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## INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

**Marion Terry, Ph.D.**

Welcome to the nineteenth issue of the *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, devoted to rural, northern, and Aboriginal education. Our authors for volume 9, issue 2, are current BU Faculty of Education graduate students. I thank all of these scholars for sharing their work. Together, they have produced a collection of articles that will interest Manitoba school administrators, teachers, counsellors, and special educators.

- Grant Wiesner's research report describes the findings that emerged from his study of ten teachers' experiences with student engagement.
- Barbara Engel's refereed article examines how teachers cultivate metacognitive thinking while they help students transfer prior knowledge to existing schema.
- Nicole Koroluk's refereed article considers formal and informal teacher evaluation as vehicles to support significant improvements in teaching and learning.
- Jacki Gudnason's refereed article challenges the use of learning styles-based instruction as a framework for differentiating instruction.
- Patricia Goodine's refereed article explores resolutions to the ethical dilemmas that can accompany multiple relationships in rural counselling.
- Jennifer Pawlett's refereed article recommends ways to provide effective educational programming for children with autism spectrum disorder.
- Delonna Morrissette's refereed article uses the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's *Calls to Action* as an opportunity to infuse Aboriginal perspectives into schools that promise to combat the historical effects of Residential Schools.
- Kathleen Richards' refereed article advocates social skills training as an accommodation for post-secondary students with high-functioning autism.
- Tricia Griffin's refereed article identifies the need to belong as a priority in reducing suicide among First Nations youth in northern Manitoba.
- Epeba Buchanan's refereed article advocates a multisensory approach to teaching learners who have been affected by fetal alcohol disorder.
- Agnes Amusa and Sherine Salmon's opinion paper considers the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in relation to the authors' experiences as citizens of Nigeria and Jamaica.

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## RESEARCH REPORT

### Proposal for Change: Student Engagement in Turtle Mountain School Division

Grant Wiesner

#### **Abstract**

*School leadership teams are struggling with student disengagement and how to support educators in their efforts to increase student engagement. As the Assistant Superintendent of Turtle Mountain School Division (TMSD), I want educators to self-evaluate their educational practice and make changes to ensure that their teaching is supported by current research. A group of ten teachers who have engaging classroom practices completed a questionnaire about their thoughts on student engagement: what it is, what they do to engage students, how they know that students are engaged, and what they describe as the key ingredients for encouraging student engagement. The teachers created a definition of student engagement, and five themes of how to nurture student engagement emerged: building relationships, creating a safe classroom culture, providing opportunity for student choice, differentiating instruction, and having high expectations of their students. The findings of the questionnaire will be used as a part of a divisional mentorship program for new teachers.*

Poor attendance. Failing grades. Disrespectful behaviour. Apathetic attitude. Everyday, educators face students who are disengaged and unmotivated at school. School leadership teams struggle with how to support educators in their efforts to increase student engagement. In an effort to effect change in this area, Turtle Mountain School Division's 2016-2020 strategic plan states that two of its priorities are to "encourage students to be active, motivated, and fully engaged learners and align student experiences to facilitate success in an ever-changing world" (TMSD, 2016). Manitoba Education and Training (2010) has outlined that there is "a need and a desire to transform . . . education in Manitoba. Educators consider the improvement of student engagement in school as the main goal and outcome of the transformation" (p. 7). Engaged students are more likely to achieve success in school and in life.

Teacher behaviours and attitudes have an impact on student engagement. A group of ten teachers completed a questionnaire on student engagement: what it is, what they do to engage students, how they know that students are engaged, and what they describe as the key ingredients for encouraging student engagement. Results of the questionnaire were synthesized into five themes: building relationships, fostering a positive classroom culture, allowing student choice, differentiating instruction, and hold high expectations of student ability and achievement. Each of these themes provide a way for administrators and educators to nurture student engagement to support them as students –

accept appropriate responsibility for their learning and assignments, demonstrate an interest in their learning, develop and maintain positive attitudes towards school subjects and school in general, make choices when doing assignments, engage in self-reflection, self-assessment, and goal setting, engage in conversations about what they are learning, and participate in classroom and school activities. (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2007, p. 17)

## **Purpose of the Study**

Turtle Mountain School Division is a small school division, and within the next five years will have a significant turnover of staff; the division hired ten new teachers in May, 2016. Developing a mentorship program will ensure that staff will have opportunity to participate in discussions about school division and provincial priorities, model best practices in their classrooms, and be actively involved in their professional development.

Student engagement was chosen as the theme of the questionnaire that teachers answered because it is an important topic identified by teachers, the school division, and Manitoba Education and Training. The questionnaire was a method to collect data on teacher beliefs and practices and have a conversation about student engagement, focusing on the four components of the divisional mentorship program.

The first component of the mentorship program is to guarantee that school division priorities are understood by teachers and are being demonstrated in the classroom. Turtle Mountain School Division (2016), in consultation with key stakeholders, has identified four priorities in its 2016-2020 Strategic Plan, which are to encourage students to be active, motivated, and fully engaged learners; facilitate improvements in literacy and numeracy for all students; enhance the board's communication strategies across stakeholder groups, and align student experiences to facilitate success in an ever-changing world. Since student engagement is one of the four pillars of the division's strategic plan, this study was completed as a way to find out if teachers are matching their practice with divisional goals.

The second component of the mentorship program is to establish that educators are aware of and practising Manitoba Education and Training (2010) outcomes. The province has identified the importance of developing student engagement in its 2007 document, *Middle Years Assessment: Grade 7 Student Engagement*, as well as through the provincial assessment of student engagement. The province has suggested that educators can effectively engage students by developing a deeper understanding of students, providing for more responsive teaching and learning experiences, nurture stronger learning relationships, increasing student voice and choice, and strengthening involvement of the community (Manitoba Education and Training, 2010). The questionnaire that teachers responded to was a way of measuring their understanding of provincial expectations.

The third component of the mentorship program is to ensure that teachers in Turtle Mountain School Division are aligning their educational practice with current research.<sup>1</sup> Are teachers aware of the most recent understandings of best practice? Is their teaching reflecting that awareness? Some examples of best practices that are supported by research are teacher effect on student engagement; assessing for learning, as learning, and of learning; and using differentiated instruction to support all students. If teachers are supported in using data from research to guide their instruction, the expectation is that teachers are also using data from summative and formative assessments to guide their teaching practices.

The final component of the mentorship program is for teachers to be actively involved in their professional development. This program allows for teachers to learn from one another, to individually assess their teaching practices and beliefs, and to be proactive agents of change.

## **Interview Protocol**

The questionnaire was created with the purpose of developing a divisional mentorship program. Since this was the first step toward development of the mentorship program, the first decision to be made was how to pick teachers who would be considered as mentors. Working with the superintendent, divisional literacy and numeracy coach, and administrators, it was decided that mentors had to have a minimum of five years teaching experience, display a

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<sup>1</sup> This summary of the research report does not include references to the literature.

growth-mindset, exhibit leadership characteristics, be a team player, and have engaging classroom environments. It was determined that only ten teachers would be identified and participate in the questionnaire to make the study small and manageable.

Another intent of the questionnaire was to discover whether educators were able to appropriately define and describe student engagement and whether any themes emerged that would be supported by current research. To meet those requirements, the questions were formulated by the divisional literacy and numeracy coach and myself and edited by graduate summative seminar instructor, Dr. Symons. The following questions were developed:

1. If you could describe student engagement in just one work or phrase, what would that be?
2. Based on your experience and understanding, please provide a definition of student engagement.
3. What are the top five indicators of an engaged student?
4. What does an engaged student look like in your classroom?
5. What do you do in your teaching and classroom to promote student engagement?
6. What do you believe is the most important factor in fostering student engagement? Explain why you think so.

The choice was made to distribute the questionnaire via Google Forms. This procedure gave teachers time to articulate their responses. Electronically submitting responses in Google Forms facilitated quick data collection. Participants were each given a number, so as to eliminate bias that could have been created if their names had been used.

## **Results of the Study**

### **Definition**

The results of the TMSD Student Engagement Form revealed that the participants had an understanding that matched with Manitoba Education and Training's (2010) definition of student engagement. Teachers expressed that student engagement is multifaceted and is comprised of cognitive, affective, and behavioural components. Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (2007) described cognitive engagement as student understandings about their learning, affective engagement as student feelings about school, and behavioural engagement as student actions.

One participant described cognitive engagement as being "actively involved in their learning. It stems from a level of curiosity, interest, and excitement in the topic, as well as a level of student input and control in the direction of exploration." Another said that students "are meta-cognitively engaged, visualizing, and questioning and connecting with knowledge and its application." Another described cognitive engagement as "thinking, questioning, visualizing, predicting, and making connections with the world, with previous knowledge and acknowledging new connections they make while learning."

One participant of the questionnaire depicted affective engagement as "students should be positively interacting with peers discussing learning that is taking place; taking pride in what they are learning about; positive relationships should be built between students, peers, teachers, and other adults in the room." Another definition given for affective engagement was "the student's willingness, need, desire to participate and be successful in the learning process."

Questionnaire participants identified behavioural engagement as being present while learning and displaying attention, curiosity, and passion. Behaviourally engaged students try harder to find the answer even when it is an obstacle. They are active, not passive, in their own learning. The participants' definitions of student engagement correspond with the Province of

Manitoba's definition. This was important to establish because their understanding of the topic was accurate and they were operating from a common understanding of student engagement.

## **Characteristics of Engaged Students**

Students who are engaged exhibit several characteristics, made visible in how they behave and in how they complete assignments and assessments. Participants in the *TMSD Student Engagement Questionnaire* described engaged students as happy, enthusiastic, excited about the work they are doing, and enjoying the learning process. The students make the effort to construct meaning, are focused on tasks, use active listening skills, take risks, and demonstrate critical thinking. Engaged students also feel a sense of belonging and have positive relationships with their peers and teachers. These students participate in discussions, ask questions, and take an active role in learning and participation. The descriptors of engaged students paint a picture of students who want to be at school, desire to learn, participate and collaborate with others, and are actively involved, as they make learning enjoyable and applicable.

## **Five Themes**

Analysis of the *TMSD Student Engagement Questionnaire* revealed five themes that are related to ways that teachers can nurture student engagement. The themes are relationships, safe environment, student choice, differentiated instruction, and high expectations.

### *Relationships*

The major theme identified by participants was the importance of having an authentic relationship with students. Manitoba Education and Training (2010) stated that student engagement is encouraged when educators “nurture stronger learning relationships among students, peers, and educators” (p. 2). One participant shared that “getting to know and building a relationship with each kid in your classroom is pivotal to motivate, encourage, and guide them to success – everything else comes after a relationship is established.” Another wrote, “Students won't become engaged if they don't feel wanted and welcome and heard and loved in my classroom. They need to feel like their lives are important, and they are valued while they are at school.” Another participant stated that building meaningful relationships with students “immediately enhances importance and connection to material.” Focusing on relationship-building increases student effort and focus in class. A teacher shared, “If you have positive relationships with students and they know that you care about them, they will hear what you are saying out of sheer respect.” Students will be engaged cognitively, affectively, and behaviourally when teachers foster authentic relationships with them.

### *Safe Environment*

Another factor that was identified as promoting student engagement is to have a classroom culture that is a safe place for students to take risks. Teachers should “create a safe learning environment and classroom culture where it's ok to make mistakes or not know the answers.” Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (2007) stated that one aspect of student engagement is “supporting the development of age-appropriate understandings about their role as students” (p. 17).

One participant described attempting “to create a dynamic learning environment where all learners are comfortable both emotionally and physically.” Participants identified that when they establish their classroom as a safe place, students feel confident, take risks, and focus on what they can do. A participant indicated the importance of how their students “feel safe enough to

get up and 'play' along, take chances, and get involved." When students feel that they are in a safe place, they will be engaged in their learning.

### *Student Choice*

Another theme that emerged in the questionnaire was the importance of allowing students to have choice and a voice in the classroom. Manitoba Education and Training (2010) highlighted that educators must "increase opportunities for student voice and choice and support young adolescents in becoming more independent and responsible for their own learning" (p. 2). One teacher identified the importance of providing student choice, assisting students in making connections between content and students so they can build that relationship, and encouraging students to lead the direction wherever possible. When students are given choice and opportunity to take the lead in their education, their level of engagement will increase because they are taking ownership of their learning.

The survey participants noted that they "promote student engagement by gearing lessons, activities, and projects to the needs and interests of their students." Students who have a choice in their learning will be engaged learners because their individual needs are being met in the classroom.

### *Differentiated Instruction*

Engaging teachers "provide teaching and learning experiences that are more responsive to the developmental needs of young adolescents" (Manitoba Education and Training, 2010, p. 2). Individual students are unique and have learning styles that are distinctive to them. Teachers nurture student engagement by responding to their individual needs through movement, music, etc. One way to provide differentiated instruction is to use Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences, which involve eight learning styles: verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical-rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist.

Another important differentiated instruction technique that teachers employ is collaborative grouping. Participants identified that they place students in groups that they can be supported and successful in, and the groups may be large, small, or pairs. Collaborative grouping enables students to learn from one another and takes into account their strengths and challenges.

Technology use is another strategy that promotes student engagement. Teachers described how they integrate technology, such as games and apps to reinforce concepts. Technology use is planned with purpose and used as a teaching and assessment tool, not as a gimmick or novelty.

The last differentiated instruction strategy that teachers discussed was the importance of making connections between course objectives and the real world. Connecting lessons to real life provides a context for curricular outcomes and helps students to make a personal connection to what they are learning.

### *High Expectations*

The final theme that came from the questionnaire was that teachers have high expectations of their students and provide support for their students to achieve at high levels. Manitoba Education and Training (2010) stated, "The high expectations teachers set for all students translate into high expectations that students set for themselves and result in improved engagement and higher student achievement" (p. 30). The participants indicated that they expected students to ask questions, make connections, extend learning on their own initiative, be critical, analytical, and evaluative. Educators set the bar high, but believe that students can reach the bar and provide support and scaffolding to assist student efforts.

One teacher wrote, “I let students know I believe in them, that learning is tough, but it’s great tough and it can be done together.” The teacher was willing to work with the students and model that hard work is necessary and an important part of the journey. Another participant stated that student engagement “comes with setting high enough expectations and making sure students know that I know they can do it!” When teachers set high standards, believe that students can achieve those standards, and provide appropriate support, students will be successful and engaged in their learning.

### **Limitations**

The main limitation of this study is that there was a bias in the group of teachers who were selected to complete the questionnaire: they were all identified as engaging teachers. What would the results have been if teachers had been selected at random? Another limitation of this study is that the questions focused on the positives of student engagement and did not provide opportunity to discuss challenges. Finally, there were aspects of engagement, such as humour and classroom furniture and arrangement, that were not discussed in this report because, although important, they were not identified by the majority of questionnaire participants.

### **Conclusion**

Turtle Mountain School Division has identified the importance of cultivating student engagement. Research discusses the important effect that teachers have on student engagement and success. The TMSD Student Engagement Form revealed that teacher philosophies and practices are supported by current research. Student engagement was defined as students being engaged cognitively, affectively, and behaviourally – and was described through positive student behaviours, such as paying attention, asking questions, and participating in class.

In the questionnaire, participants identified five themes that are vital for teachers to enact in order to encourage student engagement: build relationships, have a positive classroom culture, provide student choice, differentiate instruction, and hold high expectations of students. The teachers who participated in the questionnaire model their beliefs in their daily practice. Moving forward, they will be sharing their expertise about student engagement with new teachers, to ensure that all students are supported for their success in each of Turtle Mountain School Division’s classrooms.

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### **About the Author**

*Grant is in his second year as the Assistant Superintendent of Student Services in Turtle Mountain School Division, after twenty years as a classroom and resource teacher. He and his wife Corrie have four children: Elora, McCanna, Lucia, and Ranon. In his spare time, Grant plays guitar, sings, and golfs.*

## REFEREED ARTICLES

### Designing Intentional Transfer of Knowledge for the Purpose of Deeper Understanding

Barbara Engel

#### **Abstract**

*Teachers and administrators must embrace the paradigm shift that has occurred with regards to student engagement, and expectation of teachers. The roles of both the student and the teacher have shifted. Because of increased student access to information, the teacher is becoming a facilitator who prepares the classroom for exploration and questioning. Teaching must centre on cultivating metacognitive thinking by students, making an awareness to them and then connecting prior knowledge to existing schema. Information is readily available to students, and teachers must be intentional in connecting the depth of the students' knowledge.*

A fundamental purpose of education is to provide opportunities for students to build greater understanding through knowledge transfer. Teachers and administrators must therefore prioritize deeper learning in classrooms. Specific teaching strategies encourage deeper understanding by accessing student schema, modelling metacognition to demonstrate reading strategies, facilitating inquiry through projects, and pairing reciprocal learning with peer tutoring. Fostering quality instruction with metacognition at the core begins with teacher candidate preparation and professional development of current teachers. Intentional knowledge transfer occurs when teachers and administrators set a school's goals and mission with knowledge building at the core, thus enabling deeper, inquiry-based learning.

