurture each other and build community (Crippen, 2012). A school community can be changed by servant leadership because it "truly offers hope and guidance for a new era in human development, and for the creation of better, more caring institutions" (Spears, 2004). As teachers grow as servant leaders they will influence the school population to grow in moral literacy, effectiveness, shared decision-making, and community (Crippen, 2010; Stewart, 2012; Taylor et al., 2007).

I enjoy working hard to be a part of developing teachers so that both the teachers and students can benefit in their learning, personal growth, and love for each other and God. If I make a mistake or disrespect a teacher or student, I apologize and strive to make it right. I believe that the teachers that I work with are influenced either positively or negatively through my interactions with them. As I endeavour to excel as a servant leader, I continue to learn and grow in my understanding and efforts to be a principal who is a servant first, but whom is also passionate about leading people toward a larger vision that will one day become reality through daily collaborative efforts.

## **Conclusion**

It is clear that "servant-leadership provides the promise of an effective educational leadership and management model" (Crippen, 2005, p. 16), wherein principals serve and lead teachers and increase the effectiveness of the school. Principals must develop and utilize many servant leadership characteristics so that they fulfill their role of modelling a servant's heart, enabling teachers to act, encouraging teachers' hearts, and communicating a larger vision (Taylor et al., 2007). Principals who are excellent servant leaders increase teacher effectiveness, because teachers grow in their personal values, interactions with colleagues, classroom leadership and pedagogy, interactions with students, and desire and ability to build school community. When servant leadership is defined accurately and implemented correctly, teachers are inspired, mobilized, and empowered to maximize their effectiveness in the purposeful roles that they carry out. As servant leader principals lead by serving, they change those around them, transforming their organizations (Taylor et al., 2007) and increasing leadership effectiveness in the world of education.

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### **About the Author**

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# Factors That Influence Learning by English Language Learners (ELLs)

Kendall Hanus

## Abstract

*Current research with English language learners (ELLs) indicates that there are a number of factors that influence students' success in learning English as an additional language. Teachers and parents both have different roles in educating and supporting students on their voyage to learning another language.*

Many factors contribute to students' achieving academic success while learning a new language. For the majority of English language learners (ELLs), a new language is just one component of adapting and integrating into an educational system within a new society and country. Not only do they have to learn quickly to survive in their daily lives, but they also have to adjust to life in a school environment wherein their native language is not spoken. Some of the challenges include different behavioural and academic expectations, new social customs, and different cultural values. Teachers and parents influence various parts of a student's life, and therefore success is attributable to different factors. Parents have an important role in terms of motivation and educational expectations, as well as socio-economic status. However, it is teachers who create positive teacher-student relationships in classrooms that are culturally inclusive, collaborate with other mainstream educators, and differentiate instruction and assessment to meet student needs. Ultimately, in order for ELLs to have academic success, it is important that parents, teachers, and students work together to create an optimum learning environment and opportunities for student achievement.

Parents have critical roles in terms of motivating their children to learn and to want to improve their language skills and proficiency. While extrinsic and intrinsic motivation are important for children's success, motivation from parents is a separate form of motivation that has a more direct and positive influence on student achievement (Butler, 2014). If parents make it clear that education is important and that language skills and proficiency are desired, children are more likely to be motivated to achieve these goals. Parents' beliefs about their children's abilities and strengths significantly affect children's motivation and their own beliefs about what they are capable of academically (Butler, 2014). If parents support their children's language learning at school and also at home by facilitating language learning opportunities, children are more likely to achieve success sooner. These activities could be in English or in their native language, because strengthening one language benefits the development of all other languages by strengthening core language proficiency (Aro & Mikkila-Erdmann, 2014). Parents' expectations and their abilities to motivate their children are important for language learning, but parents' socio-economic status also influences students' ability to learn.

Socio-economic status can influence academic expectations, school resources, and societal stereotypes. Families that have a higher socio-economic status tend to have higher academic expectations in regards to college and university for their children, which can affect students' attitudes toward their own abilities and future (Aro & Mikkila-Erdmann, 2014). They can also provide their children with resources and opportunities that families from a lower socio-economic status may not be able to afford. Many students of lower socio-economic status have lower self-esteem and confidence when it comes to education, because they fear that they will not have the same opportunities for success in the future. Typically, students from lower socio-economic status also attend low-income schools that may be old and run-down, lack extra-curricular activities and resources, or exude a negative climate (Chu, 2011). Due to the lower socio-economic status, some EL families are more transient because they move due to changes in jobs, different housing options, or opportunities to be closer to family; however, their transience causes interruptions in education and, hence, learning gaps (Rance-Roney, 2009).

These learning gaps affect not only students' academic performances but also their feelings of confidence, capabilities, and attitudes toward learning. Therefore, while parents are critical factors in their children's learning with respect to motivation, academic expectations, and socio-economic status, teachers determine what takes place in the classroom.

It is critical that teachers create positive teacher-student relationships because many ELLs depend more on their teachers for academic support than on their parents (Sung, 2014). In some circumstances, parents value education but lack the academic background or language skills to help their children with the content or assignments (Chu, 2011). Not only are EL teachers responsible for language acquisition and skills, but they are also instrumental in helping students to adjust to the differences in culture and social behaviours. Cultural expectations and beliefs about teachers and students vary, and teachers need to be cognizant of these so that they can bridge the gaps. If students feel safe because they trust their teacher, they will share opinions and ideas, ask questions, and learn new concepts more readily. Positive relationships with teachers improve students' confidence, self-efficacy, and engagement in learning. If students perceive teachers to be encouraging, supportive, and interested in the content being taught, students are more likely to become engaged and motivated to strengthen their language skills independently (Fukuda & Yoshida, 2013). Although creating positive teacher-student relationships is the cornerstone of learning, teachers are also responsible for ensuring that ELLs feel comfortable and supported by their peers.

Teachers need to create classroom climates that are culturally inclusive and supportive, so that ELLs will take risks with the language and not be afraid of making mistakes. A culturally inclusive classroom affects ELLs' progress and skill development because students must feel accepted before they will engage socially. If students are not comfortable, they are more likely to lose interest and to become disengaged in their learning (Talandis & Stout, 2015). In classrooms wherein students feel safe, comfortable, and valued, they openly share ideas and become accountable for their learning. Vygotsky's belief that learning occurs when there is social interaction between more and less knowledgeable people (Yoon, 2012) applies to ELLs who feel comfortable with their peers. Encouraging ELLs to share their experiences, cultural perspectives, beliefs, and values motivates students to learn from each other and brings them closer together in supportive and meaningful ways. Teachers need to foster social interaction between ELLs and their native English speaking peers because ELLs acquire more language skills, more linguistic patterns, and also more social and academic knowledge from those peers (Sung, 2014). In culturally inclusive classrooms and positive learning communities, students perform better academically, increase self-esteem, and develop positive interpersonal relationships with students from all cultural and racial groups (Chu, 2011).

While positive teacher-student relationships are essential, EL teachers also need to collaborate with mainstream teachers, in order to ensure that ELLs' needs are met in all of their classes. Mainstream teachers often have limited training in teaching language learners and benefit from extra support and instruction on how to integrate language instruction effectively in the classroom (Coelho, 2012). Many mainstream teachers also lack the training, knowledge, and experience to teach specific reading and literacy skills, which leads to inadequate literacy instruction and lower ELLs' reading achievements (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). Open communication between mainstream and EL teachers produces timely diagnosis and strategic interventions (Garcia & Kim, 2014). EL teachers need to train mainstream teachers how to address language development and skills as they relate to curricular outcomes and content knowledge (Freeman, Katz, Gomez, & Burns, 2015). Collaboration between these teachers fosters cultures of inclusion, which broaden and develop engaging, relevant, effective, and supportive structures that meet the diverse linguistic and cultural needs of ELLs (Russell, 2014).

Working with mainstream teachers enables EL teachers to identify the supportive structures that ELLs need for intervention and timely additional support. Other factors that impede ELLs' success are inappropriate instruction and invalid assessments of their skills and needs (Drame & Xu, 2008). Response to Intervention (RTI) is a potential alternative for assessing ELLs;

however, it needs to be used appropriately and cautiously. RTI centres on literacy and focuses on intervening in students' academic careers as early as possible through a multi-tiered system wherein the intensity of the interventions increases with each level (Brown & Doolittle, 2008). Because RTI focuses on literacy levels and skills, the ELLs' literacy levels and linguistic proficiency in their native language must be taken into consideration, in order to ensure that interventions and instructions are appropriate. RTI requires working with reading recovery specialists, guidance counsellors, speech therapists and literacy specialists, in order to ensure that appropriate scaffolding is in place. RTI promotes collaboration among teachers and educators, since teachers work together to plan, problem solve, and adapt material to meet the individual needs of students (Drame & Xu, 2008). This approach changes how teachers diagnose and assess students, as well as how they plan and deliver lessons, because teachers have more knowledge and greater access to resources. ELLs benefit directly when EL teachers intervene and plan with mainstream teachers to tailor instruction and assessments to meet individual ELLs' needs and develop their skills and linguistic proficiency.

Teachers need to differentiate instruction and assessment because each ELL requires individual planning. There are significant differences in terms of immigration status, previous educational background, literacy in first language, culture, and socio-economic status (Rance-Roney, 2009). When teachers differentiate instruction and plan activities that engage students not only academically but also socially with native English speaking peers, students are more motivated and even more engaged in their own learning. Teachers also need to be mindful of cultural differences and background experiences as they plan lessons to ensure that all students feel welcome and comfortable. If teachers focus on skill-development and student-centered lessons, students are more accountable, more invested in the content, and more interested in their peers (Drame & Xu, 2008). Second language learner students have the same needs as students in mainstream classes, but they also need extra support for decoding, expanding vocabulary, and developing strong reading skills (Sasson, 2014).

It is inappropriate for teachers to assess ELLs on the curriculum writing and reading strands at grade level before adequately preparing learners to perform at grade level. Part of ensuring progression of learning requires that teachers assess students regularly, both informally and formally, in order to monitor student development. By continually gathering information about their students' skills, teachers can adjust planning and instruction to meet students' needs as they progress. For example, effective teachers lower the language barrier, provide scaffolding, give adequate time, and adapt literacy assessments until students' skills are at grade level (Coelho, 2012). These strategies enable teachers to differentiate instruction and assessments, and to match activities with skills being taught in class; thus, ELLs experience success and see progression of their skills. The more information teachers have about the language skills of their ELLs, the more efficient and effective the teachers' instruction and assessment will be.

In conclusion, many factors contribute to students' achieving academic success while learning a new language. Not only are students responsible for studying, participating in class, interacting with others, and asking questions, but parents and teachers also have vital roles in supporting students. Parents affect motivation, educational expectations, and socio-economic status. Socio-economic status affects students' self-perceptions, but healthy relationships between students and parents can offset these obstacles. The more involved and supportive parents are in their children's learning, the more engaged students are in school because they want to please their parents. Students also want to please their teachers, since they rely on their EL teachers for academic and social support. EL teachers are responsible for creating positive relationships and fostering culturally inclusive classrooms. By collaborating with mainstream teachers and ensuring that appropriate academic supports and interventions (such as RTI) are in place, EL teachers enable students to optimize opportunities and resources. Effective teachers differentiate instruction and assessments to meet ELLs' needs with specific and individualized education. Thus, if teachers understand the factors that influence and affect ELLs' learning, academic success and linguistic proficiency are possible for all language learners.

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# Inclusive Education: The Least Dangerous Assumption

Kaley Cochrane

## Abstract

*Inclusive education is a model of supporting diverse learners and needs in a general education setting. While the philosophy and ideals of inclusion are supported by many governmental and educational stakeholders, the practice of full inclusion is often met with resistance by educators. Research on the academic achievement and adaptive growth for students with special education needs and their typically developing peers proves that inclusive practices offer no harm and, in many cases, offer benefits to all students. This article supports the assumption that inclusive, general education programming can support academic and social development of all learners.*

Inclusive education is the practice of supporting a diversity of student needs in a general educational setting. Inclusive models aim to provide each student with opportunities to belong and connect with peers, while accessing curriculum through shared educational experiences. The movement toward inclusion, supported by many international and governmental organizations, is based on a variety of principles including the principle of “the least dangerous assumption,” which posits that it is least dangerous for students with disabilities to be supported in a general classroom setting, rather than a special education environment (Boyle, Topping, & Jindal-Snape, 2013, p. 62). Whether inclusion or special education programs are the least dangerous assumption depends on their academic and social influences on students. In comparison with special education programs, a general education placement is the least dangerous assumption.

