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# *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*

**Volume 10, Issue 2, 2018**

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## INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

**Marion Terry, Ph.D.**

Welcome to the twenty-first issue of the *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, devoted to rural, northern, and Aboriginal education. Our authors for volume 10, issue 2, are BU Faculty of Education M.Ed. students and recent graduates. I thank these educators for sharing their work. Together, they have produced a collection of articles that reflect topics of concern from their own experiences as educators.

- Erika Serrano-Hidalgo's research report describes the experiences and perspectives of first-generation Hispanic immigrant parents on heritage language maintenance and bilingual education in Brandon, Manitoba.
- Alann Fraser's research report describes the findings that emerged from her study of Response to Intervention as reported by principals in six early/middle years schools in rural Manitoba.
- Patrick Dunlop's refereed article considers ways to implement differentiated assessment at the high school level.
- Megan McBain's refereed article recommends strategies to overcome barriers to meeting the diverse needs of classroom students.
- Kayla Waugh's refereed article outlines reading comprehension activities that parents and teachers can use to develop early years students' literacy skills at home and in school.
- Mireille Bazin-Berryman's refereed article focuses on helping children with Down syndrome to develop reading skills for academic success and general inclusion in society.
- Colleen Warrington's refereed article advocates interpersonal relationships, physical spaces, and lesson content as essential Indigenous components of reconciliation in the classroom.
- Deanna Henderson's refereed article interprets Professional Learning Communities and Response to Intervention as opportunities to engage in the staff collaboration that will engender student success.
- Shengqing Wang's refereed article warns of the long-term consequences of developing a negative online reputation, and offers suggestions for helping teenagers to make wise choices when they use social media.

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## RESEARCH REPORTS

### **A Case Study of the Experiences and Perspectives of Hispanic Immigrant Parents on Heritage Language Maintenance and Bilingual Education in the Rural Community of Brandon, Manitoba**

**Erika Serrano-Hidalgo**

This qualitative embedded case study investigated the experiences and perspectives of 16 first-generation Hispanic immigrant parents on heritage language maintenance and bilingual education in the City of Brandon, Manitoba. I conducted 5 individual face-to-face semistructured interviews followed by three focus group interviews with 11 Hispanic immigrant parents. The participants were divided into two subunits of analysis: Colombian, Honduran, and Salvadoran (CHS); and non-Colombian, non-Honduran, and non-Salvadoran (non-CHS).

The study first examined the views that Hispanic immigrant parents have about the maintenance of Spanish among their children. Second, the study identified the difficulties that Hispanic immigrant parents experienced in their efforts to preserve Spanish as the heritage language. Third, the research identified strategies that Hispanic immigrant parents used in their homes to help their children to preserve Spanish. Fourth, the research examined power relations reflected in the experiences of Hispanic parents in their interactions with the school and examined how the nature of these relations impacts the home language maintenance among children. Finally, the study described the parents' perspectives of how school authorities, teachers, and the community can support them in preserving their native language and making informed decisions regarding heritage language maintenance and bilingual education.

The main research question was "How do Hispanic immigrant parents in the City of Brandon view their experiences with the issue of heritage language maintenance and bilingual education?" To explore this inquiry in detail the following sub-questions were addressed:

1. How do Hispanic immigrant parents perceive the maintenance of Spanish as heritage language?
2. What Hispanic immigrant parents view as challenges and/or difficulties in their effort to preserve Spanish as heritage language?
3. How do Hispanic immigrant parents perceive their relationship with their children's school and how the nature of this relationship impacts the home language maintenance among Hispanic immigrant children?
4. What are some strategies that Hispanic immigrant parents are using in their homes to help their children to preserve Spanish as their native language?
5. What are parents' perspectives of how the school's authorities, teachers, and the community can support them in preserving the native language of their children and in making informed decisions regarding heritage language maintenance and bilingual education?

### **Results**

All of the Hispanic immigrant parents participating in this study viewed the preservation of Spanish as fundamental in the development of their children, and they wanted their children to maintain the Spanish language, the Hispanic cultural values, and identity. In general, despite the challenges to maintain the home language, a few parents were succeeding in raising their children bilingually while a majority was not.

All parents considered crucial the maintenance of Spanish as the home language because they perceived their language as an essential key to fostering a sense of unity, continuity, and understanding not only among the members of their nuclear and extended family but also among the Hispanic community. Most Hispanic immigrant parents were resisting assimilative pressures by implementing practices and strategies to preserve their native language at home.

Parents in this study also viewed the bilingual ability of their children as a human capital that allows children to maintain strong family ties and serves as a door opener and as a valuable tool for achieving academic and professional success.

The CHS immigrant parents perceived the maintenance of the home language as a fundamental value for their Hispanic identity and as a means for the economic success of their children in the mainstream society. The non-CHS participants shared a similar view about the preservation of the home language by their children; however, these parents placed a major emphasis on the value of bilingualism as a medium for academic achievement.

The CHS participants were less aware of the cognitive advantages of bilingualism and heritage language preservation in comparison to the non-CHS participants. This awareness is a fundamental factor in maintaining their children's mother tongue because parental attitudes influence the way that children perceive cultural manifestations such language and traditions.

The research found that the role of the children as language brokers was a strong factor that positively influenced the attitude of CHS immigrant parents toward the preservation of the home language. However, the pressures that this role has in children and the repercussions of intrafamilial conflicts, separation, and family disruption because of the immigration process were perceived as factors that negatively influence the home language maintenance.

All but one participant considered their native language as a fundamental and distinctive component of the Hispanic culture. CHS and non-CHS parents recognized the link between language maintenance and identity. However, the perception that the Spanish language is a determinant aspect of Hispanic identity was stronger in the CHS parents. As immigrants, CHS and non-CHS parents were aware that the future of their children lies in Canada; thus, they perceived the preservation of Hispanic identity as a form of empowerment in their new context.

CHS and non-CHS parents faced challenges in helping their children to maintain Spanish. The findings suggest that, due to socio-economic conditions, language barrier, and low Spanish literacy, parents who came to the city associated with the recruitment process started by Maple Leaf Foods were having more difficulties in preserving their home language, than the non-CHS parents who came to Brandon for other reasons. By the time of the interview, two of the five CHS participants were working at Maple Leaf Foods. Findings evidenced that the heavy workload is another challenge that affects the parents' efforts to preserve the home language.

These working parents felt that they had very little connection with their children's school. They did not feel that their knowledge and human capital was perceived as valuable for the education of their children inside of the school. Both groups saw as barriers the lack of bilingual and heritage language programming and the difficulty to access printed bilingual resources. Also, CHS parents reported challenges associated with assimilative pressures from the schools, heavy workload, and economic limitations as factors affecting language preservation, while non-CHS parents did not report these concerns.

Based on parents' perceptions of the level of mother tongue language maintenance achieved by their children, it could be argued that higher educational background and better socio-economic status of parents are factors affecting the home language preservation positively among Hispanic children in Brandon. Families who had moved furthest up the socio-economic ladder had been the least successful in maintaining Spanish.

A significant finding in this study was a possible correlation between the low parent-school/teacher partnership and the low level of Spanish maintenance reported by parents. Parents who had a closer and more collaborative relationship with teachers and school perceived that the chance to discuss instructional plans and the advice from teachers and school personnel aided them to make informed decisions that favored language preservation

and bilingualism of their children. In contrast, parents who perceived a distant relationship with their children's school and experienced more assimilative pressures in detriment of their native language reported a higher level of language attrition in their children.

Most of the participants consciously used strategies to preserve the home language. Few parents enforced a Spanish-only policy; most applied more flexible ways to encourage children to maintain the home language. Common strategies included using Spanish at home, having a home library with Spanish and bilingual books, reading and writing in Spanish, using positive reinforcement, listening to Hispanic music, and watching Spanish TV programs in a family time.

All of the participants perceived that schools and community could support their efforts by having bilingual and heritage language formal instruction in the city and by including Hispanic children's home language and culture in school curriculums. Parents also perceived that schools could help them by leading strategies to promote bilingual and heritage language awareness among immigrant parents and children in the city.

### **Recommendations**

Teachers can choose to reproduce historical patterns of exclusion in their classrooms, or to embrace a collaborative relationship of power toward the empowerment of marginalized linguistic minorities. In their daily interactions with Hispanic immigrant children and other linguistic minorities, teachers need to recognize and build on the various forms of vernacular literacy that are manifested in the ethnocultural communities of these students.

Educators must be aware that power relations have an active role in the success or failure of Hispanic immigrant children who are growing up in the multilingual context of Brandon. These children belong to a linguistic, social, and cultural ethnic minority that has historically been marginalized and subordinated within the school system. Classroom educators must question coercive relations of power reflected in the wider society that communicate messages that diminish students' value, their language and culture, their worth as individuals, and their academic potential. Teachers should challenge these negative assumptions and communicate a different message by valuing children's home language and by treating immigrant children as linguistically talented individuals from the first day they arrive at the school.

In instructing Hispanic immigrant children, educators need to evaluate what image of the child they are sketching in their instruction. These children need to get from their teachers the messages that they are capable of becoming bilingual and biliterate, developing higher order thinking and intellectual accomplishments, using their creative and imaginative thinking, creating literature and art, generating new knowledge, and thinking about and finding solutions to the social issues that affect their families, their community, and their society. If these Hispanic immigrant children are not getting these messages from their interaction with their teachers and school, then they are not developing an identity of competence in their new context.

Educators need to consider the psycholinguistics dimensions of teaching through the native language of linguistic minority children, and develop literacy through both languages. They need to recognize the benefits that the first language has for academic development, but also the sociological dimensions that imply connecting instruction with children's lives and affirming their identities. Literacy engagement is a powerful determinant of the extent which literacy skills are developed in school. To engage Hispanic immigrant students with literacy, teachers need to support students in getting access to literacy in both the native and the mainstream language.

Hispanic immigrant children will benefit if teachers include in their classrooms content that is familiar or relevant to their context. In the Brandon, teachers must be aware of the social implications that the process of immigration has for the families and children who came to the city linked to Maple Leaf Foods' recruitment of workers. For instance, educators need to know that many of these immigrant children have the huge responsibility to be the voice of their parents as interpreters and translators while sometimes witnessing conflicts that have severe emotional repercussions for them.