#### **Teaching Strategies**

Deeper understanding occurs when students use higher order thinking during classroom activities that require them to make connections with their existing schema. Extending students' thinking beyond remembering, by motivating them to analyze, evaluate, and create, takes forethought, immediate feedback, and modelling by the teacher (Wilson, 2016). Traditionally, silent reading occurred in isolation and was accompanied by answering chapter questions based on recall. Silent reading, when paired with journaling, activates the students to extend thinking beyond mere recall, and to make connections with their schema. Double entry journaling connects students' reading with prior knowledge or reading strategy prompts.

Students who become aware of the connection between their existing schema and new knowledge are creating deeper understanding. Teachers who recognize this process can capitalize and facilitate deeper, inquiry-based learning. Recently, in a Reading Is Thinking class, students were working on their independent reading: while they read, they made entries in their double entry journals. Jonathon<sup>2</sup>, who was reading *Animal Farm* by George Orwell, became very excited and instead of journaling his discovery he raised his hand and asked, "Ms. Abbott, is Pinchfield supposed to be like Hitler?" Ms. Abbott smiled, and asked, "Why do you think Frederick Pinchfield might represent Hitler?" Jonathon listed several reasons using his recall of prior knowledge, comparing the character of Pinchfield with that of Hitler. Ms. Abbott praised Jonathon and then encouraged Jonathon to write his extended comparisons down in his double entry journal for future consideration. Ms. Abbott could have merely confirmed Jonathon's connection, but instead she seized an opportunity to engage Jonathon in an analysis that used

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<sup>2</sup> In order to protect individual identities, pseudonyms have been used throughout this paper.

his prior knowledge. Ms. Abbott recognized a student's understanding and then through questioning pushed the student to engage in analysis and evaluation, encouraging higher order thinking. Classroom lessons that promote students to make connections with their existing schema create a safe atmosphere for questions that nurture deeper learning.

Teachers who plan activities with a clearly set purpose facilitate student learning through the levels of cognition to include metacognition. Tools such as conferencing, think-pair-share, Talking to the Text with a partner, and double entry journals make thinking visible. They recognize the learners' existing schema so that students can make sense of new information (Akinde, 2013; Rissman, Miller, & Torgesen, 2009; Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012). Ms. Abbott knew that Jonathon loved revolutionary history. When planning independent reading, she and Jonathon conferenced about his interests and challenges. Teachers who understand that students must be allowed to process will plan and scaffold activities so that both the teacher and the student can recognize the transfer of knowledge to new learning. A student uses metacognition when he/she identifies his/her thinking processes by expressing challenges and connections. Teachers and administrators who value metacognition know that a student who recognizes his/her understanding is a student who is in control of his/her learning, and that planning activities to promote metacognition is imperative to deep, inquiry-based learning.

Metacognition must be planned, recognized, and modelled. Teachers who model a Think Aloud strategy reveal their thinking to their students and demonstrate how experts interact with text (Rissman et al., 2009; Schoenbach et al., 2012). When teachers of all disciplines share their expert reading strategies with students, they model metacognition and share connections about the discipline. Administrators are responsible for ensuring that teachers are qualified and continually exposed to professional development centered on the procedures that foster metacognition while reading. Leaders need to make sure that teachers are aware of the revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Wilson, 2016) and that they use classroom questioning strategies that engage higher order thinking such as analysis, evaluation, creation, and metacognition.

Teachers who build lessons to facilitate deep knowledge transfer have the ultimate goal for learners to engage in inquiry. Teachers want students to "formulate their own questions, and possess the tools to pursue them" (Fisher, Frey, & Hattie, 2016, p. 107). Their goal is to "teach with intention making sure that students acquire and consolidate the needed skills, processes, and metacognitive awareness that make self-directed learning possible" (Fisher et al., 2016, p. 107). When pairing metacognition with inquiry projects, students are positioned to create questions with the goal of self-directed research. In an inquiry-based pilot project for grade nine English students, teachers require students to participate in a seed text of each student's choice. The students then develop a series of questions that lead to a discovery of new knowledge. After researching, using multiple mediums (peer-reviewed journals, books, videos, newspaper articles, etc.), the students write an expository paper that explains their newly formed thesis. Following the writing of their paper, they reflect on their new understanding and express how their thinking has changed or how their research reinforced their original position. The next step is for students to create an artefact that represents their thesis. They then present their artefact to their classmates, using the evidence they have discovered. Students then write a reflection on their writing, and their artefact, reviewing possible improvement or insights of self-discovery during the inquiry process. Educators must facilitate opportunities for higher order thinking in classrooms and schools; creating inquiry and cultivating metacognition will breed success in knowledge transfer, which underpins the creation of new schema.

Another powerful means to provide immediate feedback, and therefore stimulate deeper understanding, is the practice of reciprocal learning. A math study used an RPTMC (Reciprocal Peer-Tutoring-enhanced Mathematical Communication) strategy to make thinking visible by establishing fluent progression between teaching and questioning that used computers and peer tutoring (Yang, Change, Cheng, & Chan, 2016). Combining reciprocal learning, peer tutoring, and computer usage during knowledge exploration significantly raised students' mathematical

language development. This study reinforces how quality teaching encourages making thinking visible while enhancing knowledge transfer with the power of peer tutoring and questioning.

Quality instruction encourages students by scaffolding new information with their existing schema. Rich lessons include teachers modelling their metacognition. When teachers facilitate inquiry and engage students in reciprocal learning with peers, they demonstrate that deeper understanding can be designed for and guided by quality instruction.

### **Fostering Quality Instruction**

Inquiry and metacognition have not been historically used in the pedagogical preparation of teacher candidates. Instruction on developing inquiry and revealing visible thinking is necessary for the post-secondary education of novice instructors and professional development of current teachers. The pedagogy of instructors must be improved to match the expectation of increased engagement in our students (Wilhelm, 2009). In the past, instruction has focused on teaching behaviours, as opposed to preparing for teacher purpose and problem solving. Positioning the student to build essential questions places the student in a stance to build knowledge through inquiry (Wilhelm, 2014). For this reason, educators must rethink the pedagogical practices and include inquiry and metacognition in daily planning. They must empower each other to create classrooms that use strategies to build deeper understanding.

Professors and administrators must provide a system that encourages visible thinking by building a community wherein visible learning is the norm. Visible learning occurs when students and staff become accustomed to the rituals of writing and speaking, questioning connections and misconceptions without fear of judgment. Everyone in the system, from the students to administrators, has to build an environment wherein visible learning is safe (Schoenbach et al., 2012). This safe environment ensures that immediate feedback, by teacher or peer, builds connections between prior knowledge and new knowledge. Intentional transfer of knowledge becomes visible when thinking is revealed and reinforced. Leaders must model and uphold visible thinking and create this as the norm within the education system.

For the inquiry-based project previously mentioned, the English department is given time to meet monthly to discuss how metacognition encourages students when formulating questions and researching. Teachers mentor each other by sharing students' work and examining how to ensure that higher order questions are formulated. The process leads students into more direct and thorough research. This mentoring is an example of teachers as the catalysts that uphold the highest levels of knowledge transfer in students. The visible metacognition then reveals student understanding. The teacher then provides the next steps quickly through why and how questions. The process of ensuring active pedagogy that focuses on teacher behaviour encourages transfer of knowledge, guiding the student toward deeper understanding. Instruction that focuses on making metacognition visible is a powerful tool within the classroom, and teachers and administrators must make it a part of daily teaching and learning.

Knowledge transfer is maximized within quality education. Quality instruction can improve when teachers understand that the position of the teacher is as powerful as the attitude of the student. The educational system needs teachers and administrators who say, "We want students to move from declarative knowledge (what is it), to procedural knowledge (how to use it), to conditional knowledge (when to use it)" (Fisher et al., 2016, p. 12). During the transfer of knowledge, teachers need to be engaged in the process as much as the students. All participants need to have a clear learning purpose at the centre of the lesson. Teachers who engage students in "Low-Road Hugging and High-Road Bridging" techniques strategically scaffold new knowledge with the schema of the student, in order to maximize knowledge transfer (Fisher et al., 2016). These methods encourage students to engage in conditional knowledge when they are creating and evaluating. They are making artefacts that express and represent their learning. Quality instruction facilitates higher order activities that result in artefacts, an actual demonstration or testimony of deep transfer knowledge.

Quality education pushes students to become empowered learners. How educators manifest metacognition in their classroom is critical to students engaging in higher order thinking (Rissman et al., 2009). The “what and when are equally important when it comes to instruction that has an impact on learning” (Fisher et al., 2016, p. 21), and when educators activate the schema of students and then strategically introduce new knowledge, deeper understanding transpires. It is the “what and when” of teaching that influences the intentional design of knowledge transfer, advocating students to empower themselves. Pedagogical preparation of teacher candidates and professional development of teachers are essential to ensuring that inquiry and metacognition strategies are used in our educational system.

### **Conclusion**

Planning, encouraging visible thinking, and engaging both student and teacher produce the atmosphere that cultivates deep knowledge transfer, which engenders deeper understanding. Quality educators use strategies that access students’ schema in order to ensure connections between prior and new knowledge. Instruction that models metacognition unveils the mystery behind subject area strategies. Quality instruction grounded in inquiry-based learning enlists students to question and to seek new knowledge. Reciprocal learning and peer tutoring also assist higher thinking. When effective pedagogy and intentional goals scaffold new knowledge, and students participate in the inquiry, learning and understanding deepen.

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# Formal and Informal Evaluation Systems: Two Approaches to Teacher Supervision

Nicole Koroluk

## Abstract

*Formal and informal systems of evaluation are commonly used by school divisions and districts to monitor teaching staff, measure teacher quality, inform staffing decisions, and plan professional development opportunities. Criticism from educators and supervisors of traditional and non-traditional evaluation systems has raised questions regarding the effectiveness of teacher evaluation in aiding teachers to improve their practices and achieve higher levels of professional growth. When implemented effectively, both formal and informal systems of evaluation have the capacity to support significant improvements in the quality of teaching and learning, and greater success is possible when the core components and guiding principles that form the foundation of the system are fully understood.*

The supervision and evaluation of teachers is a challenging and complicated process, but it is one of the most important aspects of supporting teacher learning and improving performance. Existing systems of supervision and evaluation have undergone extensive criticism and transformation in recent years, as attempts have been made to create more effective and productive evaluation processes (Darling-Hammond, 2013). Formal systems of evaluation are widely used by school divisions and districts to monitor the progress of their teachers, as well as to provide a sound tool for measuring the quality of teaching. The information gathered through these systems of evaluation is often used to inform decisions about staffing; however, it has been criticized for providing little direction in terms of how to improve the quality of teaching. Brandon School Division's (2002) Policy 5001, Supervision and Evaluation of Educators, addresses the processes and guiding principles of a formal system of evaluation. Alternatively, informal systems of teacher evaluation have begun emerging throughout school division and districts, as a means of addressing the perceived inadequacies of the more traditional, formal systems. Marshall's (2013) Mini-Observations scheme is one such informal system of teacher evaluation, aimed at addressing the discourse between how to effectively help teachers improve their practice, while also holding them accountable for their professional growth. In this paper, I will provide a description and comparison of Brandon School Division's (2002) formal system of evaluation and Marshall's (2013) informal Mini-Observations system, as well as an explanation of specific circumstances with which I believe each system has merit.

Brandon School Division (2002) believes in the importance of a formal system of supervision and evaluation of its educators, to ensure a high quality educational program for all of its students. The main objective of its supervision process, as stated in Policy 5001, is "the professional growth of staff resulting in improved instruction, better enabling students to achieve their fullest potential" (p. 1), and this ongoing process of supervision is to be achieved through summative reports of the educator's professional growth, as well as performance reviews completed by the school administrator. These summative reports are retained on the employee's personnel file, and are considered to inform decisions "related to placement, promotion, contract continuation and the giving of references" (p. 1). There are six guiding principles which govern this system of evaluation: the belief that professional growth "is a continuous and progressive process... guided by reflection, self-assessment and personal goal-setting" (p. 1); intrinsic motivation provides the incentive for professionals to pursue opportunities for their own growth; growth is achieved during the purposeful and collaborative construction of new knowledge; expectations of educators must be shared and discussed with them; accountable educators are responsible for upholding the set standards and are afforded opportunities and time for professional development; and continuous growth must be supported

by the system. This formal system of supervision also identifies eight key elements of exceptional and essential teaching, known as the “Standards of Excellence in Teaching” (p. 2), which guide teachers and administrators in developing growth plans and setting goals that are meaningful and relevant. A professional growth plan provides educators with “the potential to improve teaching in a constructive, trusting and supportive atmosphere of risk-taking and reflection” (Brandon School Division, 2003, p. 7), as well as providing the accountability required for the school division to monitor the progress and measure the quality of its teachers.

Brandon School Division’s (2002) policy for teacher supervision and evaluation has strengths as well as weaknesses, in terms of its ability to meet its primary objective of ensuring and maintaining the ongoing professional growth of its educators. One of the major strengths of this policy is its focus on reflection, self-assessment, and personal goal-setting. These self-regulating behaviours have been linked to positive increases in self-awareness and improvement, promoting the concept that change is driven by “a goal, and an awareness of where one currently is in order to assess the discrepancy between the two” (McConnell, 2010, “The Psychology Behind Self-Reflection,” para. 1). Another strength of this policy is the attention to the constructive social process of learning, identifying that “educators grow professionally by actively constructing new knowledge within a purposeful, supportive and collaborative atmosphere” (Brandon School Division, 2002, p. 2). This Vygotskian approach to learning aligns with what many educators know about best teaching practices; knowledge is co-constructed and learning is not simply the accumulation of new knowledge, it is the process of acquiring the new knowledge (Berkeley Graduate Division, 2016). The connection between the evaluation process and opportunities for professional development is another strength of this policy. A criticism of many formal evaluation policies is that evaluation is “rarely used to help teachers access professional development to address their unique learning needs” (Darling-Hammond, 2013, p. 5); however, Brandon School Division’s (2003) Professional Growth Process recognizes that educators have unique needs by providing them with the opportunity to pursue professional development goals that are meaningful and relevant to them, and are communicated in each teacher’s annual growth plan.

There are also weaknesses in Brandon School Division’s (2002) Supervision and Evaluation Policy. One weakness is the lack of clarity and consistency in its identified standards of quality teaching. Although this policy identifies eight standards and provides a list of descriptive elements for each, it does little to provide a clear explanation of what these standards might look like with evidence to assist an evaluator in providing an accurate and fair assessment of the teacher’s performance (Brandon School Division, 2003). Another weakness of this system is that the summative evaluation of a teacher is primarily based on the teacher’s self-assessment and the administrator’s observations, which are often provided at the end of the process. A teacher’s ability to create an effective learning environment, planning and assessment processes, and commitment to diversity are all factors; however, no consideration is given to the teacher’s actual instructional effectiveness or to the quality of student learning. Consideration is given to the teacher’s ability to work collegially; however, potentially valuable insight from coworkers is not included. The commendations and recommendations from the administrator are provided to the teacher at the end of the process, with little opportunity or expectation of continuous feedback or follow-up. The format for evaluations is also a weakness of this system, which places new and experienced teachers on a Growth Track, while teachers who are considered at risk or on probation are placed on a Focused Evaluation Track. While the differentiation of teachers’ needs is a strength, the mandatory timelines are not. Ample support is given to new and struggling teachers; however, teachers that are deemed to be competent are placed on a four-year rotational cycle. Little consideration is given to teachers in this group during a non-evaluation year, many of whom could benefit from the evaluation process.

Marshall (2013) believed that the traditional system of evaluation was flawed, and he sought to develop a system in which summative evaluation was only “the tip of the iceberg” (p. 44), with the bulk of the iceberg being continuous and meaningful supervision directed at

improving teaching and learning. In this system, known as Mini-Observations, Marshall found that detailed information could be gathered in a less formal atmosphere and on a more regular basis, immediate feedback could be given, and problems could be corrected in a non-evaluative way. This informal system of evaluation consists of twelve key components that focus on structural changes to the traditional system of observations, prompt and meaningful feedback, and strong organizational details that ensure the system's success. Marshall's system of evaluation makes it possible for all teachers to be observed several times throughout the year, which opens the door to conversations with teachers "about the teaching and learning that's going on in their classrooms [which] is the heart and soul of instructional leadership" (p. 68).