Educational inclusion is defined as providing a welcoming and equitable educational environment that meets the needs of all learners, in the pursuit of excellence in all aspects of education (Inclusion BC, 2014; Katz, 2013; Salend & Duhaney, 1999). Salend and Duhaney (1999) described inclusionary schools as those that “seek to establish communities of learners by educating all students together in age-appropriate, general education classrooms in their neighborhood schools” (p. 114). Manitoba Education further defined inclusive practices as those that foster engagement, belonging and personal achievement for all students, by “engag[ing] in practices that allow students with a wide range of learning needs to be taught together effectively” and, in doing so, “enhance students’ abilities to deal with diversity” (Manitoba Education, 2016, “What Does Inclusion Mean”). These inclusive practices are grounded in values of respect, equity, justice, and removal of “exclusionary assumptions and practices” for students with disabilities (Boyle et al., 2013, p. 528).

While classroom practices of inclusion often vary, common elements exist. Students with and without special education needs are educated in diverse classrooms with same-age peers. These students have shared educational experiences, with access to the mainstream curriculum, which is supported to meet students’ needs and abilities (Boyle et al., 2013). These elements of inclusion help to distinguish inclusive practices from other integrative approaches, such as visitation, part-time mainstreaming, physical integration, and reverse mainstreaming (Inclusion BC, 2014). Through inclusive practices, all students are able to develop academically, while fostering growth of adaptive skills.

The least dangerous assumption asserts that, without conclusive data on best practices in special education, educational systems must operate based on the assumption that their practices, if incorrect, will cause the least harm to all students (Doyle & Giangreco, 2013). With this assumption, educators must assume that it is least dangerous for students to be educated in a general education setting, alongside their peers. Rather than assuming “student deficits,” due to their special education needs, it is less harmful to presume that students are competent



and capable of learning interesting content. In turn, educational stakeholders must presume the competence of general education teachers in educating students with special education needs. By doing so, they share the belief that all students have the capability to learn, and that educators have the capacity to support them in doing so.

While the least dangerous assumption is based on the lack of conclusive evidence supporting best educational practices for students with disabilities, there is a growing body of evidence to support inclusive educational practices. Researchers have found that inclusion offers no negative effects in terms of academic and social achievement for students with and without disability (Dessementet & Bless, 2013; Dessementet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Ruijs, Van der Veen, & Peetsma, 2010). In many cases, researchers have found benefits for students in inclusive programming (Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1994; Rojewski, Lee, & Gregg, 2015; Salend & Duhaney, 1999). These benefits, or lack of detriments, support the premise of the least dangerous assumption, whereby students in inclusive education programs are least dangerously affected by inclusive, general education practices.

The least dangerous assumption is based on the presumption that students with special education needs are capable of learning curricular content, and that general education teachers have the capacity to teach students of varying ability. Research supports the belief that students with special education needs, participating in inclusive programming, are capable of learning equal, if not more, academic content than those students in special education programs (Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1994; Dessementet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Salend & Duhaney, 1999). Waldron and McLeskey (1998) compared the math and English performance of students with learning disabilities, educated in either an inclusive classroom, or receiving resource room support (as cited in Salend & Duhaney, 1999). The results showed that students educated in general education classrooms made significantly greater gains in English and no difference in gains in math, as compared to their peers educated through resource pull-out. Similarly, Freeman and Alkin (2000) found no significant differences in achievement between students with intellectual disabilities who were educated in general classrooms and their counterparts who were educated in specialized classrooms and schools (as cited in Dessementet, Bless, & Morin, 2012). In fact, they found that the time these students spent in general education classroom was associated with increased academic achievement. These findings support inclusive practices, given that students with special education needs show equal, if not more, academic achievement in the general education classes than alternative settings.

While many people will agree that inclusive practices can offer academic benefits to students with special education needs, some may argue that inclusion is done at the expense of the education of their typically developing peers. However, research confirms that academic achievement of typically developing students is not negatively affected by the inclusion of students with special education needs (Dessementet & Bless, 2013; Ruijs, Van der Veen, & Peetsma, 2010; Salend & Duhaney, 1999). Multiple studies comparing the achievement of typically developing students in inclusive and non-inclusive environments have found that the inclusion of students with special education needs in a general education setting has no effect on the reading, language, and arithmetic achievement of the students without such needs (Dessementet & Bless, 2013; Ruijs et al., 2010). Furthermore, this lack of effect is true for all achievement groups, including low-, average-, and high-achieving students. Interestingly, when comparing to other background factors that are correlated to achievement, inclusion is less predictive of the achievement of typically developing students than both country of origin and gender (Ruijs et al., 2010). This comparison reveals that including students with disabilities in general education classrooms has no more effect on the academic achievement of other students than their gender or the country in which they were born, which most people would agree are not significant predictors of academic or lifelong success. When put in this context, it becomes apparent that inclusive practices offer no detrimental effect on the academic achievement of all students.

One of the purported benefits of special education programs is the emphasis on life-skills programming, which often focuses on adaptive behaviours, such as communication and social skills, which many students with special education needs require for adulthood. However, comparative research does not support this claim. Dessemontet et al. (2012) assessed adaptive behaviours, including communication, social skills, community living, leisure, and self-care abilities, among others. They compared the adaptive skill growth of students with disabilities in inclusive settings and special placement programs. Regardless of the type of classroom placement, both groups of students made notable progress in the adaptive behaviour domain, with no significant differences between the two groups. In an older study, Saint-Laurent, Fournier, and Lessard (1993) found that students in fully integrated programs developed better social behaviours than their counterparts in community and developmentally based programs). Other aspects of adaptive behaviour were similar, regardless of program type. While effect sizes vary between studies, in a meta-analysis, Baker, Wang, and Walberg (1994) found a small-to-moderate benefit of inclusive programming, in comparison to non-inclusive practices. They noted that regardless of effect sizes, which varied between studies, research has rarely demonstrated negative effects of inclusive education. Students in inclusive programs demonstrate equal, if not greater, advances in adaptive behaviours than their peers in special placement programs.

Furthermore, in terms of long-term success, Rojewski, Lee, and Gregg (2015) found a significant, positive correlation between inclusion and participation in post-secondary education, with students who received at least 80% of their secondary education in inclusive settings being 2.1 times more likely to enrol in post-secondary programs than the less inclusive group (p. 214). Beyond this research, a national study focusing on transition into adulthood found that students who took a greater number of high school courses in a general education setting were more likely to gain employment, attend post-secondary programs, live independently and have greater social integration than their counterparts who spent more time in a special education setting (Salend & Duhaney, 1999). While the development of life skills, or adaptive behaviours, is an important and valuable goal for all students, including those students with special education needs, these skills can be taught and supported in a general education classroom equally, if not more effectively, than through special education programming, offering further evidence that inclusive placements are the least dangerous placement option.

Inclusive practices benefit not only students with special educational needs, but also their typically developing peers, or students without such needs, through a greater development of social skills and behaviours. Students involved in inclusive practices develop more positive attitudes toward people with disability, which in turn fosters acceptance of peers (Dessemontet & Bless, 2013). In a survey of 181 middle years students without disabilities, most students were supportive of inclusive practices, believing that these practices had positive outcomes for students with special education needs and helped typically developing students to develop more positive attitudes toward peers with disabilities (Salend & Duhaney, 1999). In comparing teachers' ratings of typically developing students in less inclusive (less than 10% students with special education needs) and more inclusive (more than 10% of students with special education needs) educational settings, Ruijs, Vanderveen, and Peetsma (2010) found no significant differences in student self-confidence, behaviour, effort, popularity, and teacher-student relationship. In student reports of social integration and well-being, no significant differences were found between the inclusive and exclusive groups. However, students in the more inclusive group reported significantly greater self-confidence than the less inclusive group. Through inclusive programming, and with heterogeneous peer groups, students can develop improved social and adaptive skills and behaviours, as compared to alternative programs.

Inclusive education is a practice supported by many governmental and educational organizations. The goal of inclusive education is to support diverse classrooms and meet the needs of all students, including those students with disabilities, in a general education setting. Inclusive education is supported by the principle of the least dangerous assumption, which

posits that it is least dangerous for students with disabilities to be taught in a general education placement, rather than a special education environment (Boyle et al., 2013). While the evidence base is still developing, research shows that including all students in general education classes, regardless of their education needs, offers no harm and, in many cases, offers benefits to all students. This research supports the assumption that inclusive, general education programming can meet the needs and support academic and social development of all learners. Inclusive education is, therefore, the “least dangerous assumption.”

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# Reading Is Thinking

Cindy Swallow

## **Abstract**

*Reading and thinking need to go hand in hand for students to become successful learners. The processes involved in thinking while reading must be modelled, practised, and infused into everyday instruction in all levels of education. There needs to be a balance between learning to read and reading to learn. Teachers are responsible for finding the strategies that work for all learners, differentiating the instruction and activities, and building a love of reading into our classrooms for students to master the complex action of thinking while reading.*

Learning to read and reading to learn both involve complex actions of the brain. Reading requires the brain to make connections and inferences, to visualize and respond, to ask questions and determine importance, to analyze and synthesize, and to monitor comprehension, all while carefully decoding the text (Gear, 2006). Readers engage in active thinking. There is no one best way to teach reading, because all learners learn differently. Therefore, balanced literacy programs include differentiated instruction to build interest, increase comprehension and fluency, and incorporate thinking strategies while reading (Reis, 2009). Reading can be categorized into two main areas: decoding and fluency (learning to read), and comprehension and thinking (reading to learn). Both areas are equally important in the reading process, and necessitate a variety of strategies and practices in order to master the complex action of thinking while reading.

## **Learning To Read: Decoding and Fluency**

Decoding and fluency refer to the physical act of saying the words. Readers enact word attack strategies such as sounding out, chunking, recognizing high frequency sight words, and using context clues and word structure to physically produce the sound. This side of reading is where the phonemic awareness, spelling, vocabulary and decoding strategies all come together to produce words that make sense (Gear, 2006). In order to develop these strategies, students need to participate with patterned text and repeated reading whereby they practise the same text until reading is fluent (Katz, 2012). This may be as simple as reading over a sight word list or learning to blend sounds together, or as complex as participating in a Reader's Theatre. The key is repetition, because repeated readings and wide reading training improves the comprehension scores the most with people learning to read (Ari, 2015). "Re-reading is the most powerful strategy" (Brownlie, 2012) to improve students' overall reading ability.

Teachers tend to focus on decoding, phonemic awareness, spelling, and phonics are skills in the early years of reading instruction. However, it is important to note that the time spent on learning to read should be less than the time spent on actually reading to gain meaning (Fielding & Pearson, 1994). Isolated skill-based activities have their place in learning to decode, but they should not be the only focus of a quality reading program. Early years students need to hear quality text being read to them, with them, and for them while meaningful discussions are happening about the features of the text, the meaning of the text, and making inferences about the text. The reading instruction time, based on the decoding skills, needs to be monitored to maintain quality reading instruction.

Somewhere in the middle of learning to read and reading to learn is fluency. Reading fluency includes accuracy in word decoding, automatic processing of the text, and prosodic reading (Rasinski, 2004). When students struggle in any of these areas, it is unlikely that they will fully understand the text. Students who struggle with accuracy need support in decoding. Two successful strategies for increasing this type of accuracy are assisted readings and

repeated readings (Rasinski, 2004). In my own practice as a literacy specialist, using repeated reading such as Reader's Theatre has not only improved the students' reading and comprehension, but also improved the readers' enthusiasm toward and enjoyment of reading. Re-reading texts, which students and parents may think is a waste of time, serves a very important purpose in building fluency. Fluency boot camp activities give the students a chance to read short passages over and over until they are confident with their ability to decode the words and fluently read them. The activities are timed, change quickly, and offer variety and a challenge. These activities have been highly successful in my literacy program and have been requested by students many times. Reader's Theatre, plays, poetry, speeches, or any other form of reading that involves repeated practice of meaningful texts improves fluency.

Fluency has six dimensions: rate, pausing, phrasing, stress, intonation, and integration (Fountas & Pinnel, 2006). Fluency is not to be confused with speed. Fluency does not mean reading faster, while ignoring punctuation, phrasing, and stress. Quality reading instruction must not emphasize speed at the expense of meaningful reading, or the students will become fast readers with limited comprehension (Rasinski, 2004). Fluency is not the only goal of reading; "our concern is integral connection with comprehension" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006, p. 64). Quality reading instruction that includes fluency coaching, practising and modelling leads to the greatest gains in comprehension, as well as fluency (Ari, 2015). This practice include reading aloud to students, whereby the teacher models what reading fluently sounds like while sharing quality literature with students. In my own practice, having the students use a rubric to self-assess their fluency, according to the six dimensions, makes the students aware of how they are doing, gives them ownership, and provides the next steps for goal setting. Recording the students reading a passage is a powerful way to have the students self-assess by showing them what they need to do to improve. Any strategy that has students practising the six dimensions on a daily basis will improve their reading fluency.