The use of dual books in both, Spanish and English is a powerful teaching strategy that has enormous impact in the lives of these students. While creating these bilingual books, students enhance their academic writing, reading, metalinguistic, and socio-cultural awareness – among many other skills. Their creation of bilingual or multilingual literature helps to solve the problem of the absence of bilingual literacy resources in schools and communities. These dual books can also become in a repository of a community's cultural knowledge if the immigrant children write in the dominant language during their school time and then go back and work with their parents to produce with home language versions.

Finally, teachers can change the predominant monolingual appearance of schools. They can make schools into places where the first thing students see when they walk in are signs in the multiple languages that prevail in the community, and where they can see their bilingual or multilingual works showcased in the corridors.

By adopting a collaborative position, teachers can support Hispanic immigrant parents in their efforts to preserve the home language by giving students home activities and work that require interaction with parents through the home language. Teachers can also encourage Hispanic immigrant parents to take part in classroom activities, fundraising events, or evening sessions where they come in and read with their children in their home language and English.

Policymakers should be aware that Spanish in Brandon is not a simple code of communication, but a language that relates to the culture, identity, and socio-economic struggles of a vulnerable population, most of whose members came to this city to work under challenging conditions. The way that the concept of “heritage language” is used in policy documents, the efficacy of the Policy for Heritage Language Instruction, and the requirements for its implementation in rural communities such as Brandon need to be reviewed. These policies and the curriculum proposed for the Spanish language need to be adapted to the needs of all the members of the Hispanic community.

As educators, we need to look at both the sociological and psycholinguistic implications of preserving the home language of immigrant children, and its active inclusion in the school curriculum. We also need to be aware of the historical patterns of exclusion that have led to the school failure of minority linguistic groups in North America, and reverse this exclusion that these communities have faced in the past and still face in the present. The voices of the participants in this study demonstrate the need to reverse the dimensions of schooling that have contributed to the school failure of Hispanic immigrant children in countries such as Canada and the United States. The devaluation of identity, language, culture, and community has been inevitably involved in those dimensions of schooling. These patterns of devaluation can be reversed by challenging the coercive relations of power and promoting a collaborative relationship of power in schools. The empowerment of children from minority linguistic groups can be done by providing them with more opportunities of heritage, bilingual, and multilingual literacy, and by enabling them to develop a powerful identity through affirming and intellectual work, through using their home languages, cultures, and communities in school settings.

### ***About the Researcher***

*Erika Serrano emigrated from Costa Rica. She holds a degree in Spanish Philology, a Graduate Diploma in Education, and a Master of Education in curriculum and instruction from BU. She has been teaching Spanish at BU since 2009. Erika is also the director of the Manitoba Alliance for International and Heritage Language Education Inc. in Winnipeg.*

# Implementation of a Response to Intervention in Rural Early and Middle Years Schools

Alann Fraser

## Abstract

*This qualitative study explored the experiences of administrators while implementing Response to Intervention (RTI) in early/middle years schools in rural Manitoba. Six principals were interviewed to discover how they experienced the implementation process and to glean advice for other administrators who were beginning the process of implementing RTI. Data were collected through recorded phone interviews with each participant by the researcher.*

*The decision to implement RTI resulted from a need to support students who presented gaps in their skills. The decision was made by principals and superintendents in order to close the skill gaps. The principals shared the experiences that they encountered during the implementation process as well as expected and unexpected results of implementing RTI in the school. The principals provided advice that would support an administrator new to the process of implementing RTI in a rural early or middle years school. The study also revealed some resources, professional development, and strategies to effectively implement RTI.*

Response to Intervention (RTI) is an approach that provides appropriate supports for all students in a school, including those students who struggle with learning or have disabilities of any kind. The RTI concept began to take shape in the late 1970s as a reaction to the practice of determining eligibility for special education services by showing the discrepancy between I.Q. and achievement scores for a student. The model gained additional traction with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004, which allowed school districts to use the RTI model as a way of identifying students needing special services. Decisions are made through data collection, collaboration between educators and families, quality instruction and assessments. RTI uses a three-tier approach that provides increasingly intensive interventions dependent on student needs. Tier 1 provides general education with quality instruction and assessment; Tier 2 moves to more intensive teaching in small groups; Tier 3 is individualized and highly intensive teaching to close the skill gaps that students possess.

RTI is a hierarchy of interventions. Tier 1 reflects effective core instruction for all students. This is quality instruction, assessment, and movement through student learning, directed by the classroom teacher. Tier 2 interventions are supplementary interventions for identified students. These interventions may serve small groups of students. Interventions may be provided by the regular classroom teacher or by a team of staff members, including learning support teachers, administrators, and outside professionals. Tier 3 interventions are intensive interventions for individual students. The team provides these, and students often work with specialists in specific areas, i.e., Reading Recovery teachers and learning support teachers. Boundaries between the tiers are flexible, depending on the needs of the students. Movement between the tiers is based on how well the interventions have supported the students' needs. Decisions regarding movement between tiers must be made collaboratively among the members of the team and based on data that had been gathered on the students' performance with the interventions.

Each level within RTI supports students in a different way (see Figure 1). Tier 1 consists of regular classroom, quality core instruction that uses a gradual release of responsibility. This is whole-class and small-group instruction and assessment. Approximately 75-85% of students will fit into Tier 1. Tier 2 supplements the core instruction with needs-based intervention. This tends to be in the form of small-group interventions. Assessments are more regular than in Tier 1.

Approximately 10-15% of students will be well served through Tier 2 intervention. Tier 3 is intensive individualized instruction. This is one-on-one instruction and assessment from a learning support teacher. Approximately 5-10% of students will require Tier 3 interventions. While all three tiers exist simultaneously, a student will be placed in only one tier at any one time. Mobility from tier to tier is possible, however, and even desirable. For example, if a student in Tier 2 responds to the interventions at that level to the point of not needing to remain in Tier 2 anymore, then that student will be reassigned into Tier 1. Conversely, if a student is not responding adequately to interventions at the Tier 2 level, a Tier 3 placement will be made for that student.

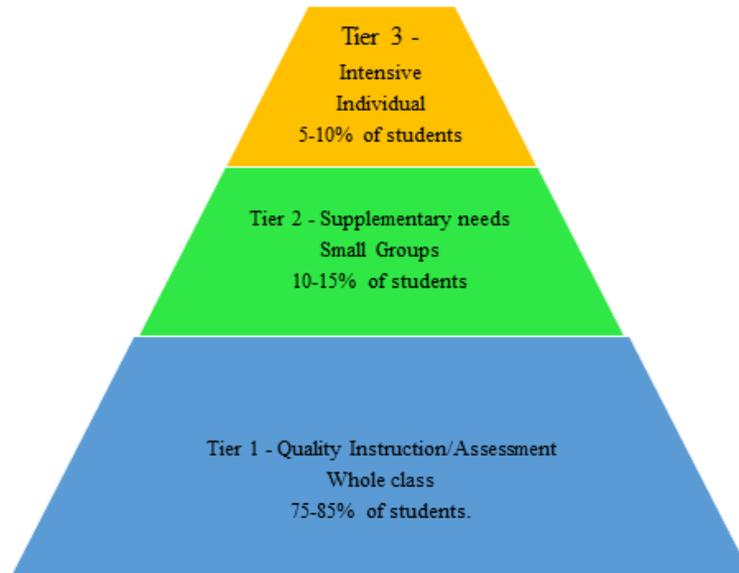


Figure 1. The RTI Pyramid of Interventions

Quality Tier 1 instruction is based on a variety of teaching pedagogies. Differentiated Instruction, Balanced Literacy, Backwards Design, Universal Design for Learning, Culturally Responsive Instruction, Precision Teaching, and Assessment Intervention Monitoring System are all widely regarded as examples of quality classroom instruction and assessment practices of benefit to all students and therefore would fall into the category of Tier 1 interventions. These types of pedagogy focus on all students in a classroom setting. If the intervention is working, progress monitoring will show successful growth in the student. When the student is not responding to the intervention, the approach needs to change, and progress monitoring must continue until the student improves. Tier 1 interventions do not diagnosis a student, but they focus on whether the student has a skill gap and they help the student to close the gap.

Tier 2 supports are targeted, research-based interventions for students who did not respond to Tier 1 instruction. A problem-solving model is implemented in Tier 2. This model includes the following four steps: (a) define the problem, (b) plan an intervention, (c) implement the plan, and (d) evaluate the students' progress. Tier 2 programming includes providing service in small-groups within the regular classroom with flexible, small-group instruction and focused supports that are research based.

Tier 3 supports are intensive instruction and assessments. Students who require individualized instruction beyond Tier 2 to access the general curriculum require Tier 3 supports. These interventions are longer, more frequent sessions outside of the regular classroom. These are individualized interventions such as one-on-one tutoring and individualized instruction. Frequent monitoring and documentation, based on problem-solving and data collection, are used to adjust school-wide and specific interventions. If any students do not respond to interventions in Tier 3, then comprehensive evaluations must be used to individualize education plans for those students through special education.

Students must be assessed, and interventions put into place that address the difficulties that the students are facing. After six to eight weeks, students need to be assessed again to see how they have responded to the intervention. If individual students have not made sufficient gains after this intervention, decisions need to be made in regards to moving to more intensive interventions for those students. There is a continual cycle of pre-assessment, intervention, and assessment of growth to ensure that the students are making accelerated gains in their learning. When acceleration is not happening, better decisions are needed to support the student.

Collaboration is key to implementing RTI as a school-wide way to support students. Everyone must be on board and active in the process. Administrators, regular classroom teachers, learning support teachers, speech and language pathologists, guidance counsellors, and any other specialists involved in the school must be part of the team as the student moves between tiers. The family also has a role to play as a team member. Staff must feel supported and receive supports to decide on the next steps that individual students need in order to move forward in their learning. Professional development is a necessary factor in implementing a strong RTI model in a school system.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of principals who have attempted to implement RTI, and to seek to discover best practices for its successful implementation on a school-wide basis. Principals who have successfully implemented RTI in their school systems have invaluable information to share with administrators who are on the path to implementing RTI in their own schools. This study focused on how to implement RTI in rural early/middle years schools in the most effective way to support all students.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question for this study therefore was: How can administrators of rural or northern early/middle years schools implement RTI programming in their schools in the most effective way to support all students? In pursuit of this research question, secondary questions asked: How was the decision to implement RTI made? What were the schools' experiences in implementing RTI? What expected and unexpected results of implementing RTI were found? What advice would administrators give to someone beginning the process of implementing RTI in a rural early/middle years school? What other topics or issues that are relevant to implementing RTI and should be discussed for consideration in implementing RTI at the early/middle years levels in rural or northern schools?