Strengths of Marshall's (2013) system are found in its twelve key components. One of its main strengths is the structural change from the traditional, high-stakes observations which typically are scheduled and occur once or twice in an evaluation year, to the frequent, unannounced observations proposed by Marshall. Unannounced visits allow observers to capture a more "accurate picture of how teachers are performing on a daily basis" (p. 58), and by spreading these frequent visits out over the course of the year, evaluators can gain a better sense of the teacher's overall performance, while recognizing essential early warnings of problems and appropriately tracking progress. Another strength of the Mini-Observations is the opportunity for continuous and meaningful feedback. Perceptive administrators engage in a brief, informal conversation with the teacher as soon as possible after the observation to provide an opportunity for the teacher to clarify aspects of the lesson, thoughtful feedback that propels the teacher forward by focusing on the essence of quality teaching and learning, and an exploration of questions for subsequent conversations. These conversations are essential because "without dialogue and active reflection on the teacher's part, it's much less likely that adult learning will take place" (p. 65). The unique opportunity to develop an enhanced school-wide perspective is another great strength of this system, as it contributes to the development of "situational awareness – having a finger on the pulse of the school's culture and climate" (p. 85). Administrators who frequently visit every classroom have a good understanding of what is going on in every classroom, and this facilitates an opportunity to strengthen effective teaching practices by enhancing collegiality and collaboration.

In addition to its strengths, Marshall's (2013) informal evaluation system also has its weaknesses, one of which is its lack of criteria for effective, quality teaching. Marshall identifies this weakness, indicating that the use of teacher evaluation rubrics "increases the power of mini-observations and is in turn enhanced by them" (p. 85); Marshall (2014) has since developed a set of rubrics to support this system. Marshall (2013) also credits a team curricular planning approach and quality use of interim assessments as other key contributors to the effectiveness of Mini-Observations. These strategies enhance the success of this system by addressing the instructional effectiveness of a thoughtful, collaborative planning approach and by putting an emphasis on higher student achievement. Another flaw worth mentioning is that the informal Mini-Observations may only be included in formal evaluations if an explicit agreement has been made with the union indicating that unannounced observations may be considered for evaluation purposes. If this agreement has been made, the benefits of this system increase by not only providing support to teachers as they reflect on their daily practice, but also by gathering useful information to inform teachers' summative evaluations. If this agreement has not been made, and the unannounced visits are considered to be non-evaluative, then a formal evaluation that is separate from the Mini-Observations is still required.

Brandon School Division's (2002) formal Supervision and Evaluation of Educators Policy shares some common traits with Marshall's (2013) informal Mini-Observations system, as well as some distinct differences. Figure 1 displays these similarities and differences.

Both of these formal and informal systems of evaluation have merit, and are considered to be appropriate methods of evaluation. Brandon School Division's (2002) formal process is an effective evaluative tool for promoting self-regulating behaviours that are linked to self-improvement; and as such, use of this system would be beneficial in an organization where

Figure 1. Similarities and Differences Between Brandon School Division's Formal System of Evaluation and Marshall's Informal System of Mini-Observations

<b>Similarities Between Systems</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The main goal of the system is to promote and support educator growth and development.</li> <li>• Teacher evaluation is executed by the school administrator, with input from the teacher; limited consideration is given to the quality of student learning or feedback from colleagues.</li> <li>• Value is placed on teacher reflection, self-assessment, and goal-setting.</li> <li>• Collaboration is identified as an important factor for both individual and school-wide improvement.</li> <li>• Improvement plans are created, implemented, and frequently reviewed for struggling teachers.</li> <li>• Lack of clear and defining teacher evaluation rubrics and proficiency rating scales decreases the effectiveness of the system.</li> </ul>	
<b>Differences Between Systems</b>	
<p><i>Brandon School Division's Formal System</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers are placed on different evaluation plans, depending on their perceived level of competence.</li> <li>• Competent teachers are evaluated every four years; new teachers, twice in first year; at risk teachers, every three months; on probation teachers, each month.</li> <li>• Observations are primarily scheduled, typically last between 30-60 minutes, and often occur between one and three times within a short time frame.</li> <li>• Teachers are expected to complete annual growth plans, indicating their personal goals and planned professional development.</li> <li>• Standards of Excellence in Teaching identify key elements of exemplary teaching, but lack clear and consistent examples of proficiency.</li> <li>• Teacher input into the evaluation process occurs through the practice of formal, written reflection; teachers describe examples of how they meet the eight exemplary teaching standards.</li> <li>• Feedback is often delivered at the end of the formal process, and serves as an offering of commendations and recommendations for future development.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Marshall's Informal Mini-Observations System</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All teachers are on same evaluation plan; however, at risk teachers may be placed on a more formal improvement plan.</li> <li>• All teachers are evaluated every year.</li> <li>• Observations are unannounced, typically last between 10-15 minutes, and occur frequently (ten observations throughout the year).</li> <li>• Administrators make decisions on necessary professional development, based on the observed needs of the school as a whole, and school teams provide collegial support to one another, as directed by administration.</li> <li>• Administrators determine their own essential ingredients of exemplary teaching, often resulting in a lack of a shared vision with the staff.</li> <li>• Teacher input into the evaluation process occurs during the follow-up conversations between the teacher and administrator; teachers provide explanations and reflections which offer clarity and guide subsequent observations and conversations.</li> <li>• Feedback is provided after every observation, allowing for immediate support and follow-up.</li> </ul>

current self-regulating behaviours have been identified as minimally effective. This formal process is also effective in its ability to hold teachers accountable, through its mandatory, annual growth plans. All teachers are expected to identify their professional goals each year by

reflecting on their individual needs, indicating professional development opportunities that align with their goals, and providing a plan for the implementation of new learning into current teaching practice (Brandon School Division, 2003). The use of this system would be valuable in an organization where accountability is a concern. In addition, Brandon School Division's system of evaluation requires scheduled, formal observations: a requirement that suggests this system would be a suitable alternative for an organization that fails to recognize unannounced observations as an appropriate evaluative tool.

Marshall's (2013) informal system of Mini-Observations requires evaluators to observe every teacher each year, which allows for accurate monitoring and tracking of each teacher's ongoing development, as well as for more informed staffing decisions. Marshall's system would be effective for an organization that was supporting a large, evolving staff, as it enables the administrator to draw on the expertise within the building to support and improve the teaching and learning in other classrooms, gain an accurate sense of which teachers require a more immediate intervention, and inform decisions pertaining to the future employment of staff. Marshall's system also provides opportunities for teachers to receive frequent feedback, engage in reflective practices, and share in professional dialogue about teaching and learning practices. This system would support a stagnant organization that was concerned with its staff's lack of commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

It is clear that both formal and informal systems of evaluation have merit with regards to teacher supervision. When time is taken to fully understand and appreciate the foundational components of an evaluative system, and substantial effort is made to follow its guiding principles, significant improvements in teaching and learning can occur, which is the ultimate goal of all supervision and evaluation systems.

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# Learning Styles in Education: A Critique

Jackie Gudnason

## Abstract

*Learning styles-based instruction is popular in mainstream society and education, yet lacks empirical data to support its use. Misconceptions surrounding the effectiveness of learning-styles based instruction are a disservice to students and educators, with the limited resources and funding available in education. Limitations in learning-styles based instruction are considered and recent research in effective teaching practices is shared in this paper to provide evidence-based alternatives to learning-styles based instruction.*

The notion of learning styles-based instruction has become synonymous with effective teaching and increased metacognition in learners (Cuevas, 2016). Measuring students' learning styles and matching teaching methods to students' learning preferences is a practice that educators rarely question. The practice is encouraged in teacher education training (Scott, 2010), and is well-supported by educators, parents, and the general public (Cuevas, 2015). However, despite the broad appeal and acceptance of learning styles-based instruction, there is limited scientific data to indicate that the learning styles hypothesis is an effective instructional/ learning tool for teachers and students (Cuevas, 2015; Pashler, McDaniel, Rohrer, & Bjork, 2009; Scott, 2010). A number of evidence-based teaching strategies are more effective than learning styles-based instruction in positively affecting students' learning, growth, and engagement (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016; Jordan, Glenn, & McGhie-Richmond, 2010).

## Defining Learning Styles

The acceptance of learning styles-based instruction in mainstream society and education, despite the lack of empirical data to support its use, is not the only misinterpretation of the learning styles hypothesis. Misconceptions exist in defining what criteria constitute a learning style (Scott, 2010). There have been over 71 different learning style models proposed to date (Pashler et al., 2009). Researchers define a learning style as a "concept that different people prefer to process information in different ways" (Cuevas, 2016, p. 2) and learn better when teaching methods are matched to their learning style. There is also debate among researchers whether Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory is a subset of learning styles. Many researchers contend that Gardner's multiple intelligence theory conflates with common-held definitions and more importantly, with public perception and understanding of learning styles-based instruction (Cuevas, 2016; Pashler et al., 2009).

Howard Gardner (n.d.) refuted claims that his multiple intelligence theory is a subset of the learning styles hypothesis. Gardner argued that his multiple intelligence theory is not the same as the learning styles hypothesis; he described multiple intelligences and learning styles as different psychological constructs. Gardner defined a learning style as a way that someone approaches something, but he described intelligence as a "computational power of a mental system" (p. 4), and claimed that learning styles and intelligence may be related but are not the same thing. Interestingly, Gardner described two primary educational implications from multiple intelligence theory: individuation and pluralization. Gardner's definition of individuation in education closely matches researchers' definition of learning styles-based instruction – that people should be taught and assessed in ways that match how they learn (Cuevas, 2016; Rohrer & Pashler, 2012). While the debate is more complex than this issue of semantics, many researchers contend that educators and the general public do not distinguish between the terminology of learning styles-based instruction and multiple intelligence theory in definition or practice (Cuevas, 2016; Pashler et al., 2009; Scott, 2010).

The blurred distinction between learning styles-based instruction and the application of multiple intelligence theory in education is apparent in the use of Jennifer Katz's three-block model in classrooms. The three-block model is being taught in education faculties and school divisions across Manitoba (Katz, 2016). Professional development for the three-block model is currently offered to teachers in western Canada and the northern United States (Katz, 2016; Manitoba Teachers' Society, 2016). While the program is about much more than learning styles (in fact, it would be inaccurate to simplify and suggest otherwise), the foundation of the program is grounded in teaching students Howard Gardner's multiple intelligence theory, determining each students' multiple intelligence profile, and developing teaching strategies around students' strengths and weaknesses as learners (Katz, 2012). Educators are also encouraged to cover curriculum and teach lessons that use the nine multiple intelligences (Katz, 2012). It should be noted, however, that Howard Gardner (n.d.) did not endorse tests to measure students' multiple intelligences and only speculated about a possible ninth and tenth intelligence. Therefore, it must be emphasized that the three-block model is rooted Katz's interpretation of the multiple intelligence theory and individuation. Evidently, the distinction between learning styles-based instruction and multiple intelligence theory by educators is not entirely clear.

### **Learning Styles as a Teaching Strategy**

Learning styles-based instruction has been a pervasive instructional tool in education for many decades. Government education departments encourage using learning styles in lesson planning and instruction (Scott, 2015). References to learning styles-based instruction is common in teacher education textbooks and training (Cuevas, 2015). In Manitoba, the *Success for all Learners* government-issued document outlines strategies for customizing teaching to students' learning preferences (Manitoba Education, 2007). In the document, educators are also encouraged to incorporate multiple intelligence theory into their lesson planning by integrating components of each of the seven intelligences into their lessons (Manitoba Education, 2007). In a 2015 review of teacher education texts, every text analysed included information on learning styles and encouraged educators to incorporate learning styles-based instruction into their classroom practice (Cuevas, 2015). None of the texts studied indicated that there was a lack of empirical data to support learning styles-based instruction. Teachers are graduating from teacher education programs believing that learning styles-based instruction is an effective and pedagogically sound teaching strategy (Cuevas, 2015; Scott, 2010), yet current research suggests that there is no evidence to support the efficacy of this approach to teaching (Cuevas, 2015; Pashler et al., 2009; Scott, 2010).

In a large-scale review of the learning styles hypothesis in 2009, it was determined that there was a lack of sound scientific process and subsequent empirical data to support teaching strategies that cater to students' individual learning styles (Pashler et al., 2009). As a result of the findings of this study, Pashler et al. (2009) developed criteria to encourage future legitimate research about the learning styles hypothesis. In 2010, another article was published detailing flaws in the learning styles hypothesis (Scott, 2010). Three primary concerns with learning styles-based instruction were identified: learning styles are poorly defined and lack empirical data to support the hypothesis, the cultural appeal and commercialization of learning styles-based instruction has made the hypothesis popular, and the use of learning styles-based instruction is at the very least ineffective but can have detrimental effects for student learning and self-concept (Scott, 2010). In 2015, an article was published in response to the large-scale 2009 review, and the authors' findings were analogous with both Pashler et al.'s (2009) and Scott's (2010) earlier publications; there is no empirical data to suggest that learning styles-based instruction positively affects learning outcomes for students (Cuevas, 2015).

It is difficult to imagine that learning styles-based instruction in education is "little more than a fad, albeit an endearing one, and one whose utility as a guide for practice has been questioned and refuted repeatedly for some decades" (Scott, 2010, p. 11), when the hypothesis

behind the “fad” is such a common teaching strategy. However, researchers are staunch in their position, and state that it is irresponsible for educators to continue using learning styles-based instruction when there is no empirical evidence that there is any benefit to learners (Cuevas, 2015). However, learning styles-based instruction continues to hold appeal; the notion that everyone can easily learn if instruction is customized to their preferences is compelling (Pashler et al., 2009). The prevailing belief of learning styles-based instruction in education also encourages confirmation bias amongst educators (Cuevas, 2015; Rohrer & Pashler, 2012). It is professionally advantageous for educators to observe and believe in learning styles-based instruction. Disagreeing with learning styles-based instruction would be akin to saying that one did not believe in differentiation.

### **Reframing Differentiation**

The expectation that teachers differentiate their instruction and provide an inclusive learning environment is ubiquitous with sound pedagogical practice in the 21<sup>st</sup> century classroom. However, successfully differentiating and developing inclusive practices, may be difficult for educators (Marshall, 2016). Nearly two-thirds of educators agree with inclusion in principle, yet less than one-third feel that they can successfully teach by using inclusive practices with the resources that they have (Jordan et al., 2010). In addition, teachers are under pressure to raise test scores and achievement with students while subsequently being told that they must meet the needs of an increasingly diverse range of learners. In response, effective differentiation has become ambiguous to many educators. This ambiguity has created demanding workloads, with educators executing superficial practices in differentiation by creating individualized worksheets and activities that have little educational benefit for students (Marshall, 2016). While teachers’ efforts in differentiation and inclusion are laudable, they are often misguided, lack support and resources, and are not rooted in an evidence-based approach.

Differentiation, inclusion, and learning styles-based instruction are often viewed as inter-related entities that define effective instruction in education. Conversely, in a comprehensive meta-analysis of factors that influence effective instruction, individuation was ranked 100 out of 138 variables and was found to have a small effect size (Marshall, 2016). A number of teaching strategies have been found to affect student learning and inclusion better than individuation. In a study that analysed research on effective inclusive teaching practices, several features distinguished effective teachers: maximizing use of instructional time by providing explicit lesson objectives that engage all learners in the classroom, expecting high standards for all learners, using well-established routines that include time for teachers to work with individuals and small groups of learners (particularly learners with disabilities or students struggling with a lesson), and prompting that encourages student response and dialogue, along with effective error correction and skilled feedback (Jordan et al., 2010). Teaching practices that benefited inclusion also increased student achievement overall (Jordan et al., 2010). Effective teaching practices benefit all learners. The key is for educators to know what teaching practices current empirical data indicate are most effective.

The dissonance between theory and practice is an ongoing challenge in education. Research on learning and metacognition has shown that people’s beliefs and intuition about learning are often wrong and “lead people to manage their own learning and teach others in non-optimal ways” (Pashler et al., 2009). In addition, teachers’ beliefs about effective teaching practices and learning are difficult to change once they have been established (Jordan et al., 2009; Scott, 2010). It is essential that teacher education training and policy become better aligned with current research, in order to ensure that future educators are not being versed in rhetoric, such as learning styles-based instruction, that is not empirically sound. While learning styles-based instruction is espoused to aid in differentiation and inclusion, it has instead become another way for educators to stereotype, label, and misperceive their students’ abilities (Scott, 2010). This is a dangerous myth to perpetuate in education when teachers’ beliefs about

learning are often static, and demonstrates why there needs to be a focus on evidence-based effective instructional practices in teacher education training and education policy.

### **Alternatives to Learning Styles-Based Instruction**

Dual coding is an alternative theory to learning styles-based instruction. Ironically, dual coding is less well known but has more empirical data to support its use. Dual coding theory posits that there are two pathways to encode information into long term memory: a visual pathway and a verbal pathway (Cuevas, 2016). All learning is processed by using language in some way; even activities or concepts that appear rooted in other skills use language to make connections to prior knowledge, to encode words, and to consider the meaning of concepts (Cuevas, 2016). While the exact area and way that such information is processed is still being researched, there is evidence that dual coding provides learners opportunities to process and retain more information. Therefore, students should be provided visuals when learning, while receiving instruction from educators who use teaching strategies that best suit the content of the topic being studied. Ultimately, all information is processed by using verbal and visual pathways; regularly catering instruction to a students' individual learning preference is not an efficient use of teachers' time or resources (Cuevas, 2016; Rohrer & Pashler, 2012; Waterhouse, 2006).