I have found that older students, who are not yet reading at grade level, are often at a standstill with their reading development. The grade-appropriate text is too difficult for them to decode, but may be well within their cognitive ability to understand. The materials at their reading levels are often juvenile and babyish, causing an engagement issue of reluctance for the student. This avoidance prevents improvements in reading from happening. This cycle is difficult to break. Often, text can be created from curricular materials that are accessible for the students and are written for their reading ability, yet are not babyish. In my experience, when the students have ownership in the task of assisting in creating the text, it is more meaningful than any commercially produced text. Their brain needs enrichment, with rich text, to enhance their vocabulary, conceptual understandings, and intellectual growth. However, often they are given the simplest text. Students need to be encouraged to use "accessible text with rich concepts" (Ivey & Fisher, 2006), alternative texts, and challenging materials for reading and thinking aloud. When teachers read aloud from content area texts, they model thinking strategies and the student is free to enjoy the fluent reading. Students enjoy the reading without the struggle of decoding the text, all while engaging the brains of the students.

### **Reading To Learn: Comprehension and Thinking**

The other side to reading includes thinking, comprehension, constructing meaning, and metacognition (Gear, 2006), which comprise "reading to learn." Students need to understand what they are reading as clearly as they know how to read it. The goal of quality reading programs is to create "efficient, independent, self-monitoring behaviour and the ability to search for and use a variety of sources of information in the text" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2012, p. 270). Reading comprehension skills should not be a secret from the students. One student stated, after hearing a lessons in which I stopped and thought out loud, "How do you know how to do that? You really have all those questions and thoughts in your head?" Teaching how to think, and to ask questions while reading, are as important as teaching how to read.

Metacognition is the act of thinking about thinking. This is an integral component of comprehending what is being read. Metacognition is the foundation for good reading. It encompasses making connections, asking questions, visualizing, determining importance, drawing inferences, analyzing, synthesizing, and monitoring comprehension (Gear, 2006). Good readers are metacognitive: they use, think about, and articulate these strategies to discuss the text and enhance meaning. When students are aware of their thinking while reading, they go beyond the basic information in the text, to thinking deeper and more meaningfully.

Explicit instruction of comprehension strategies, which includes teacher modelling, guided practice, independent practice and application of the skill, should be taught during reading lessons (Fielding & Pearson, 1994). Teacher modelling includes “repeated modeling of your thinking while you read aloud to teach each new strategy” (Gear, 2006, p. 31). Guided practice provides the student opportunity to practise the skill with support. This support remains in place until it is no longer needed. During independent practice, the students discuss their thinking with peers, which strengthens their understanding. The final goal is for students to apply the skill on their own in a variety of settings. “Intentionally integrating the language of reading and thinking into classrooms is essential” (Gear, 2006, p. 31), in order to further the thinking skills and to enhance the meaning of the text. Without this gradual release of responsibility, students miss out on the opportunity to practise new skills and make these skills their own.

Re-reading is an important strategy, not only for students to practise, but also for teachers to model. It provides students the opportunity to dive deeper into the text and to find evidence to support their thinking. By keeping the focus on the content of the book, rather than on personal experiences and thoughts, students build content knowledge and vocabulary, before moving to personal connections and feeling (Gerwetz, 2015). The first time through the book, the focus is on enjoyment. The second time reading the book, the focus is on the text and gaining meaning. This re-reading gives all students access to the story on an equal playing field, regardless of prior experiences. Close reading is a strategy that encourages students to re-read with a focus, and to uncover layers of text that they would not have understood or noticed with a single read through (Boyles, 2013). Subsequent readings of the books can focus on connections and deeper meaning. Reading any materials more than once improves comprehension.

Teachers are responsible for helping students to access their prior knowledge and to apply these reading strategies to various texts (Bryce, 2011). Accessing students’ prior knowledge goes hand in hand with helping them to make connections. Teachers must exercise caution not to let the connections overtake the text, while ensuring that they assist students “to enhance understanding and construct meaning” (Miller, 2002) of the text. Knowledge about the world, relationships, and language are critical to boost comprehension of texts (Pearson & Liben, 2013). Teachers are expected to not only teach how to read, but to include vocabulary building activities that will develop language knowledge in order to improve meaning for readers. Activating relevant prior knowledge, or schema, is essential before, during, and after reading, regardless of the text used.

Thinking aloud while reading text to the students is an important way to model thinking strategies. This modelling of thinking stimulates students to “activate, build, change, and revise their schema as they engage in conversations with their peers and their teachers” (Miller, 2002, p. 56). Thinking aloud affords students a look inside the teacher’s brain, to hear about the mental process that he/she is using to construct meaning, and it provides teachers an opportunity to demonstrate when and why each strategy is most effective. In my practice, thinking aloud is a skill that entails the gradual release of responsibility for the students to understand how to use it and how to do it successfully.

Three levels of questions require direct teaching during reading instruction (Fountas and Pinnel, 2012). Thinking within the text includes monitoring and correcting, searching for information, and summarizing. About-the-text questions involve students in analyzing the text. Beyond-the-text questions include inferring, synthesizing, making connections, and predicting

(Fountas & Pinnel, 2012). All three types of questions need to be taught explicitly, practised the gradual release model, and used when assessing students' comprehension of the text.

Students need to learn how to talk about their reading, to articulate their thinking, to ask questions, to make predictions, to analyze, to synthesize, to respond emotionally, and to make inferences about the text (Brownlie, 2005). Some students can respond as second nature. However, many students need to be taught how to respond through modelling. The Say Something strategy is a very effective way to facilitate discussions about the book (Brownlie, 2005). This discussion opens the door for all readers to participate and be heard, because of the expectation that all students will say something. In this model, the students practise comprehension strategies and learn how to talk about their books from the teacher, and from one another, in a safe environment that is respectful of all abilities.

Assessments require a purpose at all times. In my practice, I use reading assessments as benchmark assessments to get the students going and understand what they are able to do. Ongoing assessment is critical to assess previous lessons, to assess understanding of the text, and to determine the needs and strengths of the students. "Good assessment is the foundation for effective teaching" (Fountas & Pinnell, 2006, p. 275), and it therefore drives instruction. However, educators must keep in mind that "you don't fatten a sheep by weighing it" (Stead, 2003). Taking time to assess groupings, lessons, and strategies can drive forward planning to ensure success (Firmender, Reis, & Sweeny, 2013); but too much assessing, and too little time spent on practising and gaining the skills, are detrimental to the growth of our readers.

### Conclusion

Reading is a complex skill that is neatly woven between meaning and decoding, fluency and thinking. Many successful strategies improve student reading. Re-reading, reading aloud while thinking aloud, and explicit teaching of thinking skills are among the most successful, and the most easily adopted in a classroom situation. All readers, regardless of their ability, can participate in thinking while reading if the correct structure is in place. An atmosphere that values reading and thinking, and models both, will enhance the students' ability to learn to read and read to learn.

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# The Reading Recovery Intervention

Tracy Grasby

## Abstract

*Early years students enter the educational system with varying degrees of reading and writing knowledge. Designed by Marie Clay, Reading Recovery is an intervention program that targets struggling literacy learners in grade one. Reading Recovery teachers conduct assessments to identify the neediest literacy learners. Then they design and deliver one-on-one lessons that will accelerate these struggling learners. The lesson segments target reading fluency, reading strategies, letter and word work, and writing skills. Reading Recovery aims to accelerate struggling literacy learners in order to close the gaps among peers at an early age.*

When early years students struggle with reading and writing skills, Reading Recovery intervention can offer support by building the foundational skills that those children lack. Marie Clay designed the Reading Recovery program to provide intensive assistance to struggling learners, in order to develop their skills to meet those of their average classmates (Education & Training, 2015). Many strategic processes must occur simultaneously in the brain in order to read and write proficiently (O'Connor, Briggs, & Forbes, 2013), and often early years children need assistance to coordinate these processes in order to become successful literacy learners. Reading Recovery responds to a child's literacy struggles by intervening with a series of lessons that are tailored to the child's strengths and weaknesses. The format of the Reading Recovery program and the expertise of the teacher combine to create an intervention that assists young students. Struggling literacy learners can benefit from the support of Reading Recovery.

Many school teams are now using a response to intervention (RTI) model in order to group students according to their literacy needs. RTI is a tiered system that classifies students through assessments (Dunn, 2010). Based on assessment data, the school team arranges the necessary interventions to fill students' learning deficits. The Reading Recovery program is a second-tier intervention in the RTI model (O'Connor et al., 2013). The students in this tier do not respond to classroom literacy instruction and therefore require a more intensive approach in order to develop their skills to the level of their peers. Reading Recovery teachers are trained to respond with a one-on-one program that targets these struggling learners. RTI is implemented by educators to assist children who have weak reading and writing skills.

Reading is more than phonics and decoding. It is an intricate process that involves strategic activity, self-monitoring, and self-correcting (Clay, 2006). Readers mentally integrate the information drawn from the letter sounds, the language structure, and the context of the story. Reading Recovery teachers simplify this complicated process by designing individual lessons that accommodate the child's existing letter and print knowledge. Some students struggle to read because of deficits in language structure and articulation (Sices, Taylor, Freebain, Hansen, & Lewis, 2007), while others may struggle because of a lack of exposure to books and print concepts (*Profile 4*, 2005). Reading Recovery teachers are trained to analyze students' running records of reading and to teach students to use and to cross-check sources of information in order to read more challenging levels of text. The reading process extends beyond phonemic awareness.

School staff members collaborate to identify struggling readers, and the Reading Recovery teacher becomes involved. Reading Recovery is an intervention specifically designed for grade one students whose literacy skills are in the bottom 20% of their class (Clay, 2006a). Through consultation among the grade one classroom teacher, resource teacher, and Reading Recovery teacher, students who struggle with reading and writing skills are identified. The Reading Recovery teacher assesses these students and then identifies the most struggling learners to receive the intervention (Education & Training, 2015). The Reading Recovery teacher then

prepares and delivers daily one-on-one lessons that are designed to build on the students' strengths (Clay, 2006a). By working with the school team, the Reading Recovery teacher can respond efficiently to the needs of struggling literacy learners in the early years.

Once a Reading Recovery student is identified, his/her 20-week lesson series begins with 10 lessons in which the teacher familiarizes him/herself with the student. During these "roaming around the known" lessons (Clay, 2006a), the Reading Recovery teacher offers many opportunities for the child to converse, read, and write. The Reading Recovery teacher also uses his/her assessment notes to pinpoint the student's strengths and to reveal what the child already knows about print concepts. During these initial lessons, the student practises reading techniques and the writing of familiar words, in order to solidify this knowledge. An example of practising known material might be writing specific sight words quickly or locating words that the student can read in the text. The Reading Recovery teacher models new reading behaviours, such as solving words by sounding them out, but these reading strategies are not formally taught at this time (Clay, 2010b). The teacher continues to make notes during these lessons, paying particular attention to how the child independently solves problems in text. These introductory lessons enable the teacher to become acquainted with the child and to identify the student's strengths and needs, so that the rest of the lesson series scaffolds to new learning.

At lesson 11 in the program, the Reading Recovery teacher begins to teach new reading strategies. The teacher follows a regimented sequence of activities that considers the student's strengths and needs, as carefully noted from the first 10 lessons (Clay, 2006a). A typical Reading Recovery lesson is divided into three 10-minute segments: reading familiar text, doing letter work and writing, and reading new text. The Reading Recovery teacher works beside the child to enable easy observation as the child reads and writes (Clay, 2010b). Throughout the remainder of the lessons, the teacher encourages the student's attempts to read and to write, noting any new reading and writing behaviours that he or she exhibits. The student's text level is regularly graphed in order to make the Reading Recovery teacher accountable for the student's progress during the lesson series. The Reading Recovery teacher refers to his/her notes in order to plan an individualized teaching path for the child. Reading strategies are formally introduced in the 11<sup>th</sup> lesson.

A typical lesson at this point in the series begins with the child reading familiar text, and then the teacher completes a running record of the child's reading. During the first part of the lesson, the teaching focuses on fluency and phrasing in reading. After each book that the child reads, the teacher gives specific praise for a positive reading behaviour that was exhibited and then teaches a strategy that the student did not demonstrate. The teaching point is delivered by a carefully worded "prompt" (Clay, 2006a) that builds on a reading behaviour that the child has already demonstrated. An example might be: "When you read this part, you sounded smooth. Now put these words together so it sounds like smooth talking here, too." The child then rereads the piece of text, trying to hear his/her own fluency. If necessary, the teacher models the fluency, and the child repeats after the teacher. Reading fluency is taught and practised at the beginning of the lesson.

The Reading Recovery teacher then completes a running record as the child reads the text that was introduced in the previous day's lesson. The teacher analyzes the running record, noting the strategies that the child used to solve problems in text. Again, the teacher offers positive feedback for good problem solving in text and then offers a prompt to improve the child's problem solving at difficulty. A Reading Recovery teacher might say, "I like how you noticed when you got here that it did not look like the word *river*, and you reread and fixed it up. Now reread this part, and think about what would sound right and look like that word." These specific prompts reinforce the use of reading strategies. The first 10 minutes of the lesson focus on fluency, phrasing, and reading strategies.