### **Significance of the Study**

Learning from the experience of others will support principals of rural schools in implementing RTI in their small schools to benefit all students. Being knowledgeable of others' advice is supportive to someone new to a school-wide system of RTI. Information gleaned from research into these topics will support an easier transition in implementing RTI in rural schools, which will then produce effective change for all students. The successful implementation of RTI in the schools will answer the question of "We need to do something but what?" for many educators and administrators.

## Answers to the Research Questions

1. Describe your school in terms of its size, its student body, demographics, and challenges or special needs.

The six schools were rural Manitoban schools. School populations ranged from 60-450 students in grades K-6, K-8 and K-12. RTI was implemented in the early/middle years grades in all of these schools. Students were primarily Caucasian, plus several self-declared First nations students and Serbian, Filipino, African and Swahili families. The principals considered their schools to be low to affluent in socio-economic status. Staffing size ranged from 9 to 35 professionals and 5.5 to 20 support staff. Each school had many level one students and up to six level II and III funded students. All schools reported a variety of extra-curricular activities for their students. The schools also reported a variety of breakfast and lunch options that were available to their students, with some schools not offering breakfast or lunches daily.

2. Describe how the decision was made to implement a Response to Intervention program in your school.

The decision to implement a program such as RTI typically emerged in response to a perceived need. How this process began and who took the initiative to suggest such a program was dependent on each individual school, staff, and students. Questions arose around whether available resources were being maximized, how timetables were organized, and how well staff knew which interventions to use. Decisions were often made by different people than those who were in the decision-making role at the time. Depending on the situation, the decisions were made by student service coordinators, assistant superintendents, and superintendents. All decisions were rooted in what was best for the students in their charge.

3. Describe your school's experience in implementing your RTI program.

RTI was introduced to staff members in a variety of ways. It may have been through a presentation to share an administrator's vision of using RTI to support a school. It may have involved chosen staff members (resource teachers, classroom teachers, administrators, superintendents, etc.) attending professional development in a variety of cities. Sharing of documents with school staff was another way of introducing staff to RTI. Information was shared from conferences with the whole group, sharing professional readings with staff, and sending more people to professional development activities on RTI. Participants found that it was helpful to assist staff members to recognize the benefits of RTI at very early stages of the process if possible, listen to staff member concerns, and be prepared to answer questions. Some staff were more open to RTI than others. It was important to spend time with these staff members to understand their perspectives, concerns, and stresses. Staff needed to hear affirmations that what they were doing was right and provided benefits for the students. Once scheduling and common understanding were in place, the next pieces to consider were tracking the data and providing professional development focused on the differentiated instruction offered in Tier 1, and the specific interventions for Tiers 2 and 3.

4. Describe the results of your implementation process, including both expected and unexpected results.

The expected results were no surprises to anyone. Students' needs were quickly recognized, and students received the supports that they needed. Student confidence grew as they enjoyed their scheduled time to work on targeted skills. Assessment results improved as students' skill gaps closed and their confidence grew. Students relayed positive feedback to

their teachers around their personal learning and growth. It was discovered that there were more changes for staff than for students. The principals and the teachers involved noticed a marked change in the way they taught. Scheduling led to common collaboration time, so that teachers could develop a common understanding of assessments and Tier 1 instructional practices. As they collaborated more, their practices became stronger and more to the point.

5. Describe what advice you would give to someone who is beginning the process of implementing RTI in a rural early/middle years school.

Advice from the participants fell into one of four main categories: communication, using team meetings, making staff part of the process and planning, and building relationships. It is extremely important to have open lines of communication throughout the process and among all staff. People must spend time listening, providing support, and following up with emails. Teachers need to talk with other teachers. They need to pull curriculum apart, argue about it, and agree and disagree, in order to get a complete understanding of the curriculum and interventions. Teachers need to own the work. Team meetings need to be established with set dates and times. Team meetings must have protected time with everyone actively participating. Staff must be part of the planning from the start. They must see the need and support the changes that are taking place. It becomes a whole staff initiative with everyone involved. Staff must work openly and support each other. Staff must feel welcome to share and feel comfortable in taking risks together. The team must be flexible, willing to adjust and advocate for supports, resources and time from administrators. Money should be spent on resources that will support teachers with planning and interventions. Professional development should include visiting classrooms and schools that are working with the RTI framework.

6. Are there any other topics or issues that you feel are relevant and should be discussed?

Participants shared various reflections. There is a need to build up the school resources, teacher instructional tools, and ways to track activities and data. Professional learning communities and RTI work hand in hand. Time needs to be built into the timetable in order to support the benefits of both. Staff need to continue to build on the successes that are observed in the school. Tier 1 is good teaching for everyone. Teachers must try a lot of things before referring to the resource teacher or educational assistants to look after a student. RTI requires that everyone participate, do some modelling, give people time, common prep time, and time to really get their teeth into working through problems. It takes a whole team kind of commitment.

### **Limitations**

As stated earlier, RTI has been implemented in many countries. Schools in urban and rural divisions have been implementing RTI to support all students, identify those who require special education, and make school improvements. This thesis study focused on early/middle years schools in rural Manitoba. Only six schools and principals participated in the research, so the findings represent a small percentage of rural Manitoba early/middle years schools that have implemented RTI. It is the researcher's belief that had the research participants been a larger number, the findings would be much the same; however, this remains unproven at this time.

### **Implications and Recommendations for Practice**

Patterns are evident in the data collected from the research. These were all rural Manitoba early/middle years schools with under 460 students. Teachers, students, families, and community members knew each other well. Decisions around implementing RTI were made because of what the educators experienced in teaching reading and writing. The need was also

seen by school administrators. While the impetus for adopting RTI came from a variety of agents, the ultimate decision to implement RTI was rooted in what was best for the students.

Each RTI program had different experiences during the implementation process, but some patterns emerged. It was important that all staff members were part of the planning and implementation process from the start. The vision and action plan needed to be clear and understood by everyone. A variety of professional development opportunities were required around the purpose of RTI and in using interventions to support student needs. Professional development was shared in a variety of ways: attending conferences, sharing research articles, visiting classrooms and schools, and providing common prep time for team conversations.

Important advice gleaned from the research fell into four categories: communication, using team meetings, making staff part of the process, planning, and building relationships. Communication needs to be clear, concise, and followed through. Staff need to have an opportunity to speak and be listened to; their ideas and concerns need to be taken seriously. They need the opportunity to work directly with other staff members, talking through issues, making connections, and digging deeply into curriculum. Opportunities to meet must be protected time, rescheduled if cancellations occur, and set with agendas and minutes. Staff must work toward building relationships to ensure an atmosphere of comfort, risk-taking, and sharing of interventions that work well and not so well.

There must be flexibility in scheduling for all staff and students. Consistent monitoring is essential in implementing RTI effectively. Administrators must be prepared to spend money on resources and supports. Professional development must be ongoing, effective, and seen as effective by all staff throughout the implementation process. Staff need to be allocated to where the needs of the students are greatest.

The most important piece of guidance shared by participants was the necessity to be committed wholeheartedly to the idea of RTI before beginning to implement it. Administrators must have the big idea firm in their minds and be able to move staff and students through the process with confidence, using small steps, in a logical manner, and with a vision and focus. Principals must offer support and pressure as needed to ensure that all staff are implementing best teaching practices for Tier 1 students and integrating Tier 2 interventions. Administrators must ensure the validity of assessments, data collection, and analysis of the data. RTI implementation is a team approach to support all students in their learning.

Based upon this study, completed with a small set of participants from rural early/middle years Manitoban schools, it seems evident that RTI can be implemented successfully in rural schools. The advice given by all participants is informative, and easily followed by other administrators who wish to implement RTI in their own early/middle years Manitoban schools. RTI can answer the question "We need to do something but what?" Keeping a clear focus, sharing a vision, and supporting staff and students will lead to successful implementation for all students attending the school. Strong Tier 1 teaching and assessments, with quality interventions in Tier 2, and individualized support in Tier 3 will lead to measurable gains.

### **About the Author**

*Alann Fraser is an administrator and a learning support teacher in a rural early and middle years school, which enables her to actively implement Response to Intervention programming for her students. Developing programming that supports all students is her priority. Alann also enjoys gardening and operating a greenhouse. Enjoying the outdoors through photography allows Alann to capture the changes of her gardens throughout the seasons.*

## REFEREED ARTICLES

### Differentiating Assessment in High School

Patrick Dunlop

#### **Abstract**

*This article evaluates how to implement differentiated assessment effectively in a high school setting. Differentiated assessment is vital for encouraging students to express their understanding of outcomes. In early and middle years education, differentiated assessment is quite common. In high schools, a lecture and worksheet followed by a test environment can be more commonplace. With appropriate rubrics, differentiated assessment can provide all students with the opportunity to choose a preferred method to express their understanding. Such an environment fosters creativity and encourages all children to think outside the box.*

### Differentiating Assessment in High School

The increase in diversity among children in schools obligates educators to embrace differentiated instruction and assessment at all grade levels. This can be challenging as students reach the higher grades where tests and essays are common assessment strategies. Students are often subjected to tasks that require memorization rather than demonstrating creativity and long-term understanding. Teachers can provide students with alternative ways to express their understanding by incorporating rubrics, promoting inquiry, and providing students with choice by encouraging summative projects. Classroom environments that encourage students to find creative methods to demonstrate their understanding foster creativity.

#### **Examining Alternative Strategies**

Differentiated assessment is common in early years and middle years education.<sup>1</sup> Tests, essays, and exams are common measures for establishing percentages in high school. These assessment strategies provide a raw score that is useful when calculating the final averages needed for university entrance and scholarships. A concern is that students often prepare for a test or exam by “cramming.” Another assessment provided shortly after the cram session could yield a lower mark, demonstrating that the student learned the material for the test but did not develop a deep understanding of the content. High school students are overwhelmed with many courses that contain a great deal of content. Teaching to a test or exam is efficient, but it is not necessarily an effective strategy. Teachers must foster critical thinking and recognize that “individual needs, strengths and weaknesses must drive instructional and assessment practice” (Watson, 2017, para. 2). As an alternative, assessment can be “process-oriented, and multi-modal” (Katz, 2012, p. 145). Teachers can encourage students to investigate a topic independently by using a variety of methods of expression. A well-developed rubric can be used as a tool to evaluate differentiated assessments in high school.