Effective instruction in education requires a dynamic combination of evolving strategies. In a study that used a large-scale meta-synthesis to test the legitimacy of a conceptual model of learning, six primary teaching/learning strategies were formulated (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016). Educators were encouraged to interweave skill development with student dispositions and motivation, teach skills and strategies within the context of the content being taught, consider the requirements of the task (surface or deep knowledge) with the order and way students are taught, teach students to recognize similarities and differences across learning situations for transfer of knowledge, teach students about learning, and recognize that learning is the process of moving from a surface understanding to a deeper transfer of knowledge that can allow students to apply and extend their understanding to a variety of subjects and ideas (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016). The importance of encouraging "skill" development, a "will" to learn, and a "thrill" of learning for students can not be undervalued (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016, p. 9). Effective teaching is both an art and science that must engage and motivate learners while being grounded in an evidence-based approach.

### **Implications**

Learning is an undeniably complex, evolving endeavour that requires a diverse set of instructional practices to see success (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016; Jordan et al., 2009). Nevertheless, in education, there is a prevailing myth/hope that there is one idea or program that will be able to meet all learners' needs (Hopkins, 2013). Learning styles-based instruction appeals to the notion that students can be easily tested and categorized, while simultaneously catering to the unique needs of the individual learner. This misinterpretation of learning is a disservice to all students when limited resources in education are used for fads that lack empirical data. Students do not need to be taught each subject by using a milieu of strategies catered to their individual needs. Rather, learners require diverse instruction that is efficient, engaging and dynamic, and uses techniques that are best suited to each subject/concept being taught (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016; Jordan et al., 2009; Pashler et al., 2009). When science conflicts with long-held beliefs in education, it is difficult for most educators to let those existing beliefs go (Cuevas, 2015); however, it is essential that the strategies educators use benefit students' learning and make the most of the limited amounts of time and resources available. Learning styles-based instruction may be popular, but that does not make it pedagogically sound.

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# Managing Multiple Relationships in Therapeutic Roles in Rural Communities

Patricia Goodine

## Abstract

*This article explores information regarding the development of multiple relationships (where several roles exist between a therapist and a client, such as when the client is also a student, friend, family member, employee, or business associate of the therapist) in rural communities while engaging in therapeutic practices. It looks at the delicacies of such unavoidable relationships and offers guidelines to support therapists who will inevitably be required to push boundaries while balancing codes of ethics. Due to the vagueness of the information that exists and the lack of training that most counsellors have when practising in rural communities, it is imperative that professional judgement is used on an individual basis to assess the extent to which multiple relationships should exist while counselling in a rural community, for the protection of all involved.*

Controversy has surrounded boundary extensions regarding multiple relationships in rural communities. The inconsistency in views comes from the ambiguity of the ethical balancing of boundaries in multiple relationships. Furthermore, the code of ethics provides limited guidance to those seeking clarification when trying to balance boundaries in multiple relationships (Erickson, 2001). As a result, some people are left feeling that multiple relationships do more harm than good and should be avoided, while others feel that pushing the ethical boundaries in multiple relationships may be beneficial to the therapeutic process.

Ultimately, clients need to be assessed on an individual basis, and the uniqueness of each case must be considered when delving into multiple relationships with clients. Of utmost importance, however, is the therapeutic professional judgement when considering what is in the best interest of the client, and when determining the extent to which boundaries can be pushed.

When considering the decisions that counsellors have to make while maintaining ethical codes when practising in rural communities, this article explores the nature of multiple relationships in rural communities, what constitutes the development of multiple relationships in rural communities, boundary extensions and strategies in dealing with them, and the risks and benefits of participating in multiple relationships in a therapeutic environment.

## The Development of Multiple Relationships in Rural Communities

Many circumstances can engender multiple relationships in conjunction with the therapeutic process created when practising in a rural community. Even when every effort has been made to avoid such situations, extended relationships tend to be inevitable in such an environment. As a result, multiple relationships must be conducted with the best interest of the client in mind when they are established (CPA 2000).

In rural communities, unless the counsellor leads a solitary life, interactions outside the therapeutic relationship are fated to happen. Chance meetings when one is shopping, exercising, and dining out, and more anticipated meetings such as memberships to the same organizations and associations such as church and school are inevitable. Beyond these are the business relationships and friendships that form in professional and social environments in rural communities with clients and counsellors (Zur, 2015). Regardless, the scarcity of available professional resources makes it essential that therapeutic services are provided to the residents in some way even when multiple relationships develop (Halverson & Brownlee, 2010). Therefore, when assessing what is in the best interest of each client, his/her vulnerabilities must be considered, including the context of the therapy and the intimacy of the extended interactions

with the therapist. These considerations will help to determine the overall harm and benefits that developing multiple relationships have regarding the best interest of the client (Gonyea, Wright, & Earl-Kulkosky, 2012).

### **Context of the Therapy**

Many factors need to be considered when developing multiple relationships. The complexity and severity of the presenting issue, along with the treatment plan to complement it, are essential to the positive development of dual relationships (Zur, 2015). A person with depression may present different issues than a client with a personality disorder. Both could impact the therapeutic process in different ways if overlapping relationships develop (Schank, 1998). The client's values, beliefs, and interests are also important information, especially when they do not fall in line with the counsellor's. Additionally, the duration and intensity of the therapeutic process may affect ongoing external interaction. Furthermore, the experience of the counsellor to feel competent that he/she can manage numerous relationships without violating boundaries and without causing harm to the client is crucial. Staying informed in these areas will help to determine whether extended relationships are an option when combined with the therapeutic service. Considerations of these issues may determine whether the counsellor can manage a therapeutic relationship with specific clients. In rural communities, however, there is often no choice but to proceed with services as necessary (Schank, 1998).

### **Intimacy of the Relationship**

The extent to which intimate relationships are formed in rural communities varies from case to case. Intense trusting relationships, from years of friendship to casual newly developed associations through community interactions, may exist (Zur 2015). Formal services, services provided by the client or the counsellor's family, other connections with the immediate family, and memberships in associations and organizations (to name a few) are situations wherein extended relationships emerge and make the therapeutic process more complex (Truscott & Crook, 2005). Older versions of the code of ethics have been revised to allow for non-sexual relationships to exist where they are unavoidable and beneficial to the client (Herman & Robinson-Kurpius, 2006; Sheppard & Schulz, 2007). This accommodates many forms of extended relationships.

In some cases, it is possible that multiple relationships can lead to role confusion, which could negatively affect the therapeutic process. If parental type roles are developed through transference, for example, unrealistic expectations may be developed. If these expectations are not met, the client may form resentments toward the therapist from the confusion that the extended relationship has created (Truscott & Crook, 2005). In the event that the counsellor's actions are unconsciously self-gratifying, such as in the urge to extend boundaries by rescuing children who come from neglectful abusive home environments, much thought has to be given to the rule of abstinence (whereby the focus should be on the patient's problems and immediate decisions should not be made that may seem beneficial to not only the patient, but the counsellor as well) (Reynolds Welfel, 2016). Even though this may be beneficial to the client, it may be more gratifying to the counsellor by fulfilling his/her vision of rescuing everyone. Such actions could lead to counsellor burnout because of the numerous cases that fall into this category when nonprofessional relationships exist. When a counsellor feels the need to do everything he/she can to help the client, there may be too much flexibility in the extension of boundaries. Dissonance between personal and professional values must be kept in check by evaluating the situation with colleagues or looking for precedents when temptations to save clients occur in multiple in these environments. Counsellors in rural communities are under constant scrutiny, and balancing boundaries must be handled with care when they may be viewed as self-gratifying (Catalano, 1997).

## **Boundary Extensions and Strategies in Multiple Relationships**

When guidelines in counselling are pushed past the norms of traditional practice, boundaries are considered to be crossed. These could include activities outside of and within the clinic, and are often connected more so to certain therapeutic practices (Zur 2015). It is up to the professional judgement of the counsellor to determine whether crossing boundaries is integral to that therapeutic practice or will cause harm to the client (Reynolds Welfel, 2016).

### **Activities In and Out of the Office**

Forming relationships with clients outside of the clinic indicates that boundaries are being crossed. Dining with an anorexic patient or flying with a person who is afraid to fly, with the intentions of showing support, are acceptable extensions of boundaries. These extensions may be associated with cognitive behavioural and humanistic therapeutic practices (Zur, 2015). Boundary extensions within the clinic, such as non-sexual hugs, gift giving and self-disclosure, are also acceptable when done in the best interest of the client (Zur, 2015).

### **Professional Judgement**

When crossing boundaries, the counsellor should consider factors such as the history of the client – past trauma, the presenting problem, personality, values, beliefs, and culture – in order to ensure that these activities are completed with the best interest of the client in mind (Zur, 2015). It is also important to consider where the motivation and intention is coming from. If one's motivation is positive, then it most likely will reflect a positive regard for others and have their best interest at hand. However if it is negative, it will most likely reflect fear for oneself, which should send off red flags and help the counsellor to determine whether he/she is acting with good judgement (Lehr & Sumarah, 2004). Additionally, the experience the therapist has an important role in considering to what extent boundaries should be crossed without harming the client (Zur, 2015). More importantly, however, the decisions being made should not solely lie on the shoulders of the counsellor. Moreover, interpersonal interactions should take place whereby the counsellor seeks guidance from experts and also consults the patient, gaining consensus from all involved. The truth shall emerge consensually rather than with what an individual may feel is a common sense answer to the problem (Lehr & Sumarah, 2004). If one is purely extending boundaries in the best interest of the client, one is honouring the duty to neutrality and these extensions are acceptable (Reynolds Welfel, 2016).

### **Strategies**

Once a therapeutic process that involves multiple relationships is established, many strategies can be incorporated to ensure that ethical practices are being honoured. Following decision-making models through self-evaluations, empowering the client, and creating personal and professional strategies are all essential when managing multiple relationships in rural communities.

### **Decision-Making Process**

Establishing and following a decision-making list, in order to determine whether the development of dual relationships should be established, is crucial to ensure that the therapeutic process will take place for the greater good of all involved. Questions should be considered concerning the necessity of the extended relationship, the risks and benefits that may occur, whether the therapy will be jeopardized, the intimacy of the extended relationships, and the perceptions by others (Truscott & Crook, 2005).

When deciding whether this dual relationship is ethical, a number of steps can be taken:

- Identifying the multiple roles that are at play and what problems they may present. Once this is determined, seeking legal advice may be helpful.
- Applying the code of ethics to look at any standards that may already exist.
- Deciding which moral principles apply to the dilemma and then reviewing related literature and seeking advice from colleagues.
- Considering every course of action and seeking advice about which would be the safest and the least risk to cause harm, while considering the consequences and implications for all involved parties. The most undesirable choice should be eliminated, such as recommending another therapist when no others exist in that area.
- Assessing one's decisions and determining whether one would repeat this action or recommend it to others. If not, the counsellor may have to re-evaluate and start back at square one before putting his/her decision into action.
- Implementing the plan of action (taking on the client or not) and evaluating as the relationship develops. (Foster-Miller & Thomas, 1996)

This guide can help the counsellor determine whether dual relationships will be beneficial and possible in the therapeutic process.

## **Empowering**

Empowering the client to make informed decisions comes from the practice of informed consent when therapy is in its initial stage. Discussing the complexity of multiple relationships in rural communities is crucial to the client's understanding of its possible implications (Reynolds Welfel, 2016; Gonyea et al., 2012). More specifically, the visibility of the counselling services that a client pursues in a rural community makes it possible for inevitable awareness to the community of the client's need for therapy (Reynolds Welfel, 2016). Additionally, as various interactions develop between the counsellor and the client, ongoing discussions regarding the impact that the therapist and the client experience must take place at the beginning of each therapeutic session. Furthermore, working collaboratively with the client ensures his/her awareness and participation in the discussion going forward after boundary extensions have occurred. From this process, the client has the opportunity to disclose any change in his/her confidence in the therapeutic relationship that may develop (Reynolds Welfel, 2016). If there comes a point when the counsellor or client feels that confidence or trust had been broken or lost, or potential harm to the client is perceived, termination of therapy in a caring and sensitive way may be necessary. In such an event, ongoing support should be offered until other resources are available (Erickson, 2001). Additionally, if the relationship becomes too intimate, it may become difficult for the counsellor to be objective and neutral. If balancing boundaries in such cases becomes too complex, the therapeutic relationship or the extended relationships should cease (Catalano, 1997). Ultimately, if the counsellor has the client's wellness in mind and all steps are taken to empower the client, there should be no question that the multiple relationships formed will positively contribute to the therapeutic process that is established.

## **Personal and Professional Strategies**

When working in rural communities, the toll can be very hard on the counsellor. To elevate some of the stress associated with the sense of living in a fish bowl and being scrutinized by the counsellor's every action, counsellors can consider moving outside the community they work in (Endacott et al., 2006). This would help to avoid chance encounters with clients while shopping, etc. Additionally, attending fewer social events or activities can help to avoid uncomfortable interactions with clients. Sending one's spouse shopping or to parent-teacher meetings could be

options. These decisions, however, can come with certain implications which are discussed in the next section of this article.

Under professional circumstances, where it is possible, clients can be referred to other therapists if the counsellor is not comfortable with pushing the therapeutic boundaries when multiple relationships exist. If this is impossible, the dynamics of the need for therapy, the degree of the extended relationships, and the length of the involvement should be considered (Endacott et al., 2006). This information is crucial in deciding whether a therapeutic relationship is possible. Additionally, educating oneself with the intricacies of the code of ethics and using one's professional judgement keeps the counsellor informed regarding the extent with which he/she can push boundaries.

When it is determined that multiple relationships throughout the therapeutic process can be pursued, informed consent, documentation in records (including the benefits to the client supervision by superiors), and consultations with colleagues must be practised (Herman & Robinson-Kurpius, 2006; Reynolds Welfel, 2016). During this process, it is beneficial to share any knowledge regarding multiple relationships on issues of boundary extensions, so that violations will not occur (Sheppard & Schulz, 2007). This ensures that the counsellor is honouring the ethical codes, and that there is evidence to present on behalf of the counsellor when proof is needed. These strategies will help to guide and promote successful practices when dealing with the complexity of multiple relationships in rural communities.

### **Risks and Benefits of Multiple Relationships in Rural Communities**

It is up to each counsellor to determine whether the risks outweigh the benefits when developing multiple relationships in rural communities. Each case is unique and must be assessed independently. Ultimately, anonymity, confidentiality access to other resources, the client pool, and outside counselling services have to be considered to determine whether therapeutic services should proceed.

#### **Anonymity**

Counselling in rural communities is essentially like living in a fish bowl. This can be difficult for counsellors to manage, since they are subject to public scrutiny regarding every move they make (Reynolds Welfel, 2016). They must therefore balance the extent to which they participate in community events and social interactions. The absence of engagement in the community, which leads to multiple relationships, results in isolation and unrealistic positions of power by the counsellor – which can lead to exploitation of the client (Endacott et al., 2006; Zur, 2015). The counsellor may feel that anonymity is essential for his/her personal health and protection; however, the community may view this in a different light.

Research suggests that when a counsellor endeavors to maintain anonymity in a rural community it is viewed as distancing by the residents and can be resented (Truscott & Crook, 2005). However, it can become an advantage to counsellors who are from a rural community and can rely on their experience to feel comfortable with forming dual relationships. Furthermore, they feel that their therapeutic services are enhanced when they involve extended relationships. Additionally, some counsellors feel that the more information they have about the client (which comes from their multiple relationships), the more effective the therapeutic relationship is (Halverson, & Brownlee, 2010). Some also feel that it is the counsellor's responsibility to the client and the rural community to be in and contribute to the community (Halverson, & Brownlee, 2010). Furthermore, a mutual trust is developed between the residents and the counsellor when the counsellor invests in the community. Moreover, the counsellors are seen in a more humanistic way and trust is developed when they interact with the residents they live amongst (Endacott et al., 2006). The need for anonymity under these circumstances is

eased, but balance is still necessary in order to maintain objectivity and prevent counsellor burnout (Halverson & Brownlee, 2010).

## **Confidentiality**

The concerns with confidentiality become much more complex when they involve multiple relationships in rural communities. Breaches in the code of ethics may occur more often due to the visibility whereby clients are easily identified and stigma is an issue. Even in the most casual discussion, community members may misinterpret and construe details regarding clients (Schank, 1998). Under these circumstances, there is little one can do (Endacott et al., 2006).

## **Access to Resources**

In a rural community, there are many limitations to the services that are available (Reynolds Welfel, 2016). When counsellors consider the circumstances in which they will accept referrals for clients, attention must be given to the pool of clients they are pulling from, what other services are available and the desires of the residents. Furthermore, residents in rural communities have a unique set of needs that require flexibility and adaptations by the counsellor. Consequently, the competency of the counsellors can come into question as they do the best they can to meet the needs of a diverse set of issues (Schank, 1998). The views on outside counselling services and clients' preferences must be considered when multiple relationships in rural communities are established in a therapeutic setting.