The next 10-minute segment begins with letter identification and word work. The child goes to the magnetic board in the room and quickly sorts a set of letters in order to exercise visual discrimination skills. This letter sorting is followed by "breaking words apart" (Clay, 2006b) at the

board, where the teacher has carefully chosen a set of words from a previous lesson for the child to examine and to manipulate as magnetic letters. The teaching at this point attends to features and patterns in words. Visual discrimination and phonemic awareness skills are supported by having students manipulate letters and words during this part of the lesson.

Writing, the next part of the lesson, supports the child's reading achievement. This lesson component begins with a brief conversation about something of interest to the child or about a story that was read earlier. The teacher then assists the child to compose a sentence based on that conversation. The child writes this sentence in a special notebook, receiving assistance as necessary from the teacher. For difficult words, the teacher might draw Elkonin boxes, with each box representing a sound in the word (Clay, 2006b). The child is taught to push a counter into each box as he or she says the word slowly. This process teaches students to articulate words slowly as they write. This practice also demonstrates that the sounds heard in words can be visually represented in print. As students progress in their phonetic spelling skills, they are encouraged to use word analogies to write new words (Clay, 2006a). Students also practise writing sight word vocabulary during the writing segment. The Reading Recovery teacher then reprints the student's composed sentence onto a sentence strip and cuts it into words. The student is asked to rebuild the sentence, which not only reinforces self-monitoring and self-correcting of text, but also enables reading fluency because the child needs to phrase the sentence as presented on the table by the teacher. In Reading Recovery, the writing component of the lesson complements the reading component.

New text is introduced during the final 10 minutes of the lesson. The Reading Recovery teacher carefully selects a new book that enables the child to apply "what is known to new text" (Clay, 2006a, p. 51), yet also presents some challenge for new learning. Prior to the child attempting this text independently, the teacher provides an orientation to the story in order to support the child's reading. This book introduction might include a discussion of theme, a review of language structures, or a visual search in the text for new vocabulary. As the child reads the text, the Reading Recovery teacher coaches strategic reading behaviours that the child does not yet efficiently demonstrate. The child will reread this new text independently in the following day's lesson.

The Reading Recovery program directly benefits schools by reducing stress for classroom teachers, by accelerating struggling readers, and by saving money in the long term. Struggling learners usually require more time and assistance from the classroom teacher. Reading Recovery teachers support classroom teachers by engaging their neediest literacy learners in a daily one-on-one lesson, while the classroom teachers work with the rest of their class (Grehan et al., 2007). Because the Reading Recovery child receives an individual lesson, he or she does not need to spend time practising anything that is already known to him/her (Clay, 2006a). Consequently, the child's reading and writing skills accelerate more quickly. Children receiving the Reading Recovery intervention are less likely to require special education services and resource support later in their school life (Holliman & Hurry, 2013). Thus, Reading Recovery can prevent additional financial burdens for schools. The support provided by the Reading Recovery intervention is invaluable to classroom teachers, students, and the educational system.

Despite the comprehensive advantages of the Reading Recovery intervention, the program poses a financial issue for schools. Throughout the school year, teachers training in the program must participate in monthly professional development sessions. Because the program is a one-on-one intervention, it directly affects only a small percentage of the students in the school. Both the training model and the one-on-one component of the program translate into extra financial costs for school divisions to absorb (Serry, Rose, & Liamputtong, 2014). Schools committing to the Reading Recovery program invest a substantial amount of human and financial resources in the program.

Although Reading Recovery teachers are highly trained in the process of learning to read and write, they are not trained to diagnose reading disabilities. Reading Recovery teachers are obligated by the program to select only the lowest achieving literacy learners in the grade one

classroom (Clay, 2006a). Despite participating regularly in a full series of lessons with a devoted Reading Recovery teacher, Reading Recovery students do not always attain the required reading level to be “discontinued” (Clay, 2006a, p. 52) from the program. These students are then referred for additional support from the school’s resource and special education services. Students who do not successfully complete the program are often later diagnosed with clinical problems such as developmental delay, autism, dyslexia, or lowered intellect (Serry et al., 2014). Reading Recovery teachers observe and analyze the literacy behaviours of struggling readers in order to facilitate their progress; however, they are not qualified to identify specific reading or learning difficulties.

Reading Recovery supports students who enter school with substandard literacy backgrounds and skills. A child’s literacy skill development is influenced by his/her life experiences (Clay, 2010c). Some children are frequently exposed to reading and writing by having their own writing tools and books and by seeing adults in their lives engage in reading and writing activities. When parents support literacy development at home by exposing their children to print concepts and by encouraging the children’s attempts to write (Clay, 2010a), they set the foundation for their child’s literacy success. Classroom teachers are responsible for offering reading and writing opportunities to any children who have been deprived of this pre-school literacy exposure (Clay, 2010c). Reading Recovery teachers can intervene and provide the necessary foundational skills for these children. Early years experiences affect reading and writing development, and the Reading Recovery program is a means to enable all early years students access to an equitable start to literacy learning.

Reading Recovery aims to accelerate needy literacy learners in order to decrease the disparity of skills in a classroom. If an intense intervention is provided for struggling students during their early years in education, then academic and behavioural problems can be prevented for those students later in their school lives (Harn, Linan-Thompson, & Roberts, 2008). By responding quickly and early, teachers can work toward filling learning deficits, rather than having the skill gaps widen further among peers. Investing money in the Reading Recovery program can save time, money, and stress for schools and families in the long run (Harley, 2012). With the early and intense intervention of Reading Recovery, struggling readers can perform as successfully as their peers.

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## RTI Leadership – Planning for Implementation

Lesia Jensen

### **Abstract**

*A diverse and experienced leadership team is crucial to the implementation of Response Through Intervention (RTI) in secondary schools. Transitioning from traditional resource models, secondary school educators require support and guidance from knowledgeable and respected school leaders as they encounter many complexities unique to their level. Team membership will evolve throughout implementation, but the initial members should at the very least include an administrator, special education teacher, instructional coach, and guidance counsellor.*

Implementation of Response Through Intervention (RTI) at the secondary school level requires many structures to be in place, but there is not one more important than solid leadership. Though much focus and research has been done on RTI at the elementary level, the shift into the high school is still relatively new, necessitating strong support throughout implementation. Therefore, a school leadership team, consisting of a group of professionals ready to support, guide and participate in the process, is crucial to the successful transition to the RTI model. When assembling the teams, it is vital to keep in mind the needs of the students and then draw on the strengths and expertise of available staff (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2012). These teams should include professionals of diverse specialties and draw from experienced and respected educators within the school, therefore increasing the team's credibility (Wright, 2010). Though membership composition will vary from school to school, the leadership team will benefit from including an administrator, special education teacher, instructional coach, and guidance counsellor.

### **Role of the RTI Leadership Team**

RTI leadership teams are responsible for preparing personnel to effectively and, in some cases, dramatically change traditional practices; without staff buy-in, these changes are all the more challenging given the complexities unique to the high school setting. The leadership team must be diverse in its experience and expertise. Scheduling, department isolation, provincial exams, and numerous other factors associated with high school education will add to the challenges of implementation. A leadership team must guide and support staff to overcome these obstacles before implementation begins. Because much collaboration will occur within the classroom, being knowledgeable about curriculum, instruction, and using data such as formative assessment in guiding instruction is integral (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2011). Team members must also be problem solvers experienced in classroom organization, management, and collaboration (Beebe-Frankenberger, Ferriter-Smith, Hunsaker, & Juneau, 2008). To successfully implement the process, school leaders must be prepared to field questions, supply possible solutions, and guide staff. This knowledge and familiarity with classroom strategies is necessary for leadership teams monitor the fidelity of the entire process (Beebe-Frankenberger et al., 2008).

Successful RTI implementation requires a whole-school approach; thus, leadership teams have the responsibility of engaging all stakeholders. Simply stated, the teams must work to get buy-in at the school level, greatly increasing the chance of success (Khan & Mellard, 2008). Addressing concerns and perceived staff challenges is essential to planning for implementation. Attitudes, past practices, and fear of the unknown will make some staff reluctant participants. Secondary school educators may feel skeptical about the validity of the process, feeling that these preventions should have occurred at the elementary level (Ehren, n.d.). Weary educators, who have seen school initiatives come and go, may think of RTI as just another top-down

initiative that will inevitably fade away (Ehren, n.d.). Traditional teachers may take offense to being encouraged to change practices that they have used for years. Being aware of such barriers will better facilitate training and provide effective support at the school level because, with change, there is always some pushback. Gaining consensus is crucial to developing an understanding and thus desire by staff to create successful learning for all students (Fuchs & Bergeron, 2013). Experienced leadership teams will engage all stakeholders in planning, implementing and problem solving, in order to build staff cohesiveness and a greater sense of ownership of the process (Nellis, 2012).

### **Role of School Administration**

It is essential that administrators actively lead the school in establishing a positive, risk-free environment that fosters effective RTI implementation (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Providing clear expectations for staff and offering professional development outside of school and within the school timetable are integral to the planning process. School staff needs to have clear expectations about RTI implementation; identifying negotiables and non-negotiables is essential (Putnam, 2008). Because RTI implementation requires significant changes for staff, vague ideas and unclear procedures will jeopardize the process. In order lead the staff in a process fairly unknown to high school teachers, administrators themselves must be knowledgeable about the process and support the rationale with research-based data (Canter, Klotz, & Cowan, 2008). Apprehension occurs due to lack of clarity around teacher and administrator roles within the implementation process (Isbell & Szabo, 2014). Not knowing whom to address when challenges occur, where to go when more information is needed, or who is accountable for specific actions will result in chaos. All stakeholders must be supported by administration, be well informed, and be included in the process; otherwise they will be reluctant participants. A strong leader will cultivate a climate for successful implementation by creating awareness and support within the entire school (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2011).

All stakeholders need training and professional development in differentiation, data collection, and progress monitoring (Werts, Carpenter, & Fewell, 2014). Formal professional development can be costly, particularly for rural schools where a significant amount of professional development funds are spent on transportation and accommodation. Administrators need to prioritize budgets and become jugglers of budget allotments. Other school budget areas will see a reduction in funds to accommodate the need for RTI professional development. Regardless of the method used to fund professional development, without it, the integrity of the entire process is at risk.

Collaboration is integral to RTI because no one teacher is responsible for students' education, yet finding time for staff to team and learn from one another is a significant challenge to secondary level RTI implementation. Professional Learning Committees, grade level meetings, and subject area meetings all provide opportunities for such collaboration. Though providing scheduled time for staff among grade levels and content areas can be a nightmare to coordinate, it is possible with flexible, creative scheduling (Khan & Mellard, 2008). Collaboration and training provide staff with opportunities to grow as professionals, and empower them to be leaders and valued team members (Whitten, Esteves, & Woodrow, 2009). Though staff collaboration is the mainstay of RTI, a strong administration is essential because administrators are ultimately accountable for monitoring the fidelity of the RTI process in schools.

### **Role of Special Education**

The role of the special education teacher has undoubtedly undergone the greatest role transformation with the implementation of RTI. The focus has shifted to provide support for all learners along with continual collaboration with classroom teachers. Traditionally, secondary school students requiring support were helped by being identified for special education

programs. Unfortunately, under the traditional resource model, not all students were eligible for such assistance and therefore other options were searched out, or the students fell through the cracks of the system (Sanger, Friedli, Brunken, Snow, & Ritzman, 2012). With the shift to RTI, rather than simply asking what help the students qualify for, educators are encouraged to determine student needs and then identify who could best provide the support within the school (Buffum et al. 2012). The special educator shares knowledge about strategic intervention for struggling learners, but it is applicable to all learners, not just those identified as needing special education support.

In order to provide the greater range of support and services for all learners, special education teachers must work collaboratively with teachers (Khan & Mellard, 2008). The expectation is still to provide expertise on methodology and how best to support students who are not being successful in school (Brownsville Independent School District, 2012). The difference is that resource teachers would also work within the classroom setting by working with small groups of students or even co-teaching with classroom teachers. To be successful, resource teachers require a more in-depth understanding of curriculum and general instruction (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). This model of collaboration and shared responsibility, though beneficial to all stakeholders, comes with challenges. The lack of unity between special education and regular education impedes the success of process (Sanger, et al., 2012). Resource teachers may feel a sense of ownership for specific students on their caseload and be hesitant to relinquish their control. Classroom teachers may feel protective of their classes and subject areas, or even suspicious of the reason that another professional is in the classroom with them. In order for RTI to be successful, strong teaming and trust must be fostered because it will help individuals to avoid territorial behaviours when first implementing the process (Sanger et al., 2012). Promoting co-teaching, as well as providing time for co-teachers to plan for instruction and assessment, would ease the transition to this process (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012). Willingness to work collaboratively would expand services, skills, and knowledge that special educators have in order to reach all students.