#### **Providing Rubrics**

Teachers can provide rubrics to guide student thinking. A rubric is a “visual narrative of the criteria that defines and describes” (Balch, Blanck, & Balch, 2016, p. 20) the learning that must

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise specified, the information in this article is from the author’s 14 years of experience teaching middle and senior years math, science, and French.

be demonstrated on an assessment. With a well-constructed rubric, students “enter on any given topic at different points along the continuum” (Katz, 2012, p. 74) and leave at different places. Rubrics are sometimes created with a style that categorizes performance by using quantitative descriptors such as “all,” “most,” “some,” and “none.” These descriptors can be subjective and do not provide information about the skills that the student is demonstrating. An alternative approach could be to incorporate qualitative descriptors that include curricular outcomes and Bloom’s taxonomy adjectives (Katz, 2012). Bloom’s taxonomy provides a list of adjectives that indicate distinct levels of complexity. In a rubric form, these descriptors inform students of the level of understanding they are currently demonstrating and what they need to do to demonstrate a higher level of comprehension. A rubric should also contain positive language that measures “key aspects central to the quality of performance” (Balch et al., 2016, p. 23), rather than the quantity of the content provided. Appropriate rubrics, with categories ranging from beginning understanding to exceeding expectations, are appropriate tools for guiding student thinking.

The top level of a rubric should be a category for exceeding expectations. The descriptors can include the higher cognitive domain descriptors from Bloom’s taxonomy, such as “formulates,” “designs,” and “analyzes” (Katz, 2012, p. 73). Student achievement is not limited with a well-constructed rubric. With an entire section for exceeding expectations, students can explore extensions with their research. Rubrics can be used efficiently in high school if they are descriptive and the teacher and students have a clear understanding of how a numerical mark will be generated from the rubric. Including a category for exceeding expectations can be an excellent tool for assessing inquiry projects and other open-ended activities.

## **Using Inquiry Projects**

Inquiry projects provide students with a challenging way to explore their own questions and seek their own answers. Teachers can encourage students to complete open-ended projects, rather than adopting a practice of using a written test. After sufficient learning of the curricular outcomes, students can be provided with the challenge of generating their own inquiry questions based on the content explored in a unit. Through experimentation and investigation, students can seek answers to their inquiry questions and formulate extensions by using various degrees of independence in real-world applications.

Inquiry projects can be designed by using varying amounts of guidance and independence. Teachers release responsibility gradually by initially providing students with guided questions and procedures. This is called guided inquiry. After demonstrating a proficient understanding of the scientific method or research requirements, students begin to explore questions on their own. This is called open inquiry. A transition from guided inquiry to open inquiry must be deliberate. Teachers need to help students “advance gradually from a structured inquiry, through to guided inquiry, and up to the level of open inquiry” (Zion & Mendelovici, 2012, p. 388). Students need to be familiar with the inquiry process before they are left to their own methods for practising “their investigative skills” (Nivalainen, Asikainen, & Hirvonen, 2013, p. 452). It is also important for students to have received teacher feedback from smaller projects so that they have an idea of teacher expectations. While working on an open inquiry project, students develop the project “from the stage of choosing an intriguing phenomenon, and through asking inquiry questions and beyond” (Zion & Mendelovici, 2015, p. 388). Inquiry projects provide learners with the opportunity to choose their own topics of investigation and seek their own answers to these problems. The complexity involved with an open inquiry activity makes it necessary for students to have had enough practice. A high school semester provides sufficient time for teachers to instruct about inquiry. It also provides enough opportunity for teachers to help students develop the necessary skills to investigate open-ended problems (Chung-Hsien, Hsiao-Lin, & Chi-Chin, 2013). Teachers can promote varying degrees of

independent learning in their classrooms by encouraging students to choose their own inquiry topics for investigation.

### **Providing Choice**

Choosing a summative assessment format can increase student engagement. Choice provides a selection of presentation formats through which they can communicate their learning. Inquiry projects should be made “personally meaningful to students’ goals, interests, and values” (Williams, Wallace, & Sung, 2016, p. 530). Incorporating a student’s learning style provides an opportunity to ascertain what a student understands. A final assessment needs to provide the opportunity for “students to show what they have learned or to demonstrate mastery of the important concepts” (Katz, 2012, p. 73). Rather than writing a summative test, students might make deeper connections and express themselves by using other tools. For example, students can present information visually by using diagrams, infographics, and graphs. Students who develop the skills for interpreting information visually, and “who receive supports for comprehending visualizations” (Cromley et al., 2016, p. 1211), could demonstrate a higher level of comprehension. Students are more engaged in their learning when they can express their understanding by choosing from a variety of modalities.

### **Planning for Assessment**

Choice alone is not an appropriate solution for encouraging alternative methods for assessment. Teachers need to be mindful that “choice during instruction does not equate to letting students do whatever they want” (Williams et al., 2016, p. 544). The focus in the classroom needs to be on encouraging students to discover a presentation format with which they can best express their understanding. Inquiry projects, presentations, and laboratory experiments are examples of choices that permit “students to self-regulate their own learning” (Williams et al., 2016, p. 544). This environment also provides the opportunity for collaboration. Teachers need to encourage students to choose appropriate assessment formats, so that they incorporate suitable presentations that express their understanding.

Providing students with choice in high school is necessary so that students know how to express themselves as they enter the work place and post-secondary education. The opportunity for students to present their understanding in a variety of ways can increase “task performance, effort, (and) willingness to subsequently engage in the task” (Williams et al., 2016, p. 530). Not every individual will be a master of writing a paper or completing a test or exam. These tools do not necessarily provide enough opportunity to understand the connections a student has made. Teachers need to provide enough differentiation to “create individualized programs of instruction” for students at all levels of ability (Donovan & Shepherd, 2013, p. 9). Classrooms need to be a place wherein students can learn how to express themselves by using a modality that best suits their personality and creativity. Students who receive supports for comprehending visualizations can improve their comprehension.

Creating an environment wherein inquiry is a focus can be engaging for all learners. A range of students, from those who experience challenges to those who are gifted children, can find appropriate means to express their understanding through inquiry. Presenting students with “open, authentic tasks with high levels of abstraction and complexity” (Eysink, Gersen, & Gijlers, 2015, p. 63) provides everyone, regardless of ability, with the opportunity to pursue their curiosities. In an inquiry-based classroom, students can “regulate their learning by planning, monitoring, and evaluating” (Eysink et al., 2015, p. 64) their progress. With careful planning, teachers can create an engaging environment wherein the focus is on inquiry for all students.

## Conclusion

As students reach the higher grades and prepare for university, it is common to see testing and examination being used as primary assessment tools. In high school, a wonderful opportunity exists to expand the repertoire of assessments in order to encourage students to rely less on rote memorization. It might take time to establish rubrics for higher level classes, but it can be done. Appropriate rubrics provide detailed descriptions of what students need to do to meet course outcomes. Rubrics also provide indicators for how it could be possible to go above and beyond the expectations of the curriculum. Open inquiry projects are one way to evaluate student learning by using rubrics. Task-oriented projects and laboratory investigations can take the place of tests and serve as a component of a final exam. With increasing diversity in classrooms, it is vital for high school teachers to encourage students to explore different modalities for expressing their understanding. Fostering this kind of a learning environment can increase student engagement and can help students find ways to express themselves as they pursue post-secondary education and join the workforce.

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## About the Author

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# Diverse Classrooms Require Innovative Educators

Megan McBain

## Abstract

*Educators are responsible for teaching increasingly diverse students in today's technological society. Changes in students, technology, and community contexts require educators to determine which resources will engage learners. Engagement can be fostered by using educational tools such as popular culture, technology, and differentiated instruction. While teachers must determine which strategies will be effective, they must also overcome barriers put in place by school divisions, communities, and themselves. Being a classroom teacher seems like an almost impossible task, at times, but is necessary to ensure a future full of individuals who are academically, socially and emotionally strong.*

Today's educators have the responsibility of teaching in schools that are becoming increasingly diverse. Students are changing, but so is our society and the technology within it. These changes require educators to step out of their comfort zones to engage 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. While teachers are expected to use best practices to reach every student in their diverse classrooms, it is becoming increasingly difficult to determine which best practices will foster engagement and growth within learners. Many teachers use pop culture, technology, and differentiated instruction to ensure that students are engaged in their learning. These educators may understand how to accomplish success in all learners, but many barriers slow educational progress. School divisions and societal pressures often create these barriers. However, many are put in place by the educators themselves. Teachers must understand the learners within their classrooms and use best practices to get these students engaged in their learning; however, they must first overcome the barriers built by others and themselves.

## Changing Classrooms

Classrooms are constantly changing in the areas of students and their diverse needs, community pressures and changes, and technological advancements (Dixon, Yssell, McConnell, & Hardin, 2014; Mills, 2010). Learners are entering classrooms with many different needs that were either not present in the past, or not recognized by educational systems. Many students speak different languages in the home environment, and have different family structures and increasingly diverse learning styles (Dixon et al., 2014; Katz, 2008; Suprayogi, Valcke, & Godwin, 2017). There are also differences in motivation, ability, need, and interest. For example, two learners in the same classroom may have similar interests and abilities; however, Student A is a kinesthetic learner, while Student B is a visual learner. While Student A and Student B have similar capabilities, the teacher must create a learning environment that meets each learner's needs in order to ensure the success of both. Educators must understand their students' needs, strengths, and backgrounds, and use this knowledge to help the learners reach their full potential, while adapting to community changes.

Not only are learners becoming increasingly diverse, the communities they live in is also changing. An increasing number of children experience struggles (Alim, 2011; Katz, 2012). These struggles lead to students who feel like outcasts within the classroom, and this feeling of alienation affects their learning. It decreases motivation and interest, while increasing the feeling of being misunderstood (Low, 2010). Teachers must listen to these learners, help them see beyond the stereotypes, and understand that their struggles make them stronger. An increasing number of students come from homes with unsupportive parents (Chen, 2015). This lack of support causes children to seek acceptance and belonging elsewhere. These children are exposed to many different people and ideas that may not be appropriate (Tekinarslan, Kennedy,

& Nicolle, 2015). For example, Student C comes from a supportive home, while Student D does not. Student C has a close relationship with her family and they encourage her to find positive friendships through extra-curricular activities. Student D is ignored at home and finds a sense of belonging with an older group of people who are involved with drugs and gang activity. These differences affect not only the learners' time outside of school, but also their classroom experience. Educators must use their students' backgrounds and prior knowledge to ensure success, while also using the technology that is increasingly prevalent in today's society.