## **Client Pool**

A counsellor's income relies partly on the number of clients that he/she serves (Reynolds Welfel, 2016). Turning away clients can cause undue financial stress for the therapist. Therefore, the counsellor is obliged to consider the personal good of the client and not accept cases solely based on financial needs, in order to prevent self-gratification. In this situation, if the fiduciary interest does not exist and the duty to abstain from promoting self-interest is not adhered to, then the therapeutic relationship should cease (Reynolds Welfel, 2016).

## **Outside Counselling Services**

When counsellors choose to decline client referrals due to multiple relationship concerns, there may be few other therapeutic options for the client. Furthermore, the cost and inconvenience of accessing outside services may be problematic (Schank, 1998). Clients may not want (or not have the means) to travel for services that are many miles away from their home communities (Erickson, 2001). Furthermore, the clients may have developed trust in the counsellors in their home communities from other associations they may have, and may seek them out based on this comfort (Reynolds Welfel, 2016). Additionally, clients tend to be attracted to counsellors with similar interests, values, and culture. They get a good sense of this by observing the associations and contributions that counsellors make in the rural community (Gonyea et al., 2014). Moreover, refusal to provide service to them may cause them to feel rejected and offended (Reynolds Welfel, 2016). Also, potential clients often do not trust counsellors from outside the community and therefore choose not to obtain help from them. (Reynolds Welfel, 2016). Considering these circumstances, the home community's counsellor may be only option for the client.

There are also limitations for counsellors who practise in rural communities. Consultation and supervision are crucial in these environments, given that the boundaries are always pushed beyond the norms. Unfortunately, these resources may not be available to the counsellor, who may be left alone to make important decisions that he/she be unsure of (Schank, 1998).

## Conclusion

Developing multiple relationships in rural communities in conjunction with a therapeutic practice can be complex and risky. Balancing ethical boundaries while protecting vulnerable clients is a delicate undertaking. Given counsellors' limited training, and the vague guidelines that codes of ethics provide regarding multiple relationships, counsellors must remain well informed. It is left to the counsellor's professional judgement, honesty, and benevolence to make ethical decisions regarding multiple relationship and boundary extensions. In this atmosphere of uncertainty, if there is any doubt as to what extent boundaries can be pushed, following guidelines and strategies, and simply being human, should lead the counsellor in the right direction regarding the individual wellness of the client while adhering to ethical standards.

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## About the Author

*Between raising three boys and working as a high school educator, Patricia Goodine is finding the time to further her education in the guidance and counselling master's program at BU. She hopes to practise in this field in the future and is using what she learns with her current classes.*

# Removing Barriers to Learning for Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder

Jennifer Pawlett

## **Abstract**

*There is a significant increase of children diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD); therefore, parents, educators, and specially trained instructional resource teachers need to come together to provide effective programming for these children. This paper provides a number of strategies and educational methods to assist educators in providing effective educational programs for students with ASD. This paper focuses on visual aids, multimodal interventions, and strategies for challenging behaviour so students receive the education that is most suited for them.*

The past few decades has shown an increase in the number of students diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Individuals with ASD commonly have difficulties with communication and socialization and may have a narrow range of interests (“Teaching Young Children,” 2016). Given broad calls for meaningful access and inclusion for all, educators are tasked with implementing effective educational programs that include strategies to provide access to curriculum and teach these children. Educational methods and strategies will vary for individual students, based on their unique interests and skill levels. Children with ASD have diverse interests, strengths, and challenges; therefore, what works for one child may not work for the next. Strategies to help students with ASD in the classroom include visual aids, multimodal interventions to enhance communication, and strategies to support students with challenging behaviours. Practice born in the universal design for learning begins with a holistic conception of the potential for many possible learning experiences, in which the emphasis shifts from a focus on the benefits to an individual to the benefit of the whole community (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, Gallagher, 2011), by incorporating a variety of strategies into the classroom we are creating a more inclusive atmosphere that benefits all students, not only those who have ASD.

## **Visual Aids**

Many students with ASD struggle with abstract thinking (Knight & Sartini, 2015), but often have visual strengths; therefore, visual aids are one of the most common strategies for educators to use with their students. Students with ASD may face challenges in predicting how long an activity will take and are dubious about when the activity is complete; visual aids are a particularly effective tool to support students who face these challenges. Visual supports guide appropriate behaviour and promote proper functioning in and out of school (Young, Falco, & Hanita, 2016). Visual aids range on a continuum from concrete objects and pictures to symbols (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador [GNL], 2003). There are many examples of visual aids (for example, see “English Visual Images,” 2008). When and how to use visual aids depends on the individual’s comprehension level as well as where the student falls on the autism spectrum. Some of these examples include daily schedules and social stories.

Daily schedules can be used as a way of reducing anxiety throughout the day by clarifying what subjects or activities will be involved, what to expect throughout the day, and whether there are any changes to the daily routine. A high percentage of students with ASD also experience anxiety; therefore, having a schedule for the student can assist in developing a sense of time and knowledge of how long they will be participating in an activity and when to transition from one activity to the next. Depending on the severity of the disorder and their processing levels, they may need tactile objects attached to the schedule or may simply need a

symbol to represent the picture. As a classroom teacher, I have used large-scale schedules posted on the wall in conjunction with individual schedules on the students' desks. Portable schedules are another option that can be used, whereby the students take the schedule along with them in their pocket. These visual schedules provide the students a way to predict the events throughout their day; therefore, these daily schedules should be used consistently to alleviate any unnecessary anxiety that they may experience.

Social stories, officially kept by Carol Gray, are used in and out of school to help students with ASD better understand social expectations and cope with different social situations. Gray's experiences as a teacher has helped her to develop her philosophy: First: Abandon all assumptions. Second: Recognize that the social impairment in autism is shared, with mistakes made on all sides of the social equation. Third: When typical people interact with people with autism, both perspectives are equally valid and deserving of respect ("Carol Gray – Social Stories," 2017). These principles help to develop current social stories. They are useful in developing visual aids that assist in altering behaviours, easing transitions, and helping students to understand social cues and proper interactions (Notbohm & Zysk, 2010). I have used social stories to help my students to transition from one grade to the next. Introducing this transition before it took place helped to alleviate some unknowns and stressors that would have been experienced otherwise. In a situation like this, it is beneficial for the student to have a story that includes pictures of the new teacher, the new classroom, the student's new desk, and a picture of the student's new locker, for example. Reading these stories together recurrently helps ease to the transition between classes and teachers, while at the same time demonstrates and teaches proper behaviours expected of the student. Students with ASD may demonstrate challenging behaviour such as aggression and off-task activity during transitions (Lequia, Wilkerson, Kim, & Lyons, 2015); therefore, social stories are an important tool to ease the transition. Social stories should facilitate these conversions and help the student to understand new situations.

Visual aids such as daily schedules and social stories are a key component to an accessible classroom for a student with autism. These aids should be tailored for each child by varying their complexity. Given that children with ASD can struggle with abstract thinking, visual aids can be used in the classroom to reduce dependence on others by giving students with ASD direction about what is expected, which will also reduce anxiety (Heflin & Alaimo, 2007). By including visual aids in the student's environment, educators can attempt to decrease anxiety that may cause a barrier to learning.

### **Multimodal Interventions for Speech**

Multimodal interventions are useful strategies for expanding student's vocabulary by using two or more different interventions at the same time. Children with ASD have a broad range of communication abilities: some students have an impressive vocabulary, while others can have a lack of spoken language. Expanding communication strategies for children with ASD can be very challenging for educators, but must be a priority to ensure that these students express wants and needs, socialize and interact with those around them, and express their emotions (GNL, 2003). Multimodal approaches that have been used in previous studies have had advantages over solitary interventions (Brady et al., 2015). One approach is Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) in conjunction with speech. AAC can be applied to enhance communication by students with ASD. This approach uses graphics, flash cards, and voice recordings to improve communication skills (Heflin & Alaimo, 2007). The educator and Speech Language Pathologist (SLP) can collaborate to determine the specific communication need of the student and develop a program collectively. AAC is used when a student has limited expressive vocabulary. Some strategies under the branch of AAC to increase communication are sign language, communication boards, and computer devices (Maurice, Green, & Luce, 1996).

One type of AAC used to enhance student communication skills is sign language. Total communication, involving sign combined with speech, must be used in school and at home to be successful (Quill, 2000). The goal is for the student to communicate successfully with others by using this visual reference. I had a student in my school who used sign as a way of communicating. The educator working with this child used speech along with sign to enhance the child's expressive language. This approach proved to be successful for this student because she was nonverbal but could communicate requests by using this strategy. The end goal would be to fade away from the use of sign, if possible, and to emerge into spoken language because it will allow the child interact and communicate to a broader audience. Sign encourages students to communicate through a visual representation; it is an important strategy to use with children who have difficulties with communicating.

Another method of AAC commonly used in schools and at home is communication boards. Communication boards can contain pictures, words, or graphs and must be focused on a certain topic. The goal of a communication board is to increase vocabulary, reduce frustration, and provide a method for the child to communicate. Communication boards can vary, depending on the topic at hand. A communication board can be developed for choosing an activity to play at recess time, for example. The student can point to the preferred activity and a particular child in the classroom with whom he/she would like to play. Communication boards can also be used to communicate how the child is feeling, because students with ASD struggle with expressing their feelings and emotions ("Ten Things," 2005). If the child is angry or upset, he/she can utilize the board to point to a picture conjointly with the reason for feeling that way. Some visuals on the board could include a picture to communicate if it is too loud, if the student needs a break, or if he/she needs assistance with something. Communication boards are a useful communication tool when the student struggles with expressive language.

Finally, using a computer device as an AAC method is another valuable resource. Software programs and speech-generating devices can be incorporated into the classroom to enhance speech and to encourage communication. The many advantages of utilizing a computer device or a voice aid for students with limited expressive vocabulary include increasing their verbal speech, developing their literacy, and giving a nonverbal student a voice (Quill, 2000). Many different devices are available to students, and they are constantly changing. Educators and speech pathologists need to consult with personnel who specialize in the equipment, in order to determine which device is most suited for the student, depending on the severity of the speech impairment. Another important aspect to keep in mind when introducing students to computer devices is to illustrate how to use them by modelling correct behaviour.

Communicating with others and developing social connections are sometimes taken for granted. Children typically develop social connections and relationships very early. Typically, children with ASD do not develop social and joint referencing skills on their own, but must be directly taught. There are differences in the ways people move through the world, the ways people access print, and the ways people process new information (Ashby, 2012). Therefore, using sign language, communication boards, and computer devices as multimodal strategies can be beneficial to the success of all students.

### **Strategies for Challenging Behaviour**

Challenging behaviours are something that educators inevitably face throughout their career. When a child with ASD demonstrates challenging behaviours, it is important to understand the root of the problem and devise strategies for supporting students. It may not be possible to eliminate the behaviour, but guiding the student with strategies to deal with it will limit the disruptions for the student's learning as well as his/her classmates. Certain steps are necessary when developing an intervention plan for a behaviour. First, the problem behaviour needs to be identified and the contributing factors to the behaviour must be determined. An alternate behaviour and strategies for changing the behaviour need to be taught, and then a

behaviour intervention plan can be developed (GNL, 2003). Some programs that have been developed to support interventions are Madrigal and Winner's Superflex program (2012), Buron & Curtis's (2003) 5-point scale, and positive programming strategies. These programs and strategies help to devise alternative behaviours and promote classroom management.

Madrigal and Winner (2012) developed a five-step superflex program to strengthen students' social processing. This plan teaches students 5 tools on how to strengthen social understanding. The five tools are: Decider: the ability to stop, decide, and describe which unthinkable is trying to overpower their thinking. Social Detective: the ability to stop and observe the situation and the people in it. Brakester: the power to stop and think to discover why people are expected to act in certain ways. Flex DoBODY: the power to use flexible thinking to determine strategies to use to do what is expected. Cranium Coach: using self-talk to motivate him/herself to keep working (Winner, 2007). The author chose this program because she has seen it used successfully in her school. Students are generally engaged in this program since the characters mimic comic book characters. The program is effective in demonstrating acceptable behaviours in many social interactions.

Commonly, if a child can comprehend and produce language, then he/she is able to communicate effectively. Many students with ASD struggle with the cognitive process of language and therefore may not have the ability to use language in a meaningful way (Winner, 2007). Students with ASD tend to face challenges when processing social cues and developing relationships, and tend to react in a way that can produce a challenging behaviour. Madrigal and Winner's strategies encourage students to learn more about themselves and their characteristics, and ways to deal with their behaviours and emotions. They supply teachers with tools to help their students to overcome their difficult social behaviours, and provide examples of alternative responses. By using this program, students learn to think about what behaviour they are portraying, determine how it is affecting others around them, stop and think about an alternative behaviour, make a good choice, and ultimately acknowledge these steps on their own by practising self-control (Madrigal et al., 2012). This superflex program encourages students to self-monitor their behaviour and choose alternative responses.

Conventional classroom management strategies are not always pertinent to students with ASD; therefore, different strategies, such as the 5-point scale, need to be applied for their socialization and communication challenges. The 5-point scale is used with students who have ASD, because it is a visual prompt that shows clear and concrete levels of emotion. The students can use this scale to check in with their classroom or support teacher about how they feel during a certain situation. If they rate themselves at a four or a five, then they can be removed from the situation before a challenging behaviour occurs. Another way to utilize the scale is to have the teacher point to a number, four or five for example, when the teacher witnesses a challenging behaviour. The teacher would then show the student where he/she needs to be by pointing to a one or a two in order to control the behaviour. This scale acts as a reminder of appropriate behaviours for different circumstances. The 5-point scale can be used for any behaviour as long as it is properly introduced to the student, in order to ensure that the child understands how to use it (Buron & Curtis, 2003). This 5-point scale has been found to be successful when conventional behaviour interventions have failed.

When students manifest a behaviour, it is in response to something that is bothering them or they are seeking attention; this is when positive programming strategies need to be implemented. Positive behaviour support (PBS) refers to positive behaviour interventions used to achieve socially important behaviour change (Sugai et al., 2000). Sugai et al. suggested that if we can identify the conditions under which problem behaviour is likely to occur (triggering antecedents and maintaining consequences), we can arrange environments in ways that reduce occurrences of problem behaviour and teach and encourage positive behaviours that can replace problem behaviours (Sugai et al., 2000). Students with ASD often do not have the communication skills to express how they feel; therefore, they demonstrate a problem behaviour. To deal with these behaviours, educators must define the problem behaviour by

observing when and where it happens, how often it happens and for how long, who is present when it happens, and how the student reacts to what is occurring (Heflin & Alaimo, 2007). Once this information is collected, an intervention can be employed. Strategies that can be implemented are teaching the student an alternative behaviour to use instead of the problem behaviour, changing the environment by removing distracting stimuli, or having a designated calming place within the classroom. Educators, along with a support team, are responsible for using these positive programming strategies and reshaping undesired behaviours, so that all students can have success in the classroom and have strategies to respond to their emotions. I have used many different strategies to promote desirable behaviours. One of these strategies was implementing a calming corner in my classroom. The calming corner included a tent with soft cushions inside where the child could remove him/herself from the triggers and have a chance to be alone.

Teachers are guaranteed to experience problem behaviours throughout their teaching careers and must learn and use strategies to deal with these behaviours. To create and maintain positive behaviour and classroom management, teachers can implement strategies and programs such as the Superflex program, the 5-point scale, and different positive programming strategies. By using these strategies, students learn to overcome their problem behaviours and find alternative responses while practising self-control. Teachers are responsible for ensuring that their students with ASD are aware of the appropriate responses for dealing with their behaviours and have the tools to cope in an effective way (Schulze, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

With the steady increase of students diagnosed with ASD, it is pertinent that educators and support teams know how to support these students, in order to ensure that they have the best education possible. Educators need to employ effective practices and strategies such as visual aids, multimodal interventions, and strategies for challenging behaviour so that the students receive the education that is most suited for them. Not all students learn in the same way, therefore we need to have a plurality of perspectives and ways of being by using a variety of approaches to instruction, encouraging forms of assessment, providing more choice in activities and ensure that all ways of being and performing in the classroom are valued and supported (Ashby, 2011). Collaboration between the classroom teacher and support teachers is imperative to guarantee that the program developed for each student reflects his/her needs. Providing students with visual schedules, multimodal interventions to increase communication and speech, and ways to deal with their emotions and behaviours is vital to their development and should remain a focus for inclusive classrooms. By educating students with proper self-regulating and coping approaches, classroom tools, and classroom strategies we are giving them a fair chance at succeeding in school.