### **Role of Instructional Coaches**

The need for a respected, approachable “master teacher” who is readily available to coach staff in areas of instruction is crucial to implementation. Instructional coaches must understand best practices; if students are not achieving, instruction needs to change. Without support and encouragement, staff may be unwilling to make the change. Validation of the process will be attained if teaching staff feels that the coach is well qualified and is ultimately there to support their efforts; trust is necessary in this relationship. It is a tenacious relationship because coaches must be trained to assist teachers in implementing interventions while still ensuring that interventions are being implemented as intended (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2011).

RTI encourages educators to look at how their instruction can be differentiated to meet student needs rather than focusing on what the student is or is not able to do (Khan & Mellard, 2008). Continuing to instruct and assess students without applying changes will prevent students from successfully attaining outcomes. Instruction is the key, meaning that teaching practices must be examined and then differentiated to improve learning (Ehren, n.d.). This shift in instruction and assessment practices can be a high source of anxiety; therefore, the experience and support of a coach is instrumental to developing these skills. Instructional coaches provide leadership teams and classroom teachers with fundamental information regarding assessment and instruction; in essence, they manage the RTI initiative within classrooms (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012).

Ready availability of an instructional coach within the school is integral, particularly in the planning and beginning stages of RTI implementation. Though important, professional development alone will not be sufficient support for some teaching staff, particularly those who



have been ensconced in traditional instruction for years. Questions and obstacles will regularly arise, so ideally, this individual's position should not be restrained by scheduled courses. Monitoring data, providing feedback, and troubleshooting in a timely manner are essential to the process. If a teacher runs into some challenges, the school-based instructional coach may be able to clear his/her schedule to assist with instruction, or even co-teach for a time period. Because implementing high-quality differentiated instruction is not only a cornerstone of RTI, but also a significant challenge, it is imperative to have instructional coaches included in the leadership team (Bean & Lillenstein, 2012).

### **Role of Guidance Counsellors**

The guidance counsellor provides a link between leadership teams and the students themselves by filling in details about student needs. This information is essential when planning appropriate interventions. Guidance counsellors will help the rest of the team members to understand that students may be affected by outside factors, such as home life and social groups. Such insight may lead teams to determine that additional supports, and possibly outside agencies, are required (Ockerman, Mason, & Hollenbeck, 2012). As well, due to the nature of their contacts with students, guidance counsellors are the best-suited contacts for students needing to self-refer themselves to RTI intervention. The information provided by guidance teachers fills gaps in the general profile of each student, which essentially results in well-developed interventions.

Guidance counsellors typically develop trusting relationships with students who need support in class, and they most likely meet with those students on a regular basis. For these reasons, it would be fitting to have them monitor academic and behavioural interventions for these specific situations (Brownsville Independent School District, 2012). It is crucial to address personal concerns, such as alienation and low personal esteem, while working through academic challenges. Without addressing these student issues, the process is destined to fail these students (Ehren, n.d.). Guidance provides that interpersonal support for students, providing educators with possible strategies to help the students attain success. As with all other leadership team members, collaboration and shared responsibility are key.

### **Conclusion**

Although composition of the school leadership team is entirely flexible and may change as the school progresses through the implementation process, it is crucial to have thoughtfully selected key school leaders involved in the team from the start. At the very least, each school leadership team should include an administrator, special education teacher, instructional coach, and guidance counsellor. These team members should be experienced and from diverse specialties in order to address the variety of complex challenges of RTI implementation at the secondary school level.

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# Student Success Through Instructional Leadership

Liisa Brolund

## Abstract

*Instructional leadership is a model of school leadership in which a principal works alongside teachers to provide support and guidance in establishing best practices in teaching. Principals employing this model of leadership communicate with their staff and together set clear goals related to student achievement. In this model, teachers are supported by the principal. The principal provides coaching and mentoring to those teacher who require it as well as professional development opportunities that allow teachers to explore best practices in teaching. The goal of instructional leadership is for the principal to work closely with teachers in order to increase student achievement.*

The leader of a school has a high level of responsibility to students, teachers, parents, and the community. Classroom teachers need a leader who will be supportive, motivating, and knowledgeable. A well-rounded principal will have a varied style of leadership that will draw on many different leadership models. One model, instructional leadership, is a pathway for setting and communicating a clear vision and goals for teachers and students, and supporting teachers through coaching, mentoring and professional development (Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, 2008). When a principal is an instructional leader, there are positive outcomes in student achievement (Hansen & Lárudstóttir, 2015; Rigby, 2013; Robinson et al., 2008). Strong instructional leaders can therefore have a positive effect on student outcomes and learning in their schools.

The goal of the instructional leadership model is to promote student learning (Carraway & Young, 2014; duPlessis, 2013). In order to promote student learning, principals who enact instructional leadership will have a clear vision for their school and will communicate this vision to their staff (McEwan, 2003). Additionally, principals who are instructional leaders support teachers to improve their practice by giving them access to the resources that they require, coaching and mentoring them, and providing professional development opportunities, both formal and informal. Instructional leaders act as an instructional resource to support teachers in order to improve their teaching practice. Instructional leadership does not come without challenges, and principals reported that they do not have enough time and knowledge to be effective instructional leaders or that they are uncomfortable commenting on teachers' classroom practices (Salo, Nyland, & Stjernstrøm, 2014). Principals who use these tenets of instructional leadership have increased potential to improve teaching and learning in the school.

## Vision and Goals

Developing and communicating a clear vision about the direction of the school is one of the critical tasks of an instructional leader. Principals are required to build a vision for improving student achievement, and they expect that teachers will accept the vision and apply it consistently in their classrooms (duPlessis, 2013). Establishing a vision and setting goals will help to steer the school toward higher student achievement.

When principals establish goals for the school and communicate these goals to the staff, teachers will work together for a common cause. For example, Principals in Greece do not usually discuss goals and visions for the school with their staff; however, in high performing schools, principals see themselves as visionaries and discuss goals with the teachers (Kaparou & Bush, 2015). Despite the traditional exam-based Greek system, having a clear vision motivates the teachers to create an environment in which students enjoy learning (Kaparou & Bush, 2015). Communicating the vision and goals to the staff helps to inspire trust, spark motivation, and empower teachers and students to do their very best ("Four Instructional

Leadership Skills,” 2015). In order to improve student learning, an instructional leader will have a vision for the school and will communicate it clearly to his/her staff.

In order to improve student learning, the content of the goals is important. Instructional leaders develop goals that set high standards for student achievement (McEwan, 2003). Instruction and student achievement are central to school goals in high-performing schools (Graczewski, Knudson, & Holtzman, 2009). When these goals are clearly defined to teachers, the teachers are more likely to align their professional development activities and their own professional growth plans to the school goals. An instructional leader develops and communicates a vision and goals for his/her school, which sets high standards for student achievement.

### **Supporting Teachers**

Teachers are on the front lines of schools, working with the students every day. Instructional leadership means that principals provide support for teachers in their teaching practice, professional development, and resource management (duPlessis, 2013; Hansen & Lárudstóttir, 2015; Salo et al., 2014). Additionally, principals should be an instructional resource in their school (“Four Instructional Leadership Skills,” 2015). In supporting teachers and encouraging them to improve their teaching practice continuously, principals who are also instructional leaders positively affect student learning.

In order for teachers to teach students effectively, it is necessary that they have access to both formal and informal professional development opportunities. Principals of high-performing schools encourage teachers to attend professional development sessions beyond the ones mandated by the state (Kaparou & Bush, 2015). Facilitating professional development activities and encouraging teachers to take risks for innovation in their instruction also has positive effects on student learning (duPlessis, 2013). An instructional leader encourages and supports teachers to improve their teaching practices, leading to increased student achievement.

Instructional leaders provide coaching and mentoring for the teachers in their schools. Teachers who receive coaching are more likely to practise new skills and implement them in their classroom (Carraway & Young, 2014). Teachers can learn a great deal from each other. Recognizing this opportunity, principals in some high-performing schools implement an informal strategy for teachers to work together on improving their teaching practices (Kaparou & Bush, 2015). This type of support enables the teachers to practise new skills in their classrooms and consolidate their learning from professional development sessions.

Teachers require a variety of materials and resources in order to do their jobs effectively. Instructional leaders ensure that teachers have what they need in order to do the best possible job for students (“Four Instructional Leadership Skills,” 2015). Along with material things, teachers require knowledge and access to people with the expertise to deliver the knowledge. An instructional leader recognizes that expertise can belong to many people and that it is their job to bring the experts together in order for teachers to have access to everything that they need (Graczewski et al., 2009). Instructional leaders support teachers by providing them with the required resources, material and otherwise.

Instructional leaders are an instructional resource for their staff. As an instructional resource, a principal keeps abreast on current trends in effective instruction, assessment, and curriculum (“Four Instructional Leadership Skills,” 2015). Continuing to engage in their own professional development, principals can become instructional resources to their staff.

Providing direction and support that will improve teachers’ instruction is a main responsibility for an instructional leader (duPlessis, 2013). This support can come in various forms, such as providing access to professional development opportunities, coaching and mentoring, managing resources, and the principal adopting the role of instructional resource. When teachers feel supported in their work, it has positive outcomes on student learning.

## Challenges to Instructional Leadership

Despite evidence that practicing instructional leadership in schools has a positive effect on student achievement, many principals perceive roadblocks to becoming effective instructional leaders. Principals have reported that they have little time to focus on instructional tasks, they are uncomfortable visiting teachers' classrooms, and they do not have the knowledge or capacity to guide teachers' practice (Carraway & Young, 2014; Salo et al., 2014). In order to overcome these roadblocks, principals can become learners themselves and work alongside teachers to learn new curriculum, teach lessons to try out new skills, and seek out master teachers from whom to learn (McEwan, 2003). Being an instructional leader is beneficial to student achievement and a worthwhile endeavor for principals, despite the potential challenges.

Of all school personnel, no one is more taxed for time than the principal. Traditionally, school principals have been tasked with managing the budgets and disciplining students. Finding time in an already busy schedule to meet with teachers regarding their teaching, while keeping current on best practices and new curriculum, is a challenge that principals face in their journey to becoming instructional leaders (McEwan, 2003). However, when principals can find the time, teachers feel more supported and valued in their positions, thus affecting student achievement in a positive way (Graczewski et al., 2009). By redefining the role of school principal, the instructional leader moves away from management and administrative tasks, and makes use of shared decision making in order to make time for instructional tasks ("Four Instructional Leadership Skills," 2015). Principals need time in their busy days to practise instructional leadership.

Another challenge to effective instructional leadership is that principals report feeling uncomfortable discussing the topic of teaching with teachers. Teacher autonomy is a delicate issue, and some teachers feel that their practice or way of doing is the best way (Kaparou & Bush, 2015; Salo et al., 2014). Principals who do not feel comfortable having difficult conversations about how teachers can improve their practice are not as effective in affecting student achievement (Graczewski et al., 2009). Instructional leadership relies on creating an atmosphere of openness and trust in order for these difficult conversations to happen (Salo et al., 2014). Building a positive learning community among staff and creating a safe environment for teachers to take risks can make difficult conversations easier (duPlessis, 2013). Instructional leaders are sometimes reluctant to discuss a teacher's practice, but such conversations are necessary in order to help students achieve.

Among any school staff will be a wide variety of expertise. Instructional leaders are meant to have the knowledge and capacity to guide teachers to improve their instruction and thus improve student achievement (Rigby, 2013). One of the challenges to principals in the instructional leadership model is when they lack the competencies to help teachers improve their practice (Salo et al., 2014). In order to overcome this challenge, principals should become learners alongside their staff by attending professional development sessions related to improving teaching practice, learning about the curriculum, and seeking out master teachers from whom to learn (McEwan, 2003).

There are many challenges for the instructional leader. Principals report that they do not have enough time to complete their instructional tasks, they are not comfortable having difficult conversations, and they sometimes lack the knowledge base to support teachers fully. Blocking off time in a day, creating an environment based on trust and openness, and taking initiative to learn about the topics relevant to staff are all ways to overcome the challenges of becoming an instructional leader.

## Conclusion

Instructional leaders establish and communicate a clear vision and goals for their schools that center on high student achievement and excellent instruction. They manage resources for their schools and ensure that teachers have access to everything required to provide the best

possible instruction for students. Principals who are instructional leaders support teachers in their practice by facilitating professional development opportunities. They also support teachers by providing coaching and mentoring to ensure that best practices are used in their schools. When principals are instructional leaders, they positively affect the learning outcomes of the students in their schools.