The amount of information available to learners has increased since the 1990s, due to new technologies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Students are becoming more dependent on technology, specifically social media, to get a sense of belonging and communicate with their peers. They are interacting with the virtual world as much as the real world for communication and entertainment (Adams, 2009; Lasmana, 2010). Technology is a symbol of social status, identity, and acceptance for youth (Li, Snow, & White, 2015). This dependency on technology has become a stronger pedagogical force than regular schooling and is a critical part of learners' lives (Kervin, 2016; Kesler, Tinio, & Nolan, 2016; Tekinarslan et al., 2015). Educators need to understand this dependency and use it to their advantage. Relevancy is important to students (Bush, 2016), and the teachers' understanding of learners' technological dependency will help them to foster engagement and make learning relevant. As learners and communities change and technology becomes more prevalent, engaging learners becomes more challenging for educators.

### **Fostering Engagement**

Educators need to take learners' needs and interests into account and use tools such as popular culture, technology, and differentiated instruction to foster engagement and ensure success for all. Popular culture is a powerful resource that can be accessed through media to help learners construct multiple meanings within texts (Adams, 2009; Jocson, 2006; Kesler et al., 2016). It can also assist students in forming their own identities and making sense of the world around them (Kontovourki, 2014). Educators can use popular culture to help learners understand the different types of language and how these various languages are used within texts (Cope & Kalantzis, 2009). Teachers must access resources such as popular culture to engage students and teach them how to interpret and assess information around them. While popular culture is a very useful tool in classrooms, technology is the driving force behind it.

In the 21st century, technology has advanced significantly, students have become dependent on it, and it has become an extremely useful tool within the classroom. Technology has the potential to appeal to all learners, engage them in their learning, and "be used in an assistive capacity to increase student access to instruction" (Spooner, Kemp-Inman, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Wood, & Davis, 2015, p. 52). Teachers can use online resources and digital tools, which students may already have experience with, to extend learning beyond the classroom setting (Chen, 2015). Doing this will make instruction more relevant to the students and invest them in their own learning. Teachers can use educational tools, such as digital play to assist in literacy learning (Kervin, 2016), iPoetry to help students receive "authentic writing practice" (Li et al., 2015, p. 6), and virtual reality to experience a wide range of interactive activities that would otherwise be inaccessible. While technology and popular culture are useful tools for engaging 21st century learners and making them successful, instruction needs to be differentiated in order to ensure that students feel valued and cared for in their learning environments (Katz, 2012).

Differentiated instruction is a tool used by educators to provide optimal learning environments. Teachers need to find students' strengths and foster a safe and respectful learning climate within the classroom. The students should be involved in the process of creating a democratic classroom, wherein everyone feels valued (Katz, 2012; Konrad, Helf, & Joseph, 2011). Differentiated instruction is flexible and enables educators to cope with student

diversity, adopt specific teaching strategies, invoke a variety of learning activities, monitor needs, and push optimal outcomes (Suprayogi et al., 2017). Teachers also need to develop caring relationships with students and acknowledge them as individuals with hopes, fears, and anxieties (Alim, 2011). Each learner's academic, social, and emotional well-being should be taken into account. An example of a group of youth, who are strong socially, is the group of boys presented in Dacey's (2017) article regarding a group of young men who found a child alone in the rain. The boys knocked on every door in the neighbourhood to find the child's parents. Educators need to foster the creation of strong citizens. Optimal classroom environments that include popular culture, technology, and differentiated instruction can engage learners, ensure relevancy, and create great citizens of tomorrow.

### **Educational Barriers**

Teachers need to understand the diverse needs within their classrooms and engage in best practices to reach their students; however, many are unable to do so due to divisional, societal, or self-made barriers. One main barrier at a divisional level is funding, which could lead to a lack of resources and technology for educators to use within their classrooms. Professional development (PD) opportunities decrease when funding is low. Many teachers do not use popular culture, technology, or differentiated instruction due to a lack of PD within their divisions (Chen, 2015; Dixon et al.; Katz, 2012). A lack of PD causes a disconnect between differentiated instruction understanding and implementation (Suprayogi et al., 2017). Funding also affects classroom sizes and assistance within the learning environment. When educators face all of these obstacles, they feel less confident in their ability to overcome them (Dixon et al., 2014). Overcoming these divisional barriers can happen with increased funding; however, without other supports, such as cooperative parents, the process is more difficult.

Parents who are unsupportive may have strong opinions regarding how classrooms should function. Many educators face opinions that texts may bring forth controversial and challenging messages for students (Kesler et al., 2016). They also face community pressures around what is appropriate and what types of media and texts should be used (Low, 2010). For example, when one teacher engaged his students in an interactive activity involving popular culture and online resources, a student in the class questioned the assignment, which was engaging to the majority of the class. The teacher explained the reasoning behind the assignment, and the next day the student's father came in and expressed concern about the assignment. The father wondered why they were using computers instead of textbooks and worksheets, similar to what he had when he was a student. Every day, educators must deal with parental and other pressures, while continuing to engage and challenge their students' views of the world around them. This is not an easy task, and some give in to the pressures placed on them. While many teachers use engaging resources to help support their learners and to overcome divisional and societal boundaries, others create extra barriers themselves.

Educators must adhere to best practices; however, many teachers do not use the tools necessary for the success of 21st century learners, and create barriers for themselves and their students. There are many possible reasons for the creation of these barriers. Educators may feel the authority shift from teacher to learner, because today's youth tend to be more knowledgeable regarding technology and popular culture (Low, 2010). Some educators believe in maintaining stereotypes and the status quo instead of "helping students learn to challenge it" (Ladson-Billings, 1992, p. 314). For example, a student has been attending the same small school since the first grade, and every staff member at the school has watched this student grow up. A new teacher enters the building and hears that the student is difficult. Other staff members suggest possible resources to use when dealing with this student, based on their own prior assumptions and resistance to change. However, the new teacher is determined to give this student a fresh start and teach him to challenge his circumstances, based on his different

beliefs regarding curriculum delivery (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2013). Whether self-created or imposed, educational barriers have a large influence on student engagement and achievement.

## Conclusion

Teachers have the nearly impossible job of acknowledging the diverse needs within their changing classrooms, using best practices to foster engagement, and overcoming obstacles put in front of them, in order to help individual students reach their full potential. Educators must look beneath the surface of learners and find the potential within each individual. They must use relevant educational tools to foster engagement and get learners invested in the curriculum. Then, they must overcome the obstacles put in front of them, while teaching students how to do the same. While educating our youth and ensuring that they are strong academically, educators must also attempt to ensure that learners are strong socially and emotionally. Students need to feel cared for, valued, and accepted in order to be successful. Teachers must understand their learners' diverse backgrounds, use engaging resources, and push through the barriers in order to ensure that the future is full of individuals who are strong academically, socially, and emotionally.

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## Exploring Reading Comprehension Inside and Outside the Classroom

Kayla Waugh

### Abstract

*Reading comprehension is a fundamental skill that all individuals should have. A foundation of reading set in children's early years is integral to proper growth and development. Parents or guardians should spend quality time reading to their children at home prior to children attending school. Teachers should construct language arts programs, utilizing forms of technology, which promote reading and decoding forms of text. Parents or guardians should emphasize the importance of reading and reading comprehension skills outside the classroom by working with their children at home. Literacy is the fundamental building block to students' development and success in school.*

Reading comprehension is an essential component to schools' language arts programs. It is an important skill that students need to master beginning in the early years, particularly kindergarten and grade 1. Prior to students developing strong reading comprehension skills, other elements of the English language must be known, understood, and mastered. Students must know their alphabet, and understand that each letter has a corresponding sound. They also have to put letter sounds together to read words. When they have achieved letter and sound recognition they can begin to decode and comprehend what they are reading. Research has shown that students who learn to read, and can comprehend text, from an early age will find greater success in language arts programs in their later school years. Parents or guardians should read to their children from an early age, prior to them beginning school. Teachers should emphasize the importance of reading comprehension in classrooms, and encourage students to ask questions while reading. They should also incorporate forms of technology into their literacy programs in order to promote reading and reading comprehension. Parents or guardians should promote literacy and reading comprehension skills outside the classroom by working with their children in the home environment.

Parents or guardians should read to their children from an early age. It is suggested that children be read to right from birth in order to maximize their learning when they begin school (Johnson, 2016). Reading is an essential skill. It is important that children are exposed to language from birth so that they have heard a variety of words spoken to them before they learn to talk. Parents are role models for children. Children will repeat what their parents say and do (Duursma, 2016). When children are learning to speak, they can effectively communicate with others around them because they will have receptive language from listening and watching their parents read to them. Children can also develop an imagination when parents read books to them. Stimulating an imagination enables children to develop language and listening skills. Language skills are "the building blocks of development" (Johnson, 2016, para. 5) and have a host of benefits for children. Having a strong foundation of language skills leads to "brain development tied to mental imagery" (Johnson, 2016, para. 6). When children become critical thinkers, they will have strong reading comprehension skills. It is important that children are read to from birth so that they develop effective literacy habits as they grow older and move through their years of school.

Although language and reading are everywhere in today's world, and go far beyond the classroom walls, they begin in the early years at home. It is an essential skill that all children and adults need to succeed in life. In order for children to become effective readers, they should be read to from an early age. Children who have parental involvement and support in their development of reading skills are more likely to "have better phonological awareness" (Carreteiro, Justo, & Figueira, 2015, p. 910). Students will be more likely to perform better on reading tasks and activities. The English language can be difficult to master. There are many

components students need, such as alphabet and sound recognition and word identification, before they can begin reading and developing reading comprehension skills. The earlier students are exposed to language, the more success they will find when they begin school. Students who are read to at home will already be familiar with aspects of the language, and can begin developing their reading comprehension skills at an early age.