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## **Seeking Solutions with a New Lens Focused on First Nations Children in Canada**

**Delonna Morrisette**

### **Abstract**

*There will be many celebrations with the 150-year birthday that Canada will be celebrating this year. For First Nations Peoples, the celebration continues with the ability to take control of their own education. The Residential School legacy has left generational effects. Leaders across Canada are working together to infuse Aboriginal perspectives into curriculum and to maintain an inviting inclusive school atmosphere. Programs have been implemented for years to help preschool children and their parents benefit from culturally sensitive programming. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015b) Call to Action is a national wake up call to help Canadians become aware of history with the First Peoples of Canada.*

Canada will celebrate its 150th birthday on July 1, 2017. The celebrations include a focus on reconciliation with Indigenous peoples,<sup>3</sup> which fosters an inclusive environment. To be effective, ongoing reconciliation efforts must bring awareness to the broader need for Aboriginal perspectives within education curriculum as well as to how the education system has failed Aboriginal people (Fee, 2012, p. 1). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (2015b) Call to Action included a call for education for reconciliation that seeks age-appropriate curriculum on the history of Aboriginal peoples (p. 7). Prior to European contact, the entire Aboriginal community raised the child because knowledge transfer was necessary for the survival of the community. Various government policies, such as the Residential School system, eroded the parent-child relationship through lack of identity, loss of language, and erosion of traditional practices. As a result, Aboriginal students have failed to strive equally with their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Today, First Nations communities have expressed a need to take control over their own education by seeking solutions with a new lens focused on their children. An exploration of the Residential School system and the Aboriginal Head Start program, as well as the failure of Aboriginal students to strive and the resultant call for action, illustrate the developments in Aboriginal education over time.

### **Residential Schools**

The Treaties were signed in good faith by both the First Nation people and the Crown. As such, it was a shock when government officials decided that it was in the First Nations' best interest to take their children from their communities and send them to boarding schools. First Nation families believed that teachings should be woven into daily life and be connected with their spiritual beliefs, which made them reluctant to hand over their children to strangers (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2012, p. 10). Government policy stated that Residential Schools would civilize Aboriginal children and assimilate them into Canadian society. There was no indication of a curriculum-based educational system at this time because the intent was "to kill the Indian in the child."

It was an unfortunate event for the children when they were taken away from their parents as young as four years old. They were placed in the Residential School environment where they did not speak nor understand the English language; Western civilization itself was foreign to them. These children knew only what their parents had taught them through love and commitment back in their homelands. Through the 168 years of Residential Schools

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<sup>3</sup> In this paper, the terms Aboriginal, First Nation, and Indigenous are used interchangeably. These terms are not to blur any differences between groups of people.

(Sutherland, 2011, p. 1), students failed to thrive equally with the normal Canadian student.<sup>4</sup> This is understandable because curriculum teaching focused on the three R's – reading, writing, and arithmetic. Due to funding shortage in the Depression years, student class time was cut down to half a day in class to accommodate hours of manual labor needed for survival of the schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2012, p. 34). Basic needs, rather than furthering their education, took precedence.

Throughout these years, the federal government did not share information with First Nation parents. Increasing pressures for transparency pushed the federal government to consider giving education over to the provincial government. Discussions between both levels of government were to integrate students in the provincial system and to assimilate them into Western society. However, with the closure of Residential Schools, the government handed over education to the local control of First Nation communities. Parents were finally able to voice their opinions and have input into their children's education.

### **Aboriginal Head Start**

The Aboriginal Head Start program recently celebrated its 20th year of successful operations. It was in 1995 that First Nation and Inuit Health Branch, along with Public Health Canada, initiated Head Start programs in and across Canada with a primary focus on early childhood education that was culturally sensitive to Aboriginal children. Aboriginal Head Start on Reserve (AHSOR) focused on parental involvement with infant, toddlers, and preschool children. Aboriginal Head Start in urban and northern communities focused on preschool children aged 3-5 years. Creating self-identification and self-worth, and giving Aboriginal communities the power to focus their attention on the younger generation, resulted in success for Aboriginal youth because more students have attained a higher education (Preston, Cottrell, Pelletier, & Pearce, 2012, p. 5). In addition, parents are provided with the opportunity to be directly engaged in their child's educational development.

Enhancing the success of the Aboriginal Head Start centers was the partnership with other agencies that ensured that all areas of the programs six components were covered: culture and language, education, health promotion, nutrition, parental and family involvement, and social support. Agencies included dental technicians, public health, and school divisions for easy transition, as well as local Friendship Centers such as the Manitoba Metis Federation. With the involvement of community supports both on and off reserve, Head Start programs have assisted young students in the four realms of life: spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical development. This approach, although it may not have been a curriculum-based intervention, incorporated cultural compatibility theory into its design and evaluation (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006, p. 6). The inclusion of Aboriginal students' cultural values and beliefs into their education experience fostered an inclusive environment. Head Start programs have proven successful because students who attended were school ready for their formal school years.

Early education through preventative strategies embedded in Aboriginal Head Start programs has assisted communities in restoring cultural identity in parents, elders, and community workers. Nguyen (2011) stated that a holistic approach toward introducing values, attitudes, and beliefs within a community-based program has improved the children's appreciation of who they are (p. 14). Within this program design, the parents are also recognized as the first teachers in a child's life. This approach has created an atmosphere wherein social economics preserve self-worth; parents themselves gain knowledge and strive for success for themselves and their children. Only time will reveal how beneficial it has been to have an inclusive Aboriginal program for the education of preschool children on and off reserve.

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<sup>4</sup> All non-cited information in this paper is from the author's own experience.

## Failure to Thrive

Addressing the issues that impact the success or failure of Aboriginal students is a delicate and complex matter. There have been many attempts to improve grade scores across the curricula to support Aboriginal students' efforts to succeed in school and beyond. Unfortunately, statistics demonstrate less success because many Aboriginal students do not remain in school long enough to graduate. Educators often ask why this is happening or what can be done to keep Aboriginal students in school. To significantly lower the probability of early departure from school, research has shown that curricula should be taught by an Aboriginal teacher and include lessons on Aboriginal people and their history (Lamb, 2014, p. 2). Whether it is in a northern, rural, or urban setting, educators are compelled to find ways to encourage First Nation students to strive and graduate from school.

Many non-profit organizations are willing to assist First Nation students, including an organization called Outside Looking In that to incorporate methods of learning into mainstream education that incorporates the pursuits of youth (Rovito & Giles, 2016, p. 7). Youth have created their own outdoor games; knowledge transfer from teachers and elders helps students with all Native games, hip hop dance, art, and cultural creativity. Students are then given credit in school for the activities that they enjoy. It is noted that the landscape of schools is very Eurocentric. When Aboriginal students walk into school, they are greeted with the picture of Queen Elizabeth. Van Inglen and Haleas (2006) stated that Aboriginal students want to see themselves reflected in the fabric of the school (p. 390). An inclusive environment would include items such as student-made art work in the hallways.

Over time, trends in provincial schools have a tendency to recycle (Friedel, 2011, p. 538). One such trend capitalizes on resiliency and keeping the oral traditions alive as valuable lessons. Years earlier, it was recommended to keep the failure-to-strive students in remedial classes and teach them trades to prepare them for the work force. This was in response to the belief that Aboriginal students could not manage mainstream programs. Students were often labelled as learning disabled if they had trouble in the daily Eurocentric school day. Assumptions were thus made around the students' learning capabilities. Modern schools have adapted to worldly views, including that of the Maori framework and how it has revitalized the Maori language and customs while keeping pace with the 20<sup>th</sup> century educational practices (Rico, 2013, p. 382). A teacher's responsibility is to instill self-confidence and motivation into students to keep them striving for success, but this does not happen with Aboriginal students when they do not feel valued in Western society.

## Call for Action

All children deserve a familial relationship with their family that should have been their birthright. This birthright in Canada was infringed upon for First Nation children during the Residential School era. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015b) has issued 94 *Calls to Action* to inform Canadians about the legacy of Residential Schools (p. 1). The average Canadian has not been taught about the historical relationship between Canada and its First Nation people, and thus is ignorant about the Treaties, Residential Schools, and positive contributions that the First Nation people have made over time (Truth & Reconciliation Commission, 2015b, p. 291). The long-lasting implications of that lack of knowledge and understanding are what challenge Aboriginal people today in their everyday lives. Canadians witness those effects in substandard Aboriginal education statistics, higher rates of incarceration within law enforcement, and an increased probability of addictions, mental health and other compounding health issues within the Aboriginal population.

Educational institutions have a direct role in improving the historical views and working toward reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians. Education is an avenue to close the gap in historical knowledge that sustains ignorance and racism (Truth &

Reconciliation Commission, 2015a, p. 23). Implementing Jordan's Principle to settle jurisdictional disputes would go a long way to improve the Aboriginal child's welfare. Equality in the treatment of Aboriginal children and all others, including the new immigration programming, would benefit all.

Understanding Indigenous challenges today are directly linked to appreciating the long history between Canada and the First Nation people. It is the *Calls to Action* that will shape how we handle those very topics in the future. Years of silence are broken and stories are emerging from the Elders. The bondage of past wrongs under overwhelming church and government control will be destroyed and liberate First Nation people to a brighter future (Widdowson & Howard, 2013, p. 18). It is important that the Calls for Action improve historical views.

### Conclusion

The review of historical perspectives regarding First Nation education clearly shows that the developments over time have not kept pace with mainstream society. The Residential School era has negatively impacted seven generations of children; it may take another seven generations to undo the harms that were implicated upon this nation of people. This level of intergenerational trauma is a historical wrong that has now been studied, documented, and witnessed through Truth and Reconciliation events across Canada wherein survivors share their stories and the burden that they kept hidden for so long. The 94 *Calls to Action* are a national wake-up call, seeking reconciling with Canada to restore – or right – the relationship with the First Peoples of Canada. Small steps have begun with programs such as Aboriginal Headstart and efforts to incorporate cultural programming that will assist failure-to-strive students to succeed. It is through education that Reconciliation efforts will rise to the challenge. All curricula must include rewritten history books that share an Aboriginal perspective and look at First Nations people as positive contributors to society. Then First Nation People will heal and relearn to be proud of their rich history, to celebrate their unique cultures and values, and differences. Educational institutions will be places of healing that will lead the way to a better future, seeking solutions with a new lens focused on First Nations children in Canada.

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# **Social Skills Training: An Intervention for Adults with High-Functioning Autism**

**Kathleen Richards**

## **Abstract**

*Social skills training programs are often used as a behavioural intervention with elementary school-aged children; however, many students with high-functioning autism do not receive diagnoses until they reach adulthood. There is therefore a strong need for social skills training programs that can be provided as part of students' accommodations in post-secondary schools. These programs will not only help students with their personal relationships with others, but may also have a strong effect on their students' self-confidence and success in future employment.*

Although social skills are vitally important for one's success in life, they are an area of accommodation that is often overlooked in relation to educating adults with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder (HFASD). Difficulties in verbal and nonverbal communication define autism spectrum disorder (Freitag et al., 2013; Hotton & Coles, 2016; Mostert, 2013); however, for those who are high-functioning, their education and accommodations are focused on the academic sphere, as opposed to social behaviours. These individuals are expected either to have no social problems or to learn to adapt on their own. Because they are expected to have already gained the skills needed to communicate effectively, the sole focus for accommodation is in the academic realm. The consequences of failing to provide students with appropriate social skills go beyond the inability to create relationships with others. Effective social behaviours benefit individuals in multiple areas, including personal well-being and mental health, relationships with others, and employment. Therefore, while training is often done with children in the areas of social/behavioural development, there is a clear need for this work to be continued into adulthood and for vital resources to be provided to students that will assist them in all areas of their lives.

## **Personal Well-Being and Mental Health**

Social skills training improves an individual's self-esteem and mental health. In addition to causing interpersonal difficulties, social skills deficits can result in other negative consequences, such as dropping out of school, trouble with the law, and experimentation with drugs and alcohol (Craig, Brown, Upright, & DeRosier, 2016; Hotton & Coles, 2016; Tse, Strulovitch, Tagalakis, Meng, & Fombonne, 2007). Not only can the lack of social behaviours and attitudes affect one's self-confidence, but it often leads to more serious mental health issues such as depression and anxiety (Hillier, Fish, Siegel, & Beversdorf, 2011; Hotton & Coles, 2016; Parsons & Mitchell, 2002). Individuals who already have a diagnosis of HFASD and who suffer from mental health problems will have difficulty managing this and new and more complex experiences.

When students enter a post-secondary institution, many are leaving home for the first time and experiencing a level of independence that can be intimidating. Among feelings of excitement, many students will also experience loneliness and sadness at being away from their families. During this time of heightened emotion, students experiencing the effects of negative social interactions will be even more likely to suffer from depression or anxiety. Without a formal intervention, such as a social skills training program, individuals with HFASD will not learn to communicate effectively and have a safe environment to practise social skills. Many will develop social phobias and will shy away from interactions with others because they fear that they will not be able to perform the social skills needed to communicate effectively (Hotton & Coles, 2016; Mesibov, 1984). Social skills training programs can not only teach participants appropriate social behaviours, but also give a safe place for individuals to practise these skills without fearing rejection from their peers. Research has shown that by attending these groups,

participants build healthy relationships with the instructors and other members in the groups; in many cases, these groups motivate participants to share their experiences and hear about others' experiences and difficulties (Hotton & Coles, 2016; Plavnick, Kaid, & MacFarland, 2015; Zaks, 2011). Experiencing rejection or feeling isolated from one's peers because of an inability to communicate well makes many students feel that their situation is unique, and this can increase the feeling of seclusion; by talking with people in a group about similar experiences, many participants feel less alone. As a result, participants who report having depressive/anxious symptoms prior to receiving social skills training improve dramatically by the end of the program (Hillier et al., 2011; Van Dam-Baggen & Kraaimaat, 2000). Social skills training programs, therefore, provide essential skill training that one needs for the future, and also act as an unofficial group therapy for participants.

Improvement in confidence levels benefits not only one's mental health, but also other areas of one's life. Many individuals with HFASD who have had social skills training are capable of advocating for themselves when situations arise. In many post-secondary institutions, students meet instructors who are experts in their own subject area, but who may have limited experience teaching to students with HFASD and may therefore not understand the unique needs of these students and the purpose for accommodations (Mostert, 2013). In these cases, students who struggle with social interactions will often not seek a solution for fear of causing conflict, or else they will act aggressively and inappropriately in dealing with the situation (Craig et al., 2015). For example, Samantha<sup>5</sup> is a student who waited until her third year of university to seek accommodations, because one of her teachers in her first year told her that nothing was physically wrong with her and so she did not need to be accommodated. Instead of explaining her legal right to be accommodated by the educational institution she was attending, Samantha did not disagree with her instructor and struggled in the first two years of her program. Many social skills training programs teach students how to deal appropriately with conflict by means of calm discussions and negotiation. As well as learning to advocate for themselves, students with HFASD who gain confidence in social skills training programs often see an improved academic status; usually these students are naturally gifted in academics, but are unable to perform to their ability in academic settings because of their anxiety and depression (Craig et al., 2016; Hillier et al., 2011). Creating a social skills training program for students with HFASD entering post-secondary institutions enables students to gain the skills they need to be confident and not suffer from mental health issues that arise because of their social problems.

## Relationships

Social skills play a major role in creating relationships with others; without these skills, individuals with HFASD may have difficulties creating friendships and romantic relationships, and be unable to connect with peers or teachers in an academic setting. There is little doubt of the importance in relationships with others and their effect on one's emotional well-being and quality of life. For example, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs model places social interactions and relationships with others high on the scale, even above personal safety and other basic physiological needs (McLeod, 2014). For individuals with HFASD to lead satisfying lives, it is vital that they maneuver social situations and create relationships with others, in the form of either friendships or romantic partnerships. Social skills training programs teach these skills, starting from the basic level of initiating a conversation with someone else to more complex skills, such as proper dating etiquette and how to handle disagreements (Ross & Cornish, 2004; Foden & Anderson, 2011). Even if someone with HFASD has received social skills training at a young age, the skills often do not transfer to more mature relationships that adults need. Friendships and romantic relationships are important not only for creating loving and familial

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise specified, all individuals are students who have accessed this author's services as an accessibility services officer. Pseudonyms have been used to protect individual identities.

relationships, but also for providing emotional support for people with HFASD (Zaks, 2011). Post-secondary schooling introduces students to a world of fresh perspectives and new challenges, which can be even more difficult to someone with HFASD. Seeking out the support of a friend or loved one during this time is crucial to finding success in the demanding academic setting, as well as in forming social relationships with other classmates and professors.

Bullying due to lack of sufficient social skills by their peers (and even their teachers) is an occurrence that many individuals with HFASD have already encountered by the time they reach post-secondary education, but can often be much worse in this setting (Unnever & Cornell, 2003). As individuals with HFASD mature, they are more aware of their social difficulties and the fact that they are not making connections with their peers (Tse et al., 2007). Whereas staff will intervene when bullying is present in public schools, in universities and colleges the options for dealing with this type of behaviour are limited and those with HFASD can become targets of bullies more easily. Not only can it be difficult to create relationships with one's peers, but it can also be even more challenging to connect with one's professors and mentors who are often needed as references for future employment. Because most professors/instructors' main area of training is in their own subject area as opposed to education, many do not understand the challenges and behaviours of students with HFASD in their classes. Instead of seeing the potential in their students, many instructors will create a connection between a student's social deficit and an academic one, and assume that a student with HFASD or any other disability does not have the skills to succeed in university. While these stigmas and inappropriate behaviours by peers and teachers are what need to change (Zaks, 2011), social skills training can help students with autism to communicate effectively with acquaintances and even teach them how to deal with bullies in an appropriate, non-aggressive manner (Ross & Cornish, 2004; Mesibov, 1984). Close relationships are important for individuals with autism, but learning how to communicate effectively with everyone they meet is essential, and is a skill that can be used in other areas of their lives to become successful and functional members of society.