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# Unpacking the Call to Action in Early Years Education: Teaching Global Citizenship Through a Critical Lens

Lynn Nicol

## Abstract

*Global Citizenship Education in its noblest terms is a commitment made by educators to provide students with opportunities to situate themselves as citizens within a global community. This article addresses the lay of the land for global citizenship and Human Rights Education in early years spaces. Drawing upon the context of a classroom teacher's experience educating through school-based, divisional, and provincial mandates, this article addresses the dearth of resources for holistic citizenship education in early years classrooms. The discussion is intended to emphasize the need for a vibrant discourse on the placement of social justice resources in early years education.*

Take every penny you have set aside in aid for Tanzania and spend it explaining to people the facts and causes of poverty. (Julius Nyerere, President of Tanzania, as cited in The Inter-Council Network, 2015, "Good Practices")

It is a normal human impulse to want to help those caught in the wake of natural and human-constructed disasters. Compassion impels us to act, which "binds us together as human beings" (Nutt, 2011, p. 123). However, when responsive acts of humanity are not interconnected with accurate knowledge of the locale-specific economic, political, and social systems at work, there is a cost attached to the urge to do good (Nutt, 2011). When people act without an awareness of the full context of those charitable acts, they risk perpetuating the very issues that they are attempting to address. To construct an informed praxis, teachers must acquire a theoretical basis in order to equip students with the widest possible scope for each one's role in bringing about social justice. Such an approach requires that teachers first probe for meaning in the discourse around Global Citizenship Education (GCE). Educators have divisional, provincial, national, and international mandates to teach students human rights; it is through the space of actual classroom practice, then, that a critical lens is applied in the body of this text. This article articulates key terms, reviews the mandate of GCE in early years' spaces, assesses past practices, and synthesizes opportunities for improved praxis to apply in early years education.

## Conceptualizing Key Terms

We underscore the political implications of education for democracy and suggest that the narrow and often ideologically conservative conceptions of citizenship embedded in many current efforts at teaching for democracy reflects [sic] not arbitrary choices but rather political choices with political consequences.

(Westheimer & Kahne, 2003, p. 47)

The ideological framework from which teachers work when establishing their own GCE theory and pedagogy affects the learning experiences that they offer to their students. These experiences, in turn, will shape the actions that students take when they seek opportunities to help others. Therefore, it is necessary for educators to understand the potential action-oriented responses associated with various terms utilized in the field of global citizenship and rights-based instruction. Unpacking the diverse terminology in the debate surrounding GCE is a complex process fraught with tension. As the field has developed in recent years, new theories have become available that enable educators to transform educational programming moving

forward. Sorting out the terms, content, and purpose of some of the diverse perspectives on GCE is a helpful way to begin.

## **Global Citizenship**

Educators in Manitoba must frame their practice within the context of the provincial government's terminology. Social studies teaching is constructed with citizenship as a foundational concept in which global citizenship is identified as "an ethos motivated by concern for humanity, society, the planet and the future and is activated by self-empowerment" (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, 2015, "Citizenship," p. 2). Individual character building may be a starting point; however, transformative education requires students to have critically informed understandings of power relationships regarding rights, privilege, access, and equity in order to inform their actions (Shultz & Hamdon, n.d.). In situating students within the context of a global whole, teachers encourage the emergence of a sense of identity, place, and lived experience. As such, holistic global citizenship educators must strive to position their students as informed practitioners of reflective inquiry and critical dialogue. Indeed, some may suggest that early years students are merely emergent learners; however, this educator believes that they possess the aptitude and ability to extend their knowledge of social justice issues when given the opportunity to do so. Global citizenship requires that praxis moves beyond an awareness of the issues into spaces of empowerment that afford learners the individual and collective claiming of rights and freedoms while respecting, upholding, and when possible standing in solidarity with marginalized groups working to achieve their inalienable human rights (Struthers, 2015).

There are several tensions regarding global citizenship terminology. For one, citizenship may be applied to local notions of allegiance to community and nation-state, which isolates the responsibility of citizenship from a more outward, global perspective; it is within this framework of narrow perspective that the "us" and "other" discourse remains entrenched. Varied practitioners of GCE and Human Rights Education (HRE) have adopted the vernacular of "Global North" and "Global South" instead of the more divisive and politically coded "us" and "other" (Eidoo, Ingram, MacDonald, Nabavi, Pashby, & Stille, 2011, p. 61; Renner, Brown, Stiens, & Burton, 2010, p. 42; Starkey, 2005, as cited in Osler and Starkey, 2010, p. 93). Further, global citizenship, per se, does not necessarily incorporate human rights-based education. Students need to know what human rights are if they are to be expected to recognize when these rights are being impeded. As well, it is necessary to expose learners to the realities faced by marginalized groups denied fair and equitable access to their human rights. The failure to infuse rights-based teaching within the GCE model is a direct denial of the rights of the students to access HRE (Struthers, 2015). Finally, current models of GCE prescribed to early years teachers do not provide the tools necessary to enable an informed discourse through which students are empowered to challenge government policy and practice (Osler & Starkey, 2010).

## **Types of Citizenship**

Citizenship education should spark a call to action – a desire to engage in charitable acts or to challenge the power and policy that impede social justice. Citizenship education may elicit local action, while GCE should create an international response. Action and activism are diverse responses to need, which arise from an individual's sense of social, political, and economic rights and responsibilities to self and others. Westheimer and Kahne (2003) coined a conceptualization of citizenship that portrays in clear and identifiable measures the effectiveness of citizenship education.

The three types of citizenship discussed by Westheimer and Kahne (2003) are the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen (see



Appendix for a full explanation of the types of citizens). Only one of these categories has citizens who are actively engaged in challenging the systems and policies that create inequality and injustice. The aim of GCE should be to create a justice-oriented citizen, yet the education of early years students as critical thinkers and rights-based, social activists is the exception rather than the norm. There is clearly a dearth of supports and resources geared for use in the early years classroom (J. Hamilton, Executive Director, Manitoba Council for International Cooperation, personal communication, August 4, 2015; L. Schaefer, Director, Facing History and Ourselves, personal communication, July 14, 2015). Educators of early years students must make a personal commitment to ply for resources that develop citizenship beyond the personally responsible or participatory citizen into active spaces where students can strive for ways to embrace justice-oriented citizenship practices.

## **Charity**

Charity is an immediate response to a human need. Charity represents a reaction to the effects of marginalization and oppression. Acts of charity are usually individual initiatives that neither address nor challenge politics or the economic, political, or social factors that perpetuate injustice; rather, charity focuses on the effects and symptoms of injustice (Archdiocese of St. Paul/Minneapolis, n.d.). In the global context, aid agencies categorize charity as relief for “the short-term emergency initiatives concentrating primarily on food, health care, water, and shelter” (Nutt, 2011, p. 13). Charity appeases one’s conscience and affords the provider a sense of goodwill, but does nothing to address the causal factors that created the need for charity in the first place. Furthermore, without an understanding of neoliberal ideology and entrenched systems of power and privilege that lead to the denial of human rights for marginalized people, acts of charity do not, and can not, build the momentum for change. A deeper discourse must transpire to redress a social structure founded on principles of justice and reciprocal global education to move students beyond acts of charity when responding to the needs of others (Renner et al., 2010).

## **Social Justice**

Social justice refers to relationships based on human dignity in all arenas and includes active participation through enabling the full agency of all citizens locally and globally (Shultz & Abdi, 2007). The globalized world is one fraught with inequality of goods and burdens (Shultz & Hamdon, n.d.). In response, social justice practitioners engage in critical dialogue about the issues that create the obstruction for rights fulfillment. Social justice activists become allies in solidarity-based actions and initiatives that are transformative to all stakeholders in the equation (Renner et al., 2010). Social justice compels people to look beyond what is to what ought to be in terms of the universal opportunity for people to claim and apply their human rights without impingement or repercussion of any kind. Justice-based action demands responsive social change to address the legacy of colonization as manifest through the institutions, structures, and frameworks that marginalize and oppress members of society. Further, Social Justice Education (SJE) provides the means for citizens to examine and question issues of power and privilege and builds competency for all members of society, locally, nationally, and globally in order to take informed, transformative action.

The underpinning for SJE lies within the text of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which situates as truth that “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world” (United Nations, 2015, “Preamble,” p. 1). It behooves educators to infuse and instill HRE in all facets of learning, to inform students as to the inalienable rights for all human beings. Additionally, students must come to understand that these rights should not require effort in claiming; the UDHR states that “all human beings are born free and equal in

dignity and rights” (United Nations, 2015, “Article 1”). Without this baseline of understanding, there is no platform upon which to build a solidified call to the universal claiming of these rights. With knowledge comes power. In the context of GCE, the desire is to create a reciprocal relationship built on the belief of a global ethic of care and universal entitlement to human dignity. It is this relationship, forged through rights-based justice-oriented GCE, that holds great transformative potential.

### **Global Citizenship Education Mandates**

In a world where the local is informing and influencing the global and vice versa, or as it is now known as a glocalised world, the kind of citizenship that schools establish should be locally deep and responsible, but also globally aware and inclusive. (Shultz & Abdi, 2007, p. 9)

Early years educators follow teaching mandates to construct the foundational parameters through which students learn to situate themselves in relation to the world around them. Global citizenship is the second goal identified in Brandon School Division’s (2014) current strategic plan. The school division codifies global citizenship into three categories, digital citizenship, personal growth, and ethical citizenship. At face value, it would appear that the specific competencies of respect, community involvement, volunteerism, and global awareness would embrace GCE; however, these learning opportunities focus on individual, locally based acts of charity. A critique of the programming would suggest that this initiative falls short of moving beyond charity-based actions.

Manitoba’s early years social studies curriculum dedicates one cluster in grade three for HRE (Manitoba Education and Advanced Learning, 2015). The flaws in this initiative are multifaceted. For one, students’ exposure to citizenship education is through teaching and learning practices that are exclusively charity and service based. This narrow perspective fails the students by denying them the opportunity to begin creating an understanding of critical discourse about the economic, social, and political institutions that favour positions of power and privilege. Holistic GCE entails an involvement with political questions, which includes consumerism and the distribution of wealth and resources—values and practices that schools unequivocally hesitate to challenge. Moreover, students have an opportunity to consider the global “other,” but exclusively through the lens of service and aid. In addition, the development of critical literacy and transformative learning is placed solely in the trust of those educators who personally embrace deliberative inquiry and emancipatory literacy; a dearth of available teaching resources in this area has meant that not all educators have been able to gain the wider perspective that the subject demands. Furthermore, there is no requisite HRE program for grade four students, effectively denying these students their right to this learning. This void, in fact, falls far short of what the United Nations and all its conventions and teaching instruments would profess obligatory, rights-affirming practice (Osler & Starky, 2010; Struthers, 2015).

When viewed through a critical lens, divisional and provincial mandates prove to support citizenship learning individualized in focus and narrow in scope; as such, students can not access rights-based and justice-oriented GCE. This is, indeed, a travesty. The critical thinking that goes along with the idea of giving to others in need must be introduced in these first years of school in order for students to begin to form ways to approach the problems of inequity in all its forms. Teachers must be able to accompany their students beyond the notion of charity, despite evoking the feeling that giving satisfies an emotional desire for a connection to others. They must move, together, beyond merely investigating service providers that assist people in accessing their human rights, toward critiquing public policy and frameworks that require support in order to claim those rights. The effort to expand the focus of social justice education in this way is challenging but so important; it is crucial work to bring to the early years sphere.

## Past Practice

In terms of an educational agenda, we understand GCE as pushing beyond an exclusively national perspective of world affairs, avoiding reducing civics and global studies to social studies topics, and breaking from tokenizing and exoticizing foreign places and people. (Eidoo et al., 2011, p. 61)

There is a dearth of critical pedagogy for holistic GCE in early years classrooms. This teacher's past practice was narrow in scope and focus as a direct result of the lack of resources to introduce, inform, and support transformative praxis. By exclusively using divisional and provincial mandates, this educator provided instruction that was charity-based and service-focused, which effectively denied students the means to forge individual and collective understandings and the desire to challenge for change. Students were not provided the opportunity to think deeply or reflect critically about the institutions and policies that affect the equitable claiming of rights by local, national, and global citizens.

Reflecting on past practices created a crisis of conscience for me; on many occasions I embraced and celebrated students' acts of charity. I recognized and commended students as they engaged in food, clothing, and coin collections with the noble desire to do their part to make the world a better place. Through nominating a grade three student for the provincial teacher association's Young Humanitarian Award, I participated in the validation of exclusively charity-based actions. When the student won the award, her peers elevated her to a position of heroism and a model of citizenship that they believed they should emulate. At no point did I challenge the students to ply for deeper meaning. In hindsight, a celebration of activism could have led to an exploration of the social, political, and economic forces that impede children in Africa from attending schools financed and constructed by their governments and their communities. The opportunity for me to apply critical literacy and transformative pedagogy to the act of raising money for donation has passed. This was, indeed, a missed opportunity for creating foundations that might provoke the lifelong desire for one, or all, of those students to apply deliberative dialogue and critical interrogation throughout all of the spaces within their lives (Eidoo et al., 2011).