Teachers should emphasize the importance of reading and reading comprehension in school classrooms. Students in their early years of school, such as kindergarten, should be exposed to reading through a variety of age-appropriate language activities. Reading activities that can be implemented in elementary school classrooms include silent reading, Daily 5 (read to self, read to someone, listen to reading, work on writing, and word work), read-alouds, and home reading programs. In literacy activities such as read-alouds, teachers can have students engage in “dialogical reading” (Duursma, 2016, p. 467). This is a task wherein teachers “use specific techniques while sharing a book” (Duursma, 2016, p. 467). For example, a technique used is facilitating a student to “become the narrator of the story” (Duursma, 2016, p. 467). These techniques help students develop their reading comprehension skills because they can question what they are reading, and learn to make connections between the text and their world. It is important to give students a variety of opportunities to develop their reading skills both inside and outside the classroom. Reading, writing, and listening activities can be completed in school where students read various forms of text and decode meaning from it. These activities can be completed in a variety of ways, including small-group, whole-group, and individual instruction (Scanlon, Anderson, & Sweeney, 2016). The method by which the teacher delivers the activities is dependent upon individual students and their learning styles. Students can use the information they have been given to comprehend what they are reading. It is critical that teachers promote reading in the classroom and provide students with numerous opportunities to engage in it so that they can develop their reading comprehension skills.

Reading comprehension can be a difficult task for young students, especially those in kindergarten. In their first year of school, they are learning the components of the English language, how to read, and how to reflect on what they have read. One demanding task of reading comprehension that requires cognitive thinking is summarizing (Chlapana, 2016). Many students may struggle with it. It is important that teachers focus on tasks such as summarizing and teach students a variety of strategies so that they become effective readers and critical thinkers. It is also imperative that students practise reading and develop strong reading comprehension skills outside the classroom. Teachers can implement a home reading program. Students choose books according to their appropriate reading level, read them at home, and answer questions about their books. Administering language activities in the beginning months of kindergarten “did add significantly to the prediction of reading comprehension at the end of third grade” (Catts, Nielsen, Bridges, & Liu, 2016, p. 462). Students can explore language, and more specifically, reading, activities when they first enter school contributes to their success in reading comprehension when they reach the later grades. Students need to develop effective strategies. It is important that teachers emphasize the importance of reading and reading comprehension in the early years of school because these skills can be challenging for some students.

Additional opportunities for reading and reading comprehension can be given to students by using various forms of technology. Teachers have access to computers, iPads and other tablets, and SMARTBoards in schools that can encourage students to read and make sense of what they are reading. Students can listen to books on a computer or tablet, which benefits oral learners who prefer hearing a story that is read to them. When an interactive storybook (ISB) intervention was administered to students in kindergarten classrooms, students “showed a steeper growth in expressive vocabulary” (van Druten-Frietman, Strating, Denessen, & Verhoeven, 2016, p. 224). Expressive vocabulary is an essential component for reading comprehension. Students need to understand what they have read and explain the content by using appropriate, related vocabulary. With the prevalence of technology in today’s schools,

students will be engaged in their learning, and can use these forms of technology to develop their reading and reading comprehension skills.

Other computer-based literacy programs can be used in classrooms as a means of intervention to help students build effective literacy and reading comprehension skills. Students can be assessed in a number of ways, and early intervention is best. The earlier an intervention takes place in a students' time at school, the more success they will have in reading and reading comprehension in their later schooling years (O'Callaghan, McIvor, McVeigh, & Rushe, 2016). By administering tests such as these in kindergarten, teachers can identify students' strengths and weaknesses in language arts. They can use the information obtained to develop and implement appropriate intervention programs that will improve students' reading and reading comprehension skills.

Teachers should promote basic reading and reading comprehension skills in all of their students, and use a variety of resources to ensure that all students learn at their own pace. Each student brings a different background and learning style into the classroom. The ability to read text and decode it becomes increasingly difficult for students when English is not their first language. Reading and decoding text is a challenging task for EAL (English as an Additional Language) students. Teachers need to teach to all backgrounds and learning styles in their classrooms, and try to close the gap in oral language skills between EAL children and children whose first language is English. In today's schools, "EAL children continue to lag behind in their English oral language skills" (Bowyer-Crane, Fricke, Schaefer, Lerya, & Hulme, 2016, p. 783). EAL students often struggle with reading comprehension because they lack the basic language skills to decode and understand text. A variety of supports exist in schools that teachers can use to support all students, including EAL learners. These include resource teachers, other classroom teachers, and educational assistants. Teachers can also use particular resources and programs that break down the components of the English language. These include leveled reading programs that can begin as early as kindergarten. Going back to the basic building blocks enables EAL students to understand the alphabet and corresponding letter sounds, and recognize and read common sight words found in text form. Once they have a solid foundation of the English language, they can begin to read and comprehend what it is they are reading. It is important that teachers teach to all of their students so that each individual improves his or her basic reading and reading comprehension skills.

Parents should promote literacy and encourage their children to read at home. In order to maximize their children's learning potential, they need to ensure that their children are read to at home. Students learn and build upon their prior learning by forming habits. It is important that they work on their reading and reading comprehension skills by consistently working on related tasks and activities. Teachers can promote reading at home by "building partnerships with families" (Hindin, Steiner, & Dougherty, 2016, p. 11). They can encourage families to become involved in their children's learning at home by creating individualized plans that are appropriate for each student's level. Open communication with parents or guardians is important. Teachers can arrange regular face-to-face meetings with parents so that both the teacher and parent can openly discuss the students' learning progress in literacy and reading. The meetings also enable the parents to address any questions or concerns they may have. Literacy is important for parents to promote and encourage at home.

Parental involvement at home is dependent upon the parents' own literacy skills, ability to communicate, and reading abilities. A parent's level of education will determine how successfully he or she can help his or her child in their learning. Communication is important, and the way in which parents converse with their children "has direct influences on their children's emergent oral language development" (Taylor, Greenberg, & Terry, 2016, p. 11). Parents should frequently communicate with their children as often as they can. The more children are spoken to, the more opportunities they are given to develop their oral language skills. It is also important that there is quality interaction between parents and their children. Conversation should have meaning so that children can broaden their vocabularies (Taylor et

al., 2016). Some parents may also lack the basic literacy skills to communicate effectively with their children. It becomes difficult for these individuals, such as parents of EAL children, to support their children properly if they struggle with language themselves. EAL students are likely to come from home environments wherein the parents themselves are learning and developing their language skills. If the parents can not provide the appropriate reading and reading comprehension support, then the children can not grow their literacy skills. Parents should promote literacy at home, and encourage students to develop their reading and reading comprehension skills.

Basic reading and reading comprehension skills are critical to have both inside and outside the classroom. All students, regardless of their background and learning style, need to know how to read, and how to decode and understand various forms of text. It is important that children are read to from an early age. They should be read to right from birth. When they are exposed to language from early on in their life, they will be more likely to succeed in literacy activities, in particular reading comprehension tasks, as they move through their school years. It is also important that classroom teachers encourage students to read as much as possible. They should emphasize the important of developing effective reading and reading comprehension skills. Parents or guardians should also be involved in their child's literacy development. It is essential that they promote a home environment that encourages children to engage in reading. They should also frequently find time to communicate with their children so that they can expand their vocabularies and develop their oral language skills. Literacy and reading comprehension skills are important to succeed in society so that children will grow up to become literate adults who effectively communicate with others.

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### **About the Author**

*After completing her B.Ed. in Ontario, Kayla Waugh relocated to Thompson, Manitoba, where she began to understand the constructs and impact of Indigenous education on the classroom dynamic. Kayla began her M.Ed. in curriculum and pedagogy in September 2016. Outside the classroom, she enjoys spending time with her rescue cat, friends, yoga, and crocheting.*

## Reading: Children with Down Syndrome

Mireille Bazin-Berryman

### Abstract

*Understanding the learning profiles of children, when teaching reading, affects the progress of their reading, in particular for children with Down syndrome. Specifically teaching word recognition, phonological awareness, orthographic knowledge, and comprehension, while understanding the ways in which children with Down syndrome learn, will support their communication and ultimately their inclusion in society.*

Reading offers a certain amount of autonomy to people and is a learned skill. There is print everywhere, and it is used for many reasons to communicate. Children with Down syndrome need this skill, as well. In the past there were beliefs that children with Down syndrome could not learn to read, but those beliefs have since been proven incorrect (Loveall & Conners, 2016). When teaching reading, I have determined multiple integral components, such as word recognition, phonological awareness, orthographic knowledge, and comprehension. Each component requires specific teaching for all children, but in particular children with Down syndrome and their particular learning profile. Comparing the learning profile of a typically developing child to the learning profile of a child with Down syndrome helps educators to understand the process of reading for children with Down syndrome. This understanding must be part of the education of teachers, in order to provide them with the tools they require to teach reading. Intervention as applied to the components of reading should take into consideration the whole child in order for it to be successful (Oelwein, 2009).

The learning profile for reading by a child is quantified by using data from reading assessments. The child's strengths and challenges are used to focus instruction to meet his/her needs. The same is true for children with Down syndrome. It is necessary to take into consideration the strengths and challenges of short-term memory, verbal memory, visual memory, and the stages of reading. Children with Down syndrome have relative strengths in visual memory but have challenges with short-term memory and verbal memory, which determine how they learn to read (Ratz, 2013). Performing reading assessments to build a reading profile for children with Down syndrome will begin and support the reading education of the child. Assessing is not teaching, but it provides educators with the knowledge that they need to teach (Oelwein, 2009). In building a learning profile, we must also take into consideration some of the road blocks that may arise that are not academic but physiological or based on misunderstandings. Motivation, attention, vision, hearing, or thyroid problems may all play a part in the learning profile of a child with Down syndrome (Oelwein, 2009). Having the learning profile of children with Down syndrome will help to build programs specific to their needs.

The whole-word approach to reading has been a common approach to reading for children with Down syndrome (Ratz, 2013). There is some evidence that, because of the visual memory strength of children with Down syndrome, there is the possibility that word recognition is a relative strength and the first steps for them in reading. This strength can be the reason that the fluency and accuracy of children with Down syndrome is at a higher level than what would be expected from their general reading skills (Naess, Lervag, Hulme, & Lyster, 2012). Learning sight words and recalling those sight words involves the rote process. Although children with Down syndrome have better visual memory and are better with visual learning, limiting instruction to rote memory of sight-words can prohibit the learning by these children (Cologon, 2013). Using the visual strength of children with Down syndrome helps them to begin as logographic readers, but they should not be limited to just this whole-word approach.