### **Vocational**

After graduating from a post-secondary institution, the assumed next step is to start a career; however, an effective use of social skills is needed to be successful in job interviews and also to succeed later in the job with clients and co-workers. Many employers look for interviewees to be personable and appear able to work as a team with their coworkers; they also do not understand what a diagnosis of autism means, or else assume that it equates to an individual not being able to do skilled work (Foden & Anderson, 2011; Van Pelt, 2008). If someone is unable to show the desired skills in the interview, it is unlikely that he/she will be hired; also, because of the stigma associated with disabilities, many individuals with HFASD do not want to share their diagnosis in an interview, so their behaviour can make an interviewer see their social difficulties as a character flaw instead of as a part of their autism diagnosis.

Social skills training programs, and especially those that specifically pertain to vocational training, teach skills that are essential for interviews, such as how to look presentable and how to show confidence, yet in a way that is respectful and courteous (Hall, Wilcoxson, McGroarty, & Low, 2011). Mark is a 37-year-old who graduated university in 2015 with a degree in a field that currently has many job opportunities. Before starting his degree, he worked in the field but wanted to obtain a higher paying job that required a degree. Since graduating, Mark has had over 40 interviews across the country. As a student, he often disagreed with professors and administrators, and often approached these situations aggressively. He is confident in his abilities, but this confidence often comes off as egotism and, while not meaning to, Mark can treat others as though they are less intelligent than he is, and he can seem off-putting. Because of this behaviour and because he has never had any intervention with his social behaviours, he has never been called back after interviews. Many individuals with HFASD will put in years of working hard at post-secondary education, overcoming academic and institutional barriers;

however, because of this one particular part of their diagnosis, many will not be found suitable to work in their chosen fields (Van Pelt, 2008). Mark, similarly to other students with HFASD, has the skills and the knowledge to be successful in his work, but because he does not possess the social skills of his peers, he may never have the chance to show his expertise.

Individuals with HFASD who pass the interview process must continue to use appropriate social behaviours with their co-workers. Many jobs increasingly expect employees to work as team members, or at the very least to have positive relationships with their co-workers. When individuals with HFASD do not share their diagnosis with the workplace (which they are not legally obligated to do), their interactions with their coworkers can come off as awkward and the workplace can become like a school yard with fellow work employees as the bullies. Instead of being seen as exclusion on the part of coworkers, rejection by co-workers can be seen as an inability to work well with others, despite the fact that many individuals with HFASD are above-average workers in terms of skill use and in completing work ahead of schedule (Van Pelt, 2008). Many of the skills that can be taught in social skills training programs can be used when learning to communicate effectively with co-workers, including how to react to bullying, how to deal with conflict in a non-aggressive manner, and how to behave appropriately according to societal norms. Many individuals with HFASD have many years of post-secondary schooling or other training for specific job fields and, in many cases, the introduction of a social skills training program is the intervention that means the difference between employment and unemployment.

### Conclusion

Students with high-functioning autism spectrum disorder will often receive interventions in academic areas, but often social behaviours are not seen as essential to one's success. Social skills training programs can benefit individuals with autism in multiple areas in their lives. Improved social skills can give adults with autism confidence, improve their self-esteem, and help with other psychological disorders that may arise from a social deficit such as depression or anxiety. Improved social skills are also vital to creating lasting relationships; close friendships, romantic partnerships, or casual acquaintances can provide loving and emotional support that all people need to live quality lives. Lastly, social skills training can provide individuals with autism the skills and information that they need to perform well in job interviews and later in their careers with their employers and co-workers. In an ideal world, students would be accepted for their differences, no matter what their ability, and a greater emphasis would be placed on the disability studies perspective, which views disability as constructed by the society (Ashby, 2012; Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011). Until the point when this belief is more widely accepted by society as a whole, it is important that students with exceptionalities are given the resources and tools that they need to succeed, both emotionally and professionally.

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## Suicide Reduction: Building a Culture of Belonging as an Anecdote to Suicide in Northern Manitoba

Tricia Griffin

### Abstract

*Suicide rates indicate elevated mental and emotional instability among Canadian youth. Unfortunately, increased availability of resources and online supports to both students and staff, has not alleviated its deadly impact. Northern Manitoba, in particular, continues to be plagued by the onslaught of teen suicide threats, attempts, and deaths within many of its communities, predominantly among First Nations youth. Addressing this issue requires the collaborative effort of all stakeholders, through continued research, evidence-based programming and partnerships. Health professionals and educators must delve deeper into the etiology behind youth suicide in order to fully understand and begin to address a potential impediment collectively impacting those who are suffering. Addressing one's basic human need to belong may not only provide a sustainable and economical approach to this grave issue, but also promises to result in an inclusively positive outcome overall.*

Mental and emotional turmoil often results in the senseless taking of one's own life. Despite suicide awareness literature and programming, not to mention increasingly available online resources for both students and teachers, this deadly problem continues to plague educational institutes. As witnessed recently in northern Manitoba, teen suicide can reach pandemic proportions (Dangerfield, 2016). When a student dies by suicide, it impacts not only the young person's family and friends, but the entire student body, school personnel, involved agencies, and the surrounding community. Health organizations and their cohorts are attempting to address this issue through evidenced-based programming and sustained research. Schools, along with their stakeholders, must look deeper into the etiology behind youth suicide in order to realize what common barrier impedes these young people. The outcome may result in an economically viable and inclusively satisfying, pragmatic approach to suicide reduction.

The taking of one's own life is generated by accompanying factors, which may include mental illness, loss, and lack of social support (Navaneelan, 2016). It is the leading cause of death among 15-19 year olds, second only to accidental fatalities (Navaneelan, 2016, para. 15). Those who have suffered with thoughts of suicide often relate feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and being alone. This devastating approach to handling life's tribulations is not only untimely, but entirely preventable (Navaneelan, 2016). Health organizations and educational systems continue to research and facilitate new programs to reduce these morbid statistics.

As a result, schools are often inundated with the latest in staff training, tools, and texts to address student health and wellness. Generally, these tools and/or accompanying literature are purchased by the school, to use for future reference. Through experiential accounts, age-appropriate visuals, and factual information, books like *Straight Talk About . . . Suicide* provide answers to the difficult questions that youth may have (Eagan, 2011). Sadly, these valuable sources of information often end up on a library shelf, not being accessed by those most in need. In recent years, the internet has served as a primary source of information for most web-savvy teens, not to mention school staff and community members. The *Reason to Live* website links users to information, resource support, social networking sites, survivor videos, and events within Manitoba (Klinik Community Health Centre, 2016). In addition, individuals can retrieve documents such as *Safe and Caring Schools – A Resource for Equity and Inclusion in Manitoba*, which provides a user-friendly, printable kit of information, activities, and tools for all to access (Egale Canada Human Rights Trust, 2016). This site's primary objective is to provide the wherewithal to ensure safe, nurturing, inclusive learning environments that embrace diversity through community building. Awareness and prevention websites are simply a click

away for all individuals in need. Despite the availability of resources for all to retrieve, they lack the human contact and interpersonal connectedness that struggling teens need.

For years, health organizations have been establishing best-practices to address the issue of suicide. Media campaigns, training seminars, and public forums promote prevention and reduce stigma, so that school personnel, students, and community members will recognize the symptoms and become more comfortable speaking openly about this arduous topic. With the support of provincial health authorities, schools are using evidence-based programs, such as Reaching Out, Signs of Suicide, and safeTALK,<sup>6</sup> to teach youth and school staff potential suicidal indicators, how to ask the difficult questions, and the appropriate resources to access. Although the work put forth by health organizations is being accessed, the threat of suicide continues.

Despite increased awareness, resources, and available programming, there have been recent spikes in youth suicide rates among northern Manitoba's First Nation peoples. From mid-January to mid-March of 2016, the community of Cross Lake faced six suicides within a two-month timeframe, along with 140 attempts in the two weeks leading up to one news release (Dangerfield, 2016, para. 2). Reports targeted poverty and lack of education as the root causes of that crisis (Dangerfield, 2016). This province must begin to question why Manitoba's Indigenous youth are killing themselves, despite increased access to preventative programming.

This crisis signifies the repercussions of an entire population of people who were stripped of their culture and their basic human dignity. Poverty and substandard education are directly linked to the segregation and discrimination imposed upon them by the Canadian government (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada [TRC], 2015). Indigenous Canadians require more than financial restitution. They must begin to feel a sense of solidarity with all Canadians through the respect and revitalization of their culture, in addition to equal opportunities for education, employment, land ownership, health care, and the same standard of living afforded to the rest of Canada (TRC, 2015). Addressing the rise in Aboriginal youth suicide will require more than a menial effort of applying prevention resources. The time has come for Canada's history to be acknowledged by all of its people. Only then can Canada, together with its earliest citizens, begin to rebuild and embrace the dishonoured culture upon which it was formed.

Unfortunately, Canada's American counterpart shares our corrupt past. In a comparison study of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal American youth, researchers found that although mental and emotional health are predominant predictors of suicidal ideation and attempts in all youth, Aboriginal youth identify abusive and/or unstable relationships with adults as another primary predictor (Mackin, Perkins, & Furrer, 2012). Although this was an American study, the Indigenous peoples' history of the United States parallels that of Canada, in many ways. The results of this research indicate the need for positive adult relationships among all involved stakeholders, as well as the potential benefit of connecting at-risk youth with traditional cultural supports (Mackin et al., 2012). Although poor mental health continues to be the primary contributor to suicide rates among all young people, North American Indigenous youth in particular would benefit from more supportive and stable adult relationships (TRC, 2015).

The HOPE North Suicide Prevention Committee was established to spread the message of hope and available resources with regard to reducing suicide attempts and completion within the northern region of Manitoba ("About Hope North," 2015). This committee, of which I am an affiliate, consists of numerous professionals and community volunteers from a collection of agencies and organizations within the Burntwood Region. For several years, the community of Thompson, Manitoba, has hosted its annual HOPE Forum. A number of affected outlining communities sent youth and adult participants to attend the April 2016 conference, with anticipation to acquire a renewed sense of belonging, support, and promise throughout their communities. Struggling community members were provided the opportunity to network and

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<sup>6</sup> All programs not included in the list of references are from the author's own professional practice and experience.

share a common vision. These peer connections were encouraged to continue once participants return to their homes (Liz Lychuk, HOPE North Suicide Prevention Committee Co-Chair, personal communication, June, 8, 2016). Through links at the top of the *HOPE North* website, this industrious group of caring associates can navigate struggling individuals to appropriate resources and professionals, while continuing to inspire the choice of life (“About Hope North,” 2015).

In my experience, human beings are predisposed to need companionship and a sense of purpose, generally within the community or social group with which they associate. Although the school system’s primary purpose is academics, without establishing a strong sense of comradeship and community a school can not function to its full potential. With that in mind, the term *community* can be described as a group to which “its members experience a sense of belonging” (Osterman, 2000). Similarly, *to belong* implies the preservation of positive relationships among all members within the school environment, students and adults alike, whose connectedness elicits a sense of safety and security (Libbey, 2004). This instinctual need to belong must be nurtured within the culture of the school in order for students to feel a part of that academic environment.

Developing nurturing communities within a classroom not only supports the mental health and well-being of students, but also promotes learning. One grade six teacher wrote about her attempts to achieve a literacy-rich learning environment through student interaction with, and caring for, classroom pets (Radcliffe, 2015). The teacher shared a variety of examples wherein her students developed this ability through engaging in repeated and shared caregiving activities with the classroom guinea pigs. Despite the fact that her objective was to improve literacy, her findings reinforce the notion that belonging increases student engagement, dependability, and sense of purpose, as well as academic achievement (Radcliffe, 2015).

It has been suggested that the need for belonging within the school environment begins to have more influence in the middle years (Osterman, 2000). My 25 years as an educator have taught me that relationships throughout a child’s school career are essential, but it is during the middle years that young people begin to identify more with those outside of their family group. Throughout the middle years, students begin to thrive on the need for acceptance and belonging within their peer group, and are more easily swayed by others of influence, in particular their teachers (Osterman, 2000).

A number of studies have suggested that promoting a sense of harmony and belonging among students and the adults working with them reduces many of the problematic issues impacting students (Carlisle, 2011; Lam, Chen, Zhang, & Liang, 2015; Wormington, Anderson, Schneider, Tomlinson, & Brown, 2006). It has been my observation that marginalized and/or victimized youth often suffer from low self-esteem, social issues, mental health issues, high-risk behaviour, and often poor academic achievement. Social and emotional inequities among young people and adults may be rectified through improved school-based relationships (Bess, 1994; Osterman, 2000; Tillery, Varjas, Roach, Kuperminc, & Meyers, 2013).

Unfortunately, schools and their stakeholders must consider another life-threatening possibility when a young person does not feel as though his/her basic human desire to belong is met. Struggling youth, those who lack a healthy sense of belonging, are highly susceptible to potentially self-destructive behaviours such as drug abuse, sexual deviation, detachment, thrill seeking, self-harm, running away, and bullying (Carlisle, 2011; Osterman, 2000; Tillery et al., 2013). All of these behaviours may easily result in both social and mental health issues, which could lead to suicide. However, research also suggests that the paradigm of needing to belong may influence the potential of homicidal behaviour among youth (Borum, Cornell, Modzeleski & Jimerson, 2010; Daniels et al., 2010; Schiller, 2013).

To most educators, the capacity to express human compassion and develop meaningful relationships is innate. This, in part, is what drives them to do the work that they do. One such educator published a series of anecdotes from her years of teaching at-risk students in a small public school associated with a homeless shelter in Utah (Bess, 1994). Despite familial and

societal roadblocks of poverty, addiction, racism, and abuse, this educator proved that one caring adult can make a difference in the lives of these children. Through her inspirational stories, she called upon the reader to serve, in an effort to demonstrate to all children that they are valued members of the community. Educators must continue to empower each others' instinct to emote and relate, despite curricular and systemic demands.

All human beings tend to rely on relationships and a sense of connectivity with others to navigate in a healthy manner throughout their lives (de Groot, 2016). Sincere and meaningful relationships with others are key in achieving success and wellness throughout one's life (de Groot, 2016). The notion that humans tend to look for acknowledgment and acceptance, is not a new idea. This grassroots concept creates a win-win situation for all. Individuals will mutually benefit from this level of rapport, fostering deeper and more meaningful human connections as he/she matures. This model is not only manageable and rewarding for all, but also affordable. As always, school systems need to invest responsibly. Human investment is priceless. A smile shared with one young person in need could save him/her from making a fatal decision (Smith, 2015). Although this concept is simple, it is not one that should be overlooked. Schools need to focus their energy on the valuable resources that they have at their fingertips. Schools must seek further research, while emphasizing the value in building healthy student/teacher relationships in order to promote "personal competencies, autonomous thinking, active student participation . . . as well as engaging and relevant instruction" (Tillery et al., 2013, p. 145). Despite being cost effective, the fact is that everyone benefits from healthy relationships, students and teachers alike.

However, it is important to remember that the task of embracing and empowering societies' youth does not just fall on the shoulders of school personnel, but requires a "purposeful effort and collaboration among all stakeholders" (McAdams, Shillingford, & Trice-Black, 2011, p. 27). Schools need to be open to the public and involved with the surrounding community. As the old African proverb states, "It takes a village to raise a child."

Youth suicide, as indicated by Statistics Canada reports (Navaneelan, 2009), warrants continued reason for concern. Despite an abundance of suicide awareness resource material, communities continue to feel its impact. This is particularly true in First Nations communities, where support is limited and suicide rates continue to increase. Students, staff, parents, agencies, and community members are all stakeholders in the well-being and success of schools. Suicide awareness resources and training have proven effective in stigma reduction, increased consciousness, and overall intervention supports. Unfortunately, schools continue to face the repercussions of suicidal behaviours. The best defense may simply be to empower all youth by nurturing a culture of acceptance and belonging throughout the entire school community. This simplistic and inexpensive grassroots approach creates a sanctuary of connectedness wherein all parties may thrive.