Moving forward, it is incumbent upon me to revisit the knowledge amassed through academic research and personal discovery about rights-based, social justice activism and infuse it as informative praxis into the classroom, the school community, and the wider society within which she lives. Making meaning about GCE includes the development of praxis to guide and mentor others toward an informed space in which to interrogate, deconstruct, and resist the ideologies and practices of injustice and oppression that position one group over another (Kelly & Brandes, 2010). This must surely be an act of solidarity in and of itself. The opportunity to learn with students about transformative, reciprocal, solidarity-based calls to action begins with the new school year and a new group of grade three and four learners.

## Informed Praxis

The type of schools that would achieve reliable regimes of citizenship rights and social justice would have the capacity, in their teaching and social relations perspectives, to achieve a more universal ethical understanding of the rights of citizenship which will definitely enhance the lives of current and future generations. (Shultz & Abdi, 2007, p. 10)

There is an urgent need for equity-minded educators to develop critical literacy and transformative pedagogy in all grade levels. Positioning students in an informed space where they can claim collective agency empowers them to address critically the troubling issues of the deteriorating Canadian Human Rights record (Neve, July 10, 2015). There are, at present,

insufficient pedagogical tools to support social justice learning in early years classrooms. This is not from a lack of need, to be sure, as early years students deserve exposure to more critical ways in which to view the world and their place in it. The current scarcity of discursive, rights-based resources offered by school, division, and provincial mandates leaves individual educators with a passion for rights-based GCE teaching within a void.

There are models of praxis for social justice and HRE that early years educators, administrators, and policy-makers can adapt for use within early years spaces (Eidoo et al., 2011; Kelly & Brandes, 2010; Soares & Wood). In classrooms focused on justice learning, the teacher acts as facilitator to guide the students to acquire and develop the skills to think critically and reflectively as they become informed and socially responsive active agents for change (Tinkler, Hannah, Tinkler, & Miller, 2014). The social justice educator is one who creates a sense of agency in students (Kelly, 2007). Addressing structures that create power imbalance and marginalization begins within the spaces of the classroom and school community. Approaching the teaching and learning arena as a dynamic forum with reciprocal relationships enables all participants to move fluidly between the roles of teacher, facilitator, and student. Students skilled in justice-oriented citizenship have multiple opportunities to work collectively in meaningful ways to apply a critical lens to local, national, and global issues of equity, opportunity, and justice. Together, teacher and students navigate learning activities that demystify and critically analyze institutional and social injustice, and the roles that privilege and power have in creating inequity. Students become empowered to address and challenge why some members within the global community are unable to claim their human rights (Kelly & Brandes, 2010). Teachers can, and should, infuse GCE across the curriculum. Isolating citizenship and HRE into an exclusively social studies sphere does not provide the full context or learning space for the deliberative discourse required to challenge for change.

Moving forward, this educator will ensure that the classroom becomes a safe learning environment that nurtures and expects critical inquiry and discursive dialogue on issues and events that hold authentic meaning to the students. Together, the teacher and students will explore local and global issues of oppression, marginalization, and injustice. In recognition of the recent release of The Truth and Reconciliation Report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), and to stand in solidarity with Indigenous Peoples and their call to reconcile, this teacher will take an active role in facilitating students' engagement with issues of tension around our shared past. Students may critically interact with the causes and effects of marginalization, power imbalances, and resource exploitation through the exploration of personal narratives from those who bear the burden of injustice. Further, any request for acts of charity will be countered with participatory learning methods that engage the learners in holistic GCE while enriching students' confidence, self-esteem, and their critical thinking, communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution abilities (The Inter-Council Network, 2015). For educators to impart a skill set relevant for the 21st century, all stakeholders directing this learning must focus on education steeped in rights-based, justice-oriented GCE.

## Conclusion

The glorified neo-liberal agenda, which portends a global connectedness has, ironically, if predictably, resulted in further oppression, marginalization, and dehumanization for a vast majority of the world. (Renner et al., 2010, p. 42)

Justice-based GCE uses discursive pedagogy to apply a critical lens to the indoctrinated practices by those who hold positions of power and privilege. Teachers and their students probe for informed understandings upon which to draw as they work toward acquiring a global perspective of ethics, rights, and responsibilities through GCE. Critically informed students, empowered as effective change agents, will be the ones to challenge local, national, and global oppression and inequality. However, at present divisional and provincial resources for

citizenship education fail to provide the tools necessary to scaffold knowledge beyond acts of charity and service learning. Early years educators need to approach GCE from an informed position that creates relationships that embrace reciprocity and global intersection. To be clear, early years teachers have a limited repertoire of teaching and learning support material from which to draw. The responsibility to unpack action-based GCE belongs exclusively to those whose personal ideologies call for more meaningful interface with rights-based, social justice—policy-makers lag behind in this mission. Currently, it is a lonely landscape for early years global citizenship educators.

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## **Appendix Kinds of Citizen**

Westheimer and Kahne (2003) proposed a model of citizenship that aligns citizens' actions with their level of commitment to solidarity-based activism. The three types of citizens are, the personally responsible citizen, the participatory citizen, and the justice-oriented citizen. A brief adaptation and synthesis of each category follows.

### **The Personally Responsible Citizen**

The personally responsible citizen acts responsibly in the community by following rules and prescribed expectations for behaviour. These citizens respond to the call to action through actively engaging in volunteerism with charitable contributions and sheltered service. The personally responsible citizen embraces honesty, integrity, self-discipline, hard work, and compliance as platforms for building character, responding to civic duty, and when situating a relationships with others. (It is interesting to note that the ethos intrinsic to this category of citizenship mirrors the doctrines of most classrooms where teachers enforce prescribed formulations for student behaviour). Additionally, students in classrooms that embrace an “us” and “other” worldview learn to see volunteerism as a compassionate response to the needs of others. A classroom which fuels a discourse of “haves” and “have-nots” creates citizens who further perpetuate the notion of duty to care—using their point of privilege, to provide for those in need—specifically the “deficient recipient” (Shultz, 2013, p. 3).

## **The Participatory Citizen**

The participatory citizen actively responds to the call to action through civic duty and social action at the community, provincial, and national level. Entrenched in the evaluative frameworks of the participatory citizen is the requirement to improve society and solve social problems through leadership and active participation within the normative justice and service constructs. The classroom pedagogy that develops the participatory citizen focuses on the structure and function of local and national institutions, such as church, state, and service agencies that help others claim their human rights. The actions and reactions of the participatory citizenry further perpetuate the ideologies of neocolonialism in which the “haves” provide for the “have-nots.” Internationally, the participatory citizen believes it is the role of the charitable giver from the “developed” world to respond to the intellectual, political, social, economic, cultural and educational deficits of the needy “other” in “underdeveloped” parts of the world (Shultz, 2013, p. 3; J. Hamilton, Executive Director, Manitoba Council for International Cooperation, personal communication July 15, 2015).

## **The Justice-Oriented Citizen**

Rights-based GCE practitioners seek to build justice-oriented citizens in an engaged public. The justice-oriented citizen has been educated with informative inquiry and critical literacy that enables a well-versed critique of policy and practice entrenched in local, national, and global institutions. The justice-oriented citizen probes for the causal agents of injustice and once informed mobilizes to address inequity through campaigns and social movements. Social justice-oriented citizens provoke an on-going challenge to entrenched social, political, and economic structures that perpetuate inequity and deny marginalized people the space to claim their human rights. Justice-oriented citizens use the knowledge they have gained to advocate for change for marginalized members of society.

## ***About the Author***

*Lynn Nicol is a second year student in Brandon University’s graduate studies in education program. She has an avid interest in equity programming for traditionally marginalized students. Her perspective is formulated around teaching in the early years classroom as well as from personal anecdotes gleaned from the experiences of her multicultural family.*

## OPINION PAPER

### What To Expect When You Are Expecting . . . a Student Teacher

Bob Lee

Every stakeholder has different expectations of student teachers, and many have no expectations at all. Whether expectations are present or not, there is a role that each stakeholder plays in the student teaching experience, whether directly or indirectly, and it can potentially have a significant impact on the experience for all parties named.

#### **Manitoba's *Public Schools Act***

Manitoba's *Public Schools Act* speaks to the role of student teachers in our educational system – and therefore to the importance of clarifying our expectations of these professionals-in-the-making.

#### **PART III**

#### **POWERS AND DUTIES OF SCHOOL BOARDS AND EMPLOYEES OF SCHOOL DIVISIONS AND SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

#### **DUTIES OF SCHOOL BOARDS**

(j) allow students enrolled in a teacher education course conducted to prepare persons to be certified as teachers under *The Education Administration Act* and approved by the minister, to attend any classroom of any school as determined by the school board and the teacher education institution, at any time when the school is in session for the purpose of observing and practice teaching;

#### **Duties of Teacher - Section 96**

96 (h) Every teacher shall admit to his classroom student teachers enrolled in a teacher education institution approved by the Minister, for the purpose of practice teaching and observing instruction.

([http://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/p250\\_2e.php](http://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/p250_2e.php))

This commitment by our provincial government, which ensures that student teachers have the right to be in any classroom approved by a local school board, is not a well-known fact. All functioning classrooms are likely presumed to be approved, but it raises the expectation by both educators and the general public that our schools will serve as training grounds for our future teachers while they are still in training.

#### **What Do You Expect?**

Whether you are an administrator, cooperating teacher, student, parent, faculty supervisor, colleague (i.e., another professional educator in the building) or support staff, or the general public, etc., you are a stakeholder in the student teaching experience and you therefore have a



right to hold expectations regarding the incoming student teachers assigned to your school or to a school in your neighbourhood.

### **Administrators**

Administrators should first apprise their staff that one of their responsibilities (in fact, “duties” as identified in section 96 of the *Public Schools Act*) is to accept student teachers into their classrooms. The expectation that administrators need to build is that this privilege/right should be extended first and foremost to staff in their building who exemplify, model, and practise the personal traits and teaching characteristics of master teachers whom we want to mentor teacher candidates.

Administrators, in turn, should expect to receive student teachers who have met the requirements of entry to the Faculty of Education – and that these requirements have enough rigour to ensure that teacher candidates are academically capable of interpreting the provincial curriculum and developing the skill sets that will eventually lead to their certification as qualified teachers.

Further administrator expectations concern the practicum experience offered by the school setting. The school climate should be collegial, open, flexible, supportive, giving, honest, and informative. The classroom environment needs to demonstrate best practice in all aspects of education in order to maximize student teacher growth.

Final administrator expectations should mirror many of the expectations that all other stakeholders would list in relation to the personal and professional qualities that each teacher candidate brings to the building. The desired traits include being hard working, open to learning and to feedback, eager, enthusiastic, flexible, personable, organized, mature, dedicated, thoughtful, reflective, and committed to the classroom, school, and community. They also include having an interest in extra-curricular skills and an awareness of the significance that a practicum provides – the opportunity to grow professionally and begin to build a network and skill set of mindfulness and tools that will enable them to become master educators themselves who will eventually provide the guidance for future candidates to follow.

### **Cooperating Teachers**

The cooperating teachers’ expectations will match all of those qualities noted above, and add characteristics such as taking initiative, questioning, being approachable, and wanting to learn. They will also be looking for another set of hands, perhaps another skill set that will benefit their students, and finally they will be expecting to gain another colleague who will provide support to them and their students in this challenging profession, not just during the practicum experience but in the years to follow as well.

### **Students**

Classroom students expect a fresh face, an energetic practitioner, a support, a friend and confidant. They seek meaningful connections with another adult who appreciates them for who they are, and who embraces their excitement and energy. Most of all, students expect their student teachers to know what they are doing; they see the student teachers as “teachers.”

### **Parents**

Parents will have many expectations that reflect what they already expect of the current practitioners in their children’s classrooms – and that probably mirror their own children’s expectations. Parents definitely expect that their children will not be impacted negatively by the presence of a student teacher in the classroom.

## **Faculty Supervisors**

Faculty supervisors expect to see growth. They understand that this is what the practicum experience is all about, but they also expect to see manifested the expectations by administrators, cooperating teachers, and (to some degree) the student teachers. Above all, faculty supervisors expect to find a willingness by student teachers to use the practicum experience as an opportunity to develop as educators. They anticipate that student teachers will view them and their CT as supports to help make that happen.

## **Colleagues and Support Staff**

Teaching colleagues and support staff will expect a new energy in the building, an excitement that something big or new is about to happen because of what the new teacher candidate brings to the building, to a classroom, or to a particular student. These staff members anticipate optimism.

## **General Public**

Stakeholders from the general public should expect that the public school system, through the administration of each school, will ensure that educators currently employed as teachers – and who exemplify the professional qualities of master educators – are the staff being actively sought to receive student teachers from our teacher training faculties.

## **Conclusion**

The general public, along with divisional personnel, expect that all of the components mentioned are working and in place to ensure that the school year continues to flow smoothly. They want assurance that a new crop of educators is growing well in our schools and is being managed and cared for by thoughtful practitioners who are interested in harvesting or (as the title of this article suggests) “giving birth” to some amazing new educators.