Phonological awareness is another piece in learning to read, and is part of reading development in children with Down syndrome (Burgoyne, 2009). Phonological awareness is

“becoming aware of the sounds within spoken words” (Clay, 2016, p. 92). Short-term memory and verbal memory are limitations that need to be considered when working on and assessing phonological awareness in children with Down syndrome (Fletcher & Buckley, 2002). Most of these children can learn phonological awareness, but it is more difficult than other reading strategies because of specific limitations in their learning profile (Naess et al., 2012). There is evidence that early phonological awareness instruction helps children with Down syndrome learn and “should include rhyme, syllable, and phoneme awareness” (Naess, 2016, p. 186). Understanding the strengths and limitations of phonological awareness in children with Down syndrome should be considered, when teaching children with Down syndrome to read.

Orthographic knowledge has not been researched with typically developing children or children with Down syndrome as deeply as phonological awareness, but it has enough importance in reading skills to be included in the discussion (Loveall & Conners, 2016). Orthographic knowledge is the understanding of word sounds and putting them down in written form (Conrad, Harris, & Williams, 2013). Children with Down syndrome are stronger with word specific orthographic knowledge than general orthographic knowledge (Loveall & Conners, 2016). As mentioned previously, short-term memory is a deficit in children with Down syndrome. Repeated exposure to skills helps to transfer knowledge from short-term to long-term memory. The amount of exposure that children with Down syndrome have to orthographic skills and writing will solidify their understanding of these skills (Conrad et al., 2013). Orthographic knowledge is connected to phonological awareness, and for children with Down syndrome must be taught explicitly while taking their strengths and challenges into consideration.

Word recognition and phonological awareness are key pieces for beginning readers, but readers then advance to the more complex part of reading: comprehension. Listening comprehension is the understanding of oral texts, and reading comprehension is the understanding of written texts (Roch, Florit, & Levorato, 2012). Children with Down syndrome have lower scores than typically developing children in both reading and listening comprehension (Laws, Brown, & Main, 2016). Comprehension is the main goal of both listening and reading, and is an important part of being autonomous and a reader.

Listening comprehension occurs regularly throughout the day for all types of learners. There are spoken directions, oral stories, and spontaneous conversation, to name a few. In all of these situations, listening, processing, and comprehending are necessary steps. Children with Down syndrome have verbal short-term memory challenges, which cause challenges with listening comprehension (Levorato, Roch, & Florit, 2011). Holding onto a large string of information is a challenge, and the strategies must be taught. Assessment of listening comprehension is affected by expressive language and verbal memory, so these must be taken into consideration when assessing listening comprehension of children with Down syndrome (Roch et al., 2012). Children with Down syndrome tend to have stronger receptive language than expressive language for various reasons, so simply assessing in a manner that includes oral response and verbal memory, two of their deficits, would not provide accurate information. When working with children with Down syndrome, it is necessary to support their listening with visuals in order to increase their listening comprehension.

Reading comprehension is also lower in children with Down syndrome than in typically developing children, but is more of a strength than listening comprehension (Roch & Levorato, 2009). Children with Down syndrome have similar profiles to students considered poor comprehenders: poor language skills, limited vocabulary, and challenges with memory skills (Burgoyne, 2009). The evidence suggests that language level can make a difference on reading comprehension (Nash & Heath, 2011). Low language level will make a negative difference and a higher language level will make a positive difference. Vocabulary abilities are linked to the ability to learn to read (Hulme et al., 2012). The stronger the vocabulary strengths of children with Down syndrome, the better the reading growth (Steele, Scerif, Cornish, & Karmiloff-Smith, 2013). The visual memory of children with Down syndrome and the amount of processing resources necessary for the task affect reading comprehension. Visual memory is a strength

and has a positive effect on reading comprehension, whereas the higher the need for processing, the more negative effect on reading comprehension (Roch & Levorato, 2009). Reading comprehension is possible with children with Down syndrome.

While assessing children with Down syndrome and building intervention plans for their reading, all areas of the children and their reading profile must be considered and created specifically for those with the syndrome (Steele et al., 2013). Children with Down syndrome have a relative strength in word recognition because of their visual memory strength. There has been a pattern of using only the whole-word approach to teach reading to children with Down syndrome (Baylis & Snowling, 2012), but we should not limit their learning by offering only one strategy (Cologon, 2013). Phonological awareness training can make a difference for reading progress in children with Down syndrome (Baylis & Snowling, 2012), particularly in word recognition and decoding skills (Mengoni, Nash, & Hulme, 2014). Orthographic knowledge is stronger for actual word recognition than non-word reading (Loveall & Connors, 2016), so we should build the orthographic knowledge of real words by children with Down syndrome. While building a strong base of word recognition, phonological awareness, and orthographic knowledge, intervention plans must also incorporate reading comprehension. Listening, reading, discussing, and writing about a text will build vocabulary, word recognition, and receptive and expressive language skills while improving reading comprehension (Baylis & Snowling, 2012). All of these components must be part of an intervention plan for children with Down syndrome.

Teacher training for mainstream teachers does not include a significant amount of special education content. Down syndrome is an extremely prevalent genetic cause for learning disabilities (Hulme et al., 2012), so it is important that both teachers in training and practising teachers be provided with the information on how to teach reading to children with Down syndrome (Cologon, 2013). Having a support team for the children and the regular classroom teacher will help to provide what is needed for these children to learn and the teachers to teach them (Oelwein, 2009). Teachers in training and practising teachers must have training on how to teach reading to children with Down syndrome.

In conclusion, word recognition, phonological awareness, orthographic knowledge, and reading comprehension must specifically be taught to all children, but in particular to children with Down syndrome in a way that is conducive to their reading and learning profile. Teacher education must include the different ways to intervene in reading for children with Down syndrome because of the prevalence of these children in our regular stream classrooms. Successfully teaching children with Down syndrome to read provides them an effective mode of communication, which in turn supports their inclusion in society, their contribution to society, and their autonomy.

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### **About the Author**

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## Reconciliation in the Classroom

Colleen Warrington

### Abstract

*Canada is beginning to work toward reconciliation with Indigenous people. Serious mistakes have been made in the educational system which have led Canada to the current situation in which relationships with Indigenous people are in need of repair. This paper outlines the ways in which classroom teachers are integral to the reconciliation process through relationships, physical spaces, and lesson content. Through personal relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, culturally inclusive physical spaces, and curricular content that includes Indigenous perspectives, classroom teachers will contribute to reconciliation with Indigenous people in Canada.*

### Reconciliation in the Classroom

Canada is venturing down a path toward reconciliation in which educators play an integral role “to restore mutual respect between individuals from different cultural backgrounds” (Dion, 2016, p. 472). Considering the education system was a primary weapon in the European settlers’ attempt to destroy Indigenous<sup>2</sup> culture, it is the most suitable instrument to begin to rectify the egregious errors of the past. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC, 2015) recognizes the role of the education system in this process and lists Calls to Action numbers 6 through 12 under the umbrella of education (pp. 320-321). Classroom teachers will contribute to moving our country toward reconciliation by establishing and maintaining meaningful, respectful relationships with Indigenous students and their families, encouraging mutually respectful relationships between all students, creating classroom environments that meet the needs of Indigenous students, and delivering culturally relevant curriculum that includes Indigenous perspectives and an understanding of Canadian history from both the settlers’ and Indigenous people’s points of view. In their classrooms, teachers will set the stage for healing the damaged relationships with Canada’s Indigenous people and make reconciliation possible.

### Relationships

The relationships with Indigenous people, formed and facilitated by classroom teachers, are essential prerequisites to reconciliation. Relationships between educators and Indigenous students, educators, and Indigenous community members (including a student’s family<sup>3</sup> and Elders), as well as relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous<sup>4</sup> youth, are imperative when working toward reconciliation. Relationships with students, families, and communities are a priority to create positive school experiences for Indigenous students (Preston, Claypool, Rowluck, & Green, 2017). Through such relationships, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people will come to a place of mutual acceptance, respect, and understanding, which will facilitate the healing necessary for reconciliation to begin.

Nurturing, respectful relationships between teachers and Indigenous students contribute immensely to the reconciliation process in two ways. First, the relationships themselves are valuable in their own right, fostering a feeling of belonging and a positive attitude toward school

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<sup>2</sup> “The term ‘Indigenous’ is meant to respect the diversity of Indigenous nations, whether or not they are recognized by the Canadian state” (4Rs Youth Movement, 2017, p. 5).

<sup>3</sup> The word “family” is meant to include all caregivers in a student’s life.

<sup>4</sup> The term “non-Indigenous” is used “to respect the diverse peoples and communities living in Canada that are not Indigenous to these lands” (4Rs Youth Movement, 2017, p. 5).

in general. Second, the relationships lead to increased engagement in education, which results in higher academic achievement levels for Indigenous students. Positive relationships will be a factor in reconciliation by ensuring that school is a positive, successful experience for Indigenous students, unlike the negative experiences that many Indigenous people endured in schools of the past.

Caring personal relationships between teachers and Indigenous students are valuable first steps on the path to reconciliation in Canada because they instill a sense of belonging and emotional well-being in the students. Teachers' interactions with students have great influence on the students' sense of belonging in school (MacIver, 2012), and Indigenous students must know that they are important contributors to the school community (Gunn, Pomahac, Striker, & Tailfeathers, 2010). In addition to relationships contributing to Indigenous students' sense of belonging, when teachers truly get to know their students and build relationships with them, the students feel accepted for who they are and understand that they are cared for and appreciated. Authentic relationships between teachers and Indigenous students will create a "healthy, supportive school climate that affirms the identity and heritage of Native youth" (Lee & Quijada Cerecer, 2010, pp. 204-205). Indigenous students need to feel nurtured, respected, and understood by classroom teachers, and have positive relationships with educators that provide a sense of belonging to the school and society as a whole, in order to begin laying the groundwork for reconciliation.

Relationships based on mutual respect, trust, and genuine caring between teachers and Indigenous students significantly influence student attitudes, engagement, and therefore academic success. Teachers who demonstrate caring and communicate clearly the belief that all students are capable of learning promote Indigenous student success (Toulouse, 2011). In casual, friendly conversations, teachers learn about their students' interests and lives outside school. The personal connection with a teacher creates a positive school experience for the student. In addition, the teacher can make school more engaging for the student by incorporating aspects of the student's life outside school into lessons. With increased engagement in, and positivity toward, school comes increased Indigenous student success. Positive attitudes toward school and engagement in lessons translate into greater academic success, leading to an increased number of Indigenous graduates with the skills needed to become leaders and positive role models in society. These leaders and positive role models will guide Canadians down the path to reconciliation.