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# Using Multimodal Strategies To Teach Children with FASD

Epseba Buchanan

## Abstract

*Teachers who adapt a multisensory approach to teaching learners who have been affected by fetal alcohol syndrome disorder (FASD) will encourage them to be self-supporting, and to excel in the classroom through participating in a myriad of stimulating activities. Researching the learners' unique characteristics will provide teachers with the tools for planning, thereby maximizing the learners' strengths through the introduction of visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and simulation strategies. There is no one learning style that suits all learners, and regardless of any learning difficulty experienced by FASD learners due to brain damage, if teachers capitalize on their unique strengths and talents, then they can create a student-centered learning environment wherein less disruptive behaviour is displayed, and more participation is encouraged.*

Educators who use multimodal teaching strategies in the classroom are better able to facilitate children's learning, and to support the development of independence in children with fetal alcohol syndrome disorder (FASD). The term FASD refers to the developmental impairment that occurs as a result of parental alcohol exposure during pregnancy, and children are affected in various ways, including having learning difficulties and behavioural disorders (Bertrand, 2009; Carpenter, 2011; Healthy Child Manitoba & Manitoba Education, 2010). If teachers understand the strengths and difficulties of children with FASD, then they will be better able to plan creative lessons to appeal to their senses and build on their strengths. Relevant knowledge about learners with FASD will provide teachers with valuable tools to tailor lessons to meet their cognitive needs (Rasmussen & Bisanz, 2009). Because there is no one approach to be used to teach every student, since "no two children with FASD learn and function in the same way," (Healthy Child Manitoba & Manitoba Education, 2010, p. 1) teachers who plan and practise visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and simulation teaching strategies will provide a wide array of learning tools for learners with FASD, and a better chance for them to excel in the classroom, thus creating a positive impact on their academic achievements (Graham, Glass, & Mattson, 2016). The use of multiple modes of teaching strategies will ensure that educators provide a classroom that facilitates the learning and independence of children with FASD.

It is important to note that children living with FASD are capable of learning, and they will succeed in a supportive learning environment that is interesting, engaging, and full of fun. In order to provide a high quality of support, teachers need to acquire adequate knowledge about the individual students they are supporting (Fulton & Richardson, 2014; Vida Health Communications, 2012). Teachers who are aware of the unique gifts and strengths that learners with FASD possess will be better able to plan programs to support and build on their talents and strengths, thereby reducing frustrations on the part of both the teachers and the learners (Healthy Child Manitoba & Manitoba Education, 2010; Skiba, Ormiston, Martinez, & Cummings, 2016). An understanding of what the students like to do, what activities they enjoy most, their skill level, their ability to work independently, and any special tendencies are all useful information when modifying lessons and classroom environment to provide children with FASD with an effective customised learning experience (Popova, Lange, Burd, Nam, & Rehm, 2016). The behaviour of children with FASD can be misconstrued, and bearing in mind that no two children are alike, if teachers are knowledgeable about their learners they will develop the skill to apply effective classroom interventions and plan interesting lessons to motivate and enthrall them, thereby considerably reducing any disruptive, off-task behaviour by children with FASD (Gaastra, Groen, Tucha, & Tucha, 2016; Skiba et al., 2016). Because children with FASD have the capacity to learn, they can succeed if they are well supported in an engaging classroom.

We rely heavily on our senses to process information, so we remember more when we use our senses, and sight plays an important role in developing organizational skills in learners with FASD because they are often visual learners (Healthy Child Manitoba & Manitoba Education, 2010; Hess, 2011). Tasks such as word search or spot the difference are considered useful in improving cognitive development and increasing attention span, because it will become necessary for learners to focus on the small details while doing the activities. Sight tasks can facilitate memory when used effectively, and having a daily schedule with illustrations and pictures can provide some structure in the lives of children with FASD (Cohen & Adubato, 2011). Visual reminders such as a chart to teach safety, or memory aids for spatial awareness and boundaries, for example, placing a mark on the floors to remind learners of where to stand, can prove beneficial (*Assessment for FASD*, 2016). The use of calming colours in the classroom will create a peaceful atmosphere in which a learner with FASD can work, and will discourage classroom disruptions. "Creative computing" can be used as an intervention to support active learning in various subject areas such as art, history and mathematics, whereby animation and games can be used to expand or cement learning concepts and create fun and enthusiasm in learners with FASD (Saez-Lopez, Roman-Gonzales, & Vazquez-Camo, 2016, p. 130). Teachers should however be mindful not to provide over stimulation in this area, as this can be distracting to some learners with FASD, and encourage hyperactivity in the classroom (Healthy Child Manitoba & Manitoba Education, 2010). Whilst visual language may be used to enhance learning, an over crowded wall display can be distracting for a learner experiencing FASD. Because we depend heavily on our senses when processing information, it is possible for organizational skills to be developed in many learners with FASD through the use of visual aids, since they are generally visual learners.

Of equal importance is the need for auditory strategies to be used in the classroom, which could result in sustained focus from some learners with FASD who are often sensitive to sounds. Thinking aloud, which is called vocalization, can produce desired results for people with short-term memory, and also for people with focusing problems such as learners with FASD (Martin, 2009). Organizational skills can also be taught through auditory means, such as singing a song when resources are being packed away after each activity. "Sing song" rules, and instructions or stages for an activity, can assist children to remember what to do when faced with a problem (Hess, 2011). The use of auditory strategies can aid learners with FASD in understanding the world around them when these strategies are used in collaboration with visual teaching aids such as an "identifying and labeling" activity. To establish routine, educators can establish a system by which learners respond to the clapping of hands or the sound of a whistle in a physical education class. Learners with FASD can enjoy real-life experiences through the introduction of interactive books with sound activation. Playing soft background music and using head phones when working on the computer are popular strategies that I have used in the classroom, because many of my learners have been diagnosed with FASD, and the strategies serve as a useful way to engage their concentration (Cohen & Adubato, 2011). Quiet music can be relaxing for a learner with FASD, but educators should be careful not to overload the learning environment with noise such as loud singing or sudden noise like a bell or a timer alarm. Due to their sensitivity to sounds, persistent focus can be achieved by some learners with FASD if auditory teaching strategies are employed (Healthy Child Manitoba & Manitoba Education, 2010).

In like manner, some children who are diagnosed as having FASD can be taught with the use of kinesthetic teaching strategies, because they usually like to be creative with their hands and because such activities make it easier to process concepts "through body movements and sensations" (Hess, 2012, "When Giving Instruction," para. 11). Learners who like to feel and touch will become very excited about their achievement if they have made things themselves (Pitts, 2012). The use of manipulative maths can create interest and build a sense of achievement and self-worth in learners. Play dough can be utilised to teach creativity, and science classes that include experiments can hold the interests of learners with FASD (Healthy

Child Manitoba & Manitoba Education, 2010; Vida Health Communications, 2012). If these learners are given opportunities to feel and touch items in the classroom, such as a plant, then they will develop concepts through real-life experiences and enjoy relaxation as well as a sense of duty. Because they may be required to compare and describe items in a science lesson where, for example, a blanket is used to teach temperature, or in a home economics lesson where flour and sugar are used to teach textures, their attention span will be broadened through focusing and repeatedly touching the items. Using kinesthetic learning strategies to teach through discovery will create motivation, and improve the learning experience of learners with FASD, because some usually enjoy doing activities with their hands, through project-based learning which supports dynamic edifying experiences (Saez-Lopez et al., 2016). Teaching children with FASD by using kinesthetic teaching strategies can also be effective, because of their love of creativity and the benefits derived by many children from the movement and sensation that these activities provide.

In addition, simulation is effective in the classroom, because it encourages learners to engage in decision making and problem solving while transforming the classroom from a teacher-centered environment to one that is learner centered (Pettenger, West, & Young, 2014). Learners affected by FASD generally lack social skills and are not sensitive to social cues (Bertrand, 2009; FASD Network of Saskatchewan, 2015; Lutherwood, 2012), but if they practise social skills while engaging with their peers in role-playing real life situations, then it will encourage concrete thinking and play to their strength of conversing, while being given multiple chances to respond to instructions and the curriculum (Skiba et al., 2016). In some situations, when many children suffering from FASD become overwhelmed and display aggressive or abusive behaviour, they can be taught to practise positive self-talk through modelling acceptable behaviour during role-playing, and role-playing is an effective learning strategy to encourage participation by passive learners (Stevens, 2015). When learners take on a role in a simulation, they are placed in a real-life situation, thereby displaying the expected desired outcome. I use role play to teach many social skills in my classroom where many learners are affected by FASD, and it proves successful in their daily interactions with their peers. Examples of lessons that I teach using simulations are “preparing for a stressful conversation” and “expressing a complaint constructively.” Simulations will stimulate the imagination and encourage creativity, and require learners to listen, take turns, and display feelings such as empathy, thereby encouraging intellectual development in learners with FASD (*Expat Since Birth*, 2013). Participating in simulation exercises can be an effective classroom tool because it teaches problem-solving and decision-making skills, and will showcase the learning environment as being learner centered instead of teacher centered.

It is important for educators to use multimodal teaching strategies, in order to ensure that learners with FASD are provided with an opportunity to excel in school and to exhibit less disruptive behaviour in their learning environment (Vida Health Communications, 2012). Despite the learning difficulties experienced by learners with FASD, due to brain damage caused from parental alcohol exposure, if teachers capitalize on their unique strengths and develop a teaching approach that is based on adapting to learners' strengths, then encouraging progress can be experienced by the learners (*Assessment for FASD*, 2016; Cohen & Aduato, 2011; Healthy Child Manitoba & Manitoba Education, 2010). A happy and successful classroom can be created if teachers gain the knowledge and skill to develop and use a multisensory approach to stimulate all the senses (Gaastra et al., 2016). In teaching, there is no “one size that fits all,” so for learners with FASD to achieve success in the classroom, it is imperative that teachers use visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and simulation teaching techniques that meet the cognitive needs of their learners while fostering independence (Rasmussen & Bisanz, 2009). A “happy classroom” can be produced when learning strategies are multisensory, so that the senses are stimulated by the activities that are introduced in the classroom (Pitts, 2012, para. 7). Less disruptive behaviour, and more engagement in the classroom, can be achieved if teachers use a multimodal approach to teaching children with FASD (Skiba et al., 2016).

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### **About the Author**

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## OPINION PAPER

### **The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* from the Perspectives of a Nigerian and a Jamaican**

**Agnes Amusa and Sherine Salmon**

#### **Overview**

The exposure being gained to Canadian law for a Nigerian and Jamaican girl, to say the least, is quite eye opening at times. From our perspective, the application of one's rights is very basic knowledge from the lowest to highest level of the Canadian educational system. We have come to appreciate the instilling of rights and the exposure that one receives at the earliest stages of life. Comparatively, this is not our cultural experience, because law is not the first thought we have when dealing with people, especially our students; our first thought is normally not one of right and wrong but instead of recognizing first that the person is human. The exposure from the course School Administration and the Law has forced us to explore the charters of rights in our own countries, where they are not commonplace] in spheres of educational practice, except in cases that have swung too far left from the centre of the pendulum of practice. With appreciation, we have looked at the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* and have gained knowledge on its origin and implications for practice in the Canadian educational system.

Established in 1984, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* was born out of a nation's recognition to protect the civil liberties and privileges of its people. As an evolutionary document from the 1960 Bill of Rights, the Canadian Charter contains improved and additional rights and freedoms, secured as a part of the Constitution, where it is more difficult for current and future governments to infringe on the rights of citizens or make changes with the ebb and flow of one's mood. As a response to ongoing issues in the 1960s and 1970s, particularly in Quebec about language and social policies and [in the] western provinces about resources, then Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau thought it prudent to reform the constitution, wherein citizens' rights would be more protected. Armed with the support of nine provinces, Trudeau, in the early 1980s Trudeau brought home the Constitution from Britain through patriation, where Queen Elizabeth II signed off on the amendments.

It is the Constitution Act of 1982 that contains the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. The Charter has seven sections: fundamental freedoms, democratic rights, language rights, mobility rights, minority language educational rights, legal rights, and equality rights. Applicable to education are the following sections under each category: Section 1 (Guarantee of Rights and Freedoms), Section 2 (Fundamental Freedoms), Sections 7-12 (Legal Rights), Section 15 (Equality Rights), Section 23 (Minority Language Educational Rights), and Section 24 (Enforcement). After reviewing these sections, we thought that the Charter gives equality of rights to both the teacher and the student, using a framework and scope of function that articulates the responsibility and accountability of administrators, and creates a safe and equal environment given the rise in Canada's diversity.

#### **Our Experience and Implications for Education**

First, the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* gives equality of rights to both student and teacher. Being cultured in societies where age automatically determines the amount of respect and authority that one has can sometimes prove unbeneficial for the younger population. Within our Nigerian and Jamaican societies living with this principle, children's rights are often abused, even though they exist. The Canadian Charter, however, delves into the principles of law that govern every Canadian citizen, and yield power not only

to teachers (older) but also to students (younger). A student at a Jamaican post-secondary institution reported a teacher to the principal for her lack of planning and execution of lessons during class-time. The student was ostracized by the teacher and frustrated into leaving the school because of how poorly the principal handled the matter. Nothing came of it, because instead of addressing the issue the focus was on the student being silenced. The rights that are advantageous to students can not be undermined in comparison to those of teachers; the Canadian Charter balances the power play between teachers and students, and promotes the voice of the student in having the equal right to be heard, which fosters students' participation in society with other matters of societal importance. Contingent on the students' awareness, they have the opportunity to be heard should they feel that someone in authority acted inappropriately toward them in relation to their rights and freedoms. Notwithstanding the rights of both teacher and student, the Charter also provides a scope of function for administrators.

The Charter provides a framework and scope of function to define the responsibility and accountability of administrators. From its varied categories, each section defines the right or freedom and, even further, the Charter document defines how it should be used with a running theme of reasonableness being applied to rights and freedoms. Often, we find that decision making is based on educators' own interpretation of edicts, and the law at times places a significant degree of trust in the decisions that educators make because they are seen as the experts, given their training and familiarity with the nuances of school operations. However, the Charter improves such decision making, not only on the part of educators and educational personnel, and other stakeholders such as parents, but also for judges and lawyers to examine laws. All parties may view their roles in relation to the Charter, and then navigate their actions accordingly. The Charter eliminates the confusion of what constitutes appropriate versus inappropriate actions in times of intervention.

Leaving the interpretation of how fairness is executed up to any one individual leaves large rooms for injustice and inequality. In Nigeria and Jamaica, we would have experienced decisions being made at the whim and discretion of administrators and educators alike with no regard to the rights of the child, laws, policies, or regulations. Principals in our context often make decisions based not on the repercussions that may ensue (in issues of responsibility or accountability), but from the standpoint of who holds the most power in the situation. From our experiences, we have realized that the educator is seldom found wrong (except in extreme cases), but the students are made to suffer. We also think that the Canadian Charter's framework and clarity of function are especially helpful in the face of Canada's evolving diversity.

Looking at Canada's – and even closer at Manitoba's – rise in diversity, the Charter protects against discrimination and promotes a safe, equal environment; historically, it brought reform to laws that discriminate against people because of personal characteristics or prejudices. From our experience as educators (including one administrator), enforcing the use of such a document would eliminate our own biases and prejudices that may accompany a situation. Students can be marginalized based on belief, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and many other variables inherent to population that increases as time progresses. From laws that did not recognize a woman's right to own property as a Japanese Canadian, the Charter of Rights has echoed equality and equity as it tolled on the bells of justice. Classism is still heavily practised in Jamaica and Nigeria, where status favours those students of a higher social standing.

*Sherine: "My Jamaican mother was especially happy when academics could now determine who entered traditional high schools, as opposed to where you fell in societal ranks. I would enter the high school of my dreams, also the high school of the rich and famous and experienced and witnessed the unfair treatment of the working class or lower class. I escaped much of the treatment because of my assumed or perceived ties to a wealthy family. My mother was not so lucky as during her era, it wasn't even a thought to enter such a school."*

So many ethnicities have settled in Manitoba (Africans, Europeans, South Americans, Caribbean people, Asian) that enforcing laws to govern the equal and equitable treatment of all students, regardless of their status, background, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, is creating a society that values diversity.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, a Nigerian girl and a Jamaican girl gained appreciation for not just the existence but the enforcement of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* in the educational system. There are charters of rights in Nigeria and Jamaica, but they are not enforced, not taught to our students, and not practised by educators. The Canadian Charter gives equality of rights to both the teacher and the student, using a framework and scope of function that articulates the responsibility and accountability of administrators, and creates a safe and equal environment given the rise in Canada's – and specifically Manitoba's – diversity. We are in no way saying that this Charter has created a utopia for Canada's educational system, but it provides that opportunity and enforces these statutes on the road to creating such a system. Limitations exist, for example, in reasonableness that may or may not be exercised in the application of the Charter, but from our perspective the openness to thought and action to speak up about issues is a step in the right direction.

Retrospectively, just in how we present this paper, would show how our cultural experience has shaped us, because we speak in terms of students versus teachers and vice versa; our experience and those of others whom we have witnessed made us feel powerless as students in Nigeria and Jamaica, and provoked much introspection as we became educators (including one administrator). As true educators, we do not want to be a part of a society that does not promote the rights and freedoms of people, and as such we should seek to enact and enforce these values. Sir Wilfred Laurier aptly confirmed, "We have no absolute rights among us. The rights of each man, in our state of society, end precisely at the point where they encroach upon the rights of others."

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