## **About the Author**

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## SPOTLIGHT ON UNDERGRADUATE SCHOLARSHIP

### The Transformative Nature of Journey in Self-Identity

Holly Kalyniuk

**Prologue:**  
**Perennial Questing**

*Since childhood, I have been a traveller. Embracing the land below many different North American skies as my home, I revelled in the balmy Pacific seashores along California's coast, explored a suburban cul-de-sac in Indiana's tornado alley, and learned to adore the vast prairie plains in rural Manitoba. In later years, abandoning habit for the inexperienced – the unknown, the unfamiliar – became more than a means to an end, as the end became impossible to predict. While on a quest for adventure in bella Italia, I discovered a wealth of friendship and the concurrent allure and fear of freedom in linguistic, geographical, and cultural isolation. On a spiritual voyage in Brazil's major cities, I felt the warmth of the globe's precious humanity, basked in the great kindness of strangers, and rediscovered the joy of existential connection. And although I can not determine whether these memories retained their full truth beneath the glaze of my continuous re-rememberings of them, I still cherish the moments each holds just as I cherish my inanimate travelling companions: the rich tales of others.*

*I can not count the times I found solace in the stories of friends and family, as well as new friends I came to know through their writing; all of these new stories fractured my emotional and intellectual boundaries to let in the light. I explored the written lives of many fictitious and less than fictitious heroes and heroines, lived within their imaginings of the world, absorbed and shed ideas of myself and my experiences with each new face and turned page. And this is why I am a traveller: not in ode to the conventionally chic that pursue the far corners of the world to satisfy their dusty social media accounts with exotic, envy-evoking photography, but as a fundamental means of being and becoming.*

The notion of venturing beyond the self dwells at the heart of education, as highlighted most notably through studying the many voices of history. Exposure to new ideas, beliefs, and physical spaces can create transformational learning, the acquisition of a profound newness that permeates one's entire perception of living and being, and culminate in the similar, nearly destructive metamorphosis of one's community. While initially seeming rare or mythologized, journeying of this nature is an inherent element of the human experience at a fundamental level. The nature, necessity, and consequences of journeying, of travelling through others in physical and psychological space, oftentimes has an untraceable but profound impact on one's discovery of self-identity, sometimes changing, quite literally, everything.

#### The Role of Journey in Education

Discovering the world through physical or psychological displacement is a concept inherently imbedded in education. Within a discipline structured around empowering youth through their own self-realization and exploration of the world, education and the act of learning offer students gateways through which they can venture, either in person or through the lenses of others, beyond their common realm of existence into new, seemingly impossible realms of opportunity. In her studies of liberal arts, Madeleine Grumet (1998) discussed the concept of education as brand of travel. Arguing the cosmopolitan nature of education, Grumet wrote, "*Educos* means to lead out, to lead away. I have never heard anyone define it as leading us back, back to our families, our neighborhoods, our beginnings" (p. 188). Grumet's words

emphasize the inherent connection between education and estrangement of self from familiarity. This separation, such as by physical removal through travel or [by] psychological displacement through literature, leads to the growth that defines education. Without an enticing, initial “leading out,” however, teachers can not expect students to gain new understandings of their world. One of the ways to incorporate healthy exploration into students’ daily lives is by integrating the questioning of self into the curriculum.

The importance of the social studies curriculum lies within its ability to expose students to new cultural and historical voices in order to enrich their perception of self and culture, a task that educators can not approach without first developing an understanding of history themselves. As a text that evolves and grows much like the world, the contemporary curriculum aims to guide youth toward a more complete sense of themselves and their reality through figurative journeys through time. Pinar (2004) noted that while these “voices of individuals, even in the distant past” reach pupils through the curriculum, teachers must also “understand the contemporary (and, implied, the future) curriculum” (Network Continuum Education, 2006, p. 989). Although Pinar appealed directly to understanding the curriculum, his message extends beyond the document and into the meanings that it encourages educators to impart to children. In order to lead students into the study of history, educators must possess a concrete, yet evolving, understanding of that subject before attempting to dissect its curriculum. If this curriculum document changes with the culture, however, it too remains an artifact of the past and a shadow of the present, a written record of societal perceptions, values, and meanings. As a historical document, the curriculum is therefore open to interpretation by educators and students alike, a familiar territory wherein both can begin to explore distant and present realities. Understanding elements of contemporary history, such as those contained in the curriculum, illuminates more distant histories, sparking the imagination and initiating the journey through one’s physical space and time. Through exposure to the voices of others, students develop empathy for their tales, absorb elements of their reality, and live a new experience of life as a result. Bridging the divide between old and contemporary histories, however, is far from a simple, painless task.

### Learning in Community

Far from ordinary, the acquisition and remaking of meaning – as in the case of understanding history – requires an estrangement from previously upheld conceptualizations and a re-understanding of the present time, ideally sparking an expanded understanding of everyday experiences. Studying the acquisition of knowledge and the school curriculum, Matruglio, Maton, and Martin (2013) revealed the importance of enabling youth to re-contextualize knowledge through context-dependence and condensation of meaning. Throughout the learning process, students experience other cultures through their pre-determined understandings of their modern world, which ultimately supersedes any new perceptions of time, for better or worse.

[This] movement from the representation of more familiar and directly experienced stretches of time to larger historically labelled stretches suggests that successful learning of the discourse of History is partly a process of shedding *personally oriented construals of time* and expanding a more *publically oriented ‘technology’ of time*. (Matruglio et al., p. 40, emphasis added)

Thus, by their very act of learning, students abandon a sense of self in exchange for a more “out-of-body,” community-minded perception of the world – both previous and present time – and of their experiences, even if the aforementioned community’s voices are distant and foreign in time and space. While ruptures of this sort occur semi-regularly in classrooms, thereby threatening to render them mundane, the significance of these moments of intellectual

awakening makes them extraordinary. Students must experience discomfort through their remaking of meaning: the assimilation of information into their sense of identity is a difficult, taxing, unpleasant, and almost unnatural task, but also absolutely necessary for growth. Without this detachment, students would remain isolated, separated from their larger contemporary society as well as from the distant historical societies that greatly molded their perceived present reality.

To connect abstract, faraway voices and places to present realities, students require community in order to absorb and assimilate these living histories into their sense of self. Much like Matruglio et al. (2013), Grumet (2009) also believed in the detachment of self as necessary for exploring what is foreign. Reflecting on the curriculum and Greek practices, Grumet clarified the historical prevalence of journeying in pursuit of knowledge for self and community:

The *theoros* was an ambassador who traveled to another community to witness its rituals and spectacles, and then returned home to report his findings. What the *theoros* observed was the performance of another community's understanding of its everyday life and its relationship to sacred truth . . . transforming the *theoros*.  
(p. 223)

The acquired information is both distant and intimate, because it deeply connects the subject and object, paralleling the profound inner transformation that students experience in similar intellectual pursuits of knowledge through experience. Much like the *theoros*, students are appointed by their communities as vessels worthy of knowledge, betterment, and empowerment – as the proceeding generation capable of reconstructing, rejuvenating, and re-inspiring their community and their world through their own transformation. The enormity of this task requires even greater care and sacrifice when the pupils return to their communities for the learning process to be complete.

Returning to community in the act of (and following the moment of) knowledge acquisition is essential to the learning process, culminating in the learner's expanded self-identity. As students venture through other societies' sacred realities and integrate this knowledge in their being through the act of learning, just as the *theoros* did, they return to their communities to share their enlightenment, either intentionally or accidentally and unconsciously. Just as students view the other through their own societally crafted gaze, so must they intellectually reflect on their experiences through exposure to their homeland – both through physical travel and internal reflection. This movement not only grounds their understanding in reality but also extends the call of knowing to others. The essential outward expression of inward growth demonstrates the contagious aspect of learning: the community's involvement in the development of youth through learning and welcoming them upon their return, and the necessity of returning to this same community for the process of education to be complete. Pinar (1992) reflected that teachers frequently glimpse –

the notion that intelligence and learning can lead to other worlds, not just the successful exploitation of this one. . . . Rather, knowledge and intelligence as free exploration become wings by which we take flight, visit other worlds, returning to this one to call others to futures more life affirmative than the world we inhabit now.  
(p. 234)

Without the final return of journeyers to homeland, the full knowledge that they have gained can not come to fruition, as their new insights must modify their perceptions of the “old world” to a point of near destruction, thus accomplishing the sometimes painful but always rewarding transformation required in learning.

## Journeying as the Human Experience

Visiting foreign locations and people profoundly alters students' understandings of their global community and senses of self, reinforcing the importance of abandoning the familiar in understanding humanity. The very essence of travel is a critically important experience for learners, a truth asserted by Pinar (1992) and Grumet (2009), and a physical reality that Greenberg (2008) discovered through his cosmopolitan ventures with his students. While struggling to combat the intellectual and emotional resistance that students demonstrate when they theoretically and empirically study global issues, such as economic underdevelopment and its social impacts, Greenberg found that one of the stumbling blocks to student understanding is their own privilege and their inability to remove themselves from their present state of being in order to enter into the life of another. While "the very situation of global privilege that is a consequence of First World/Third World inequality can be a barrier to teaching concepts of global citizenship, social change, and under-development" (Greenberg, p. 284), the very identification of this issue also poses a solution to teaching similar controversial and otherwise inaccessible concepts across the curriculum. To broaden his students' understanding and help others, Greenberg embraced "the pedagogy of travel/service learning that can effectively teach concepts of world citizenship, economic development, and social change" (p. 299), finding that students not only desired to contribute to social change for the betterment of others but also –

Dialectically, they comprehend that Latin poor are brethren in spite of differences of language, culture, nation, and social circumstance. They grasp the concept of universal brotherhood and the ethical notions that, just as people are responsible for other people, peoples are responsible for other peoples. Student participants declare that their values have changed in discovering that in poor societies, the value structure is focused on love, family, and friendship rather than material things. Finally, in changing their aspirations to continue participating in internationalist voluntarism, they demonstrate mastery of concepts of world citizenship. (p. 300)

Moments when students began living within the lives of others and exploring manners of thinking and being that were inherently different from their own resulted in an altered perception of what it means to be human in the world. Aside from the fact that leading students to an understanding of global citizenship remains an essential outcome in the Manitoba social studies curriculum, the ability to empathize, view one's positive contributions to the world as a reflection of one's innermost self, and live responsibly and compassionately are core attributes of individuals who have vacated a familiar world and self for an alternative vantage point. These students no longer embark on a journey, but actively live the journey, not only for themselves but for others as well.

The very nature of human existence is, at its fundamental core, one of essential, unending journeying, a quest for knowledge of every shade, and remains the substance of our being. In his discussion on the role of journeying in learning, Smith (1999) described journeying as an execution of daily work, a central aspect of the human experience, the sole method of constructing individual humanity. These moments of travel are a frequent, necessary, and often unperceived involvement with ideas, beliefs, and physical spheres that are "other" to one's daily existence. They enable the traveller to fully comprehend and live more wholly within life's banalities. The very action of leaving behind preconceptions renders "oneself available, individually or collectively, for deeper insight into what the present moment holds" (Smith, p. 4). While superficially normalizing one's own denormalization, Smith's statement implicitly exposes humanity's intrinsic pursuit of novelty, joy, and a definition of self through others both near and far. Smith claimed that the outward journey can not exist without first suffering an inward realization, but the complex nature of the person requires a venture that simultaneously

engages the inward self and the outward world. Journeying is a process that dissects cultural constructs in order to better understand their pathologies while advancing toward genuine freedom to “engage the world openly and without pre-judgement” (Smith, p. 4), and submersion within “the deepest truth of things” by “learning to be at home in a more creative way” (p. 2). The nature of personhood, one propelled by an insatiable desire for purpose and understanding, requires journey, which is simultaneously the very composition of itself.

### **Conclusion: An Elusive End**

Journey is an integral part of learning, a transformational process by which individuals discover a deeper understanding of their world and their own experiences for the betterment of themselves and their community. The process of abandoning familiar territory for the frightening and threatening unknown is part of being human, of struggling to comprehend our environment and those occupying it, of becoming intimately and irrevocably entangled in humanity as we live the continuous process of reinvention, renewal, and rediscovery. The exploration of self – the very core of our identity – is an unachievable axiom, a path untravelled by others but also intimately transformed and created by them. A lifetime of journeying is the only way to live, the only way to be human. The centre of this mystery is precisely where the thrill of pursuit and the bliss in perennial questing thrives.

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### **About the Author**

Holly Kalyniuk is entering her final year of Brandon University's B.Ed. program, senior years stream. She enjoys volunteering with Westman Immigrant Services, playing soccer with the Brandon University Women's Soccer Team, writing for the university's student newspaper The Quill, and reading, painting, and travelling.

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