Personal relationships between school personnel and Indigenous community members are important as well as those between teachers and students. The relationships between educators and community members will not only convey to Indigenous students that their community and family are valued by the school and mainstream society, but will demonstrate to community members that they are accepted and valued as well. Relationships with the students' families are important because "parent and family involvement in the teaching and learning experiences of children is without a doubt the most critical component affecting student motivation, success, and achievement" (Manitoba Education and Training, 2017, para. 8). In order for Indigenous family members to support classroom and school activities, personal relationships must be present between them and their child(ren)'s classroom teacher. The classroom teacher must be perceived as a human being who understands his or her students and their families, rather than as an employee of a system that attempted to destroy Indigenous culture in the past. Relationships such as these stem from personal interactions that occur naturally when a classroom teacher makes a conscious effort to build connections with students' families. Connections can be made by attending community events, arranging social visits to students' homes or meeting for coffee, personal invitations to attend school functions, positive phone calls or notes home, social media contact, and casual conversations in the community. When a family member has a personal connection with the classroom teacher, he or she will be more likely to support the teacher in helping the child with homework, volunteering at the school, and communicating respectfully if conflicts arise. Relationships between Indigenous families and

teachers will lead to increased involvement in, and support of, the educational system. Involvement in the educational system will begin to heal wounds inflicted by this system in the past, and will empower Indigenous people to take increased ownership of the education of their youth, setting the stage for reconciliation.

Relationships with Indigenous community members are essential for teachers to lead future generations toward reconciliation. Relationships with Elders in the community are especially significant because Elders are highly respected people in the Indigenous community who have extensive knowledge about Indigenous culture and worldviews (Toulouse, 2011). Once relationships have been established, community members share valuable Indigenous knowledge, speak up to correct misconceptions about Indigenous culture, and actively participate in guiding the educational system. Local Indigenous people have the knowledge to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are accurately represented in schools and will contribute to shaping the educational system if these relationships exist.

Relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, based on mutual respect and understanding, are important as well as those between educators and Indigenous people. A positive school social environment that is “free from racism, bullying and other forms of oppression” (National Panel, 2017, p. 43) is essential for student success. In addition to zero tolerance policies regarding racism and bullying, classroom teachers must ensure that the classroom and school environment are conducive to developing respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. This can be done by creating opportunities for social interaction such as strategic seating plans, inviting mixed groupings of students for “lunch with the teacher,” and assigning groups for projects that require Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to spend time with each other and work together. Opportunities to share personal stories through show and tell, sharing circles, and class discussions also help students to see one another as individuals. Respectful interactions can be modelled through conflict resolution strategies that require those involved to share their perceptions of the conflict and to collaborate in order to come to a solution or plan for the future. Through facilitating respectful, open relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, teachers shape the interactions of future generations. While working toward reconciliation for generations to come, it is important for our future leaders to have built and maintained respectful relationships with each other.

Reconciliation is possible only if Indigenous people are respected equals in society, and relationships established in Canada’s classrooms set the stage for this equality to be recognized. Education must not be perceived as something imposed upon the students in a classroom, but something everyone is working toward as a team, with each participant sharing individual strengths and knowledge, and learning from other members. This collaborative approach to education is possible only when mutually respectful relationships have been established to ensure that all parties feel valued as individuals and know that their contributions are appreciated.

### **Classroom Environment**

To be instrumental in the process of reconciliation, classroom teachers must create inclusive learning spaces designed for Indigenous student success. In creating such a space, educators must pay close attention to the physical appearance of schools and classrooms, instructional techniques employed, knowledge valued, and classroom management style. It is important for teachers to understand the perspectives and needs of Indigenous students (MacIver, 2012). The current educational system is modelled on a European approach to learning, and “Western models of education continue to be imposed on Aboriginal peoples throughout Canada” (Van Ingen & Halas, 2006, p. 380). For reconciliation to begin, teachers must examine schools and classrooms from an Indigenous perspective and make the changes necessary to ensure that learning spaces are inclusive.

Students must see themselves and their culture reflected in the school in order to feel as if they truly belong in the space. This feeling of belonging and pride in one's culture takes precedence over academics in the classroom (Gunn et al., 2011). Classroom teachers must ensure that posters and displays include culturally significant images and content. Pictures and information about the Seven Teachings, biographies and photos of local band council members, and displays of Indigenous artwork are some examples of how a culturally relevant environment for Indigenous students can be created. When Indigenous students see themselves and their culture represented in a celebratory and respectful way, they will begin to feel a sense of belonging and pride.

When educating with the goal of reconciliation in mind, teachers must employ instructional methods that suit the learning styles of Indigenous students. Indigenous ways of learning are different from the Western ways on which the current system in Canada was modelled, in that they are based on "a four-dimensional approach balanced to meet the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual needs of the learner" (Neeganagwedgin, 2013, p. 18). Teachers must consciously plan lessons and activities that address the needs of the whole child (Manitoba Education and Youth, 2003), and recognize that although this is typically considered an Indigenous philosophy of education, this approach is beneficial to all students, not only to those who are Indigenous.

Indigenous culture, knowledge, worldviews, and contributions to society must be acknowledged and celebrated in the classroom. To the detriment of Canadian society, the educational system has consistently conveyed the message that Indigenous people, along with their knowledge, ways of life, and contributions to society, matter less than those of the settlers and their descendants do. This omission of Indigenous perspectives in mainstream public education is evidenced by the fact that many Canadians are ignorant of the contributions of Indigenous people to society (TRC, 2015), and through the numerous misconceptions many people have about Indigenous people and their way of life. Indigenous students often have to disregard their traditional knowledge to succeed in the current Euro-centric school system (Neeganagwedgin, 2011), causing Indigenous students to feel that they must choose between being themselves and being successful in school. Indigenous students must see themselves and their culture represented in a respectful way in lessons and class activities, and non-Indigenous students must learn to value and appreciate Indigenous knowledge and culture, in order to begin moving toward reconciliation.

Daily classroom experiences must be culturally inclusive. The communication style used in the classroom, daily routines, behaviour expectations, and the ways in which discipline issues are handled must reflect Indigenous beliefs rather than remaining solely Euro-centric. According to traditional Indigenous beliefs, "children are complete human beings given as gifts from the Great Spirit on loan to adults" (Kanu, 2014, p. 81) and must always be treated with dignity and respect. Teachers can demonstrate respect for students by engaging in conversations with students about the content being taught, rather than lecturing on the topic, in order to show students that their ideas matter and will be heard. In addition to their need for respect, Indigenous students have also identified the desire to be treated with firmness and warmth from their teachers (Kanu, 2014). When students are treated firmly, they receive the message that the teacher is paying attention to them and making an effort to correct behaviour as needed in order for them to succeed. Students also realize when they are held to high standards of behaviour, the teacher believes in their abilities. The Seven Teachings provide excellent guidelines for acceptable classroom behaviour as well as an opportunity to infuse Indigenous culture in daily school life (McFee, 2015). Following these guidelines aligns school beliefs with Indigenous beliefs, creating a culturally inclusive environment. Discipline issues must be dealt with by using Indigenous methods of conflict resolution, which focus on restoring harmony rather than on punishing individuals (Jacobs, 2013). Classrooms that are inclusive of Indigenous culture will begin building the road to reconciliation by creating learning spaces that meet the needs of all students.

Inclusive learning spaces are essential to the reconciliation process. Classrooms are mini-societies in which the future adult citizens of Canada learn to interact with each other. Canada's classrooms must be places that reinforce the value of Indigenous people and all aspects of their culture, including their knowledge, learning styles, and beliefs. When students are educated in such an environment, Indigenous and non-Indigenous students will develop mutual understanding and respect. This understanding and respect will make reconciliation possible in Canada's future.

### **Curricular Content**

The final component of education that leads to reconciliation is curricular content. It is inequitable that "Indigenous people and their cultures have been undermined and supplanted in the curriculum with lies or by distortions through both omission and commission" (Neeganagwedgin, 2013, p. 24) throughout Canada's history. To achieve reconciliation, students must learn an accurate and non-biased version of Canada's history and understand how it has transpired that Indigenous people are marginalized in their own homeland. In summarizing the TRC's Calls to Action regarding education, Vowel (2016) wrote:

Remember, the TRC did not call for only the residential-school legacy to be taught to all people in Canada. Learning about the treaties and the historic and contemporary contributions of Indigenous peoples is also vital if Canadians are ever going to achieve a base level of knowledge necessary to enter into any form of "new relationship" with us. (p. 178)

The lessons taught in classrooms, and the curriculum in general, must adhere to the TRC's Calls to Action and educate truthfully in order to make reconciliation possible.

The curriculum must include Treaty Education and an accurate account of Canadian history, including the facts surrounding residential schools and their continued legacy. Future generations must understand the experiences of Indigenous people with colonization, in order to ensure that the errors of the past are not repeated and to participate empathetically in the healing process. Treaty Education is a key component to understanding Canada's history, and, as such, is a critical aspect of beginning the journey to reconciliation. All students deserve "to know about treaties, the Indian Act, the development of the reserve system, the history of residential schools, and importantly the ongoing implications of this history for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada today" (Dion, 2016, p. 472). A clear understanding of Canada's history is important because "when all students – as well as educators – learn about our shared history in a balanced and respectful way, big steps on the path to reconciliation are taken" (Canadians for a New Partnership, 2017, p. 10). The foundation for the understanding and respect necessary for reconciliation is factual historical knowledge learned in Canada's classrooms.

In order to heal from events in Canada's history that damaged the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, there needs to be an understanding of how Canadian society came to be in a position of needing reconciliation so desperately. The school curriculum must no longer teach from a solely European viewpoint, but must include Indigenous perspectives as well. Teachers must realize that the European way of education is not the only way, and learn to accept a different truth than what has been traditionally presented by Canada's educational system. Through adjusting the curriculum to include an accurate portrayal of Canadian history and including Indigenous perspectives, the understanding necessary to reconciliation will develop.

### **Conclusion**

Reconciliation in Canada is dependent upon the relationships, curriculum, and environments in the nation's classrooms. Educators shoulder much responsibility in the reconciliation process because "education has brought us to the current state of poor relations

between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country, but education holds the key to making things better” (Sinclair, 2014, p. 7). Trusting, respectful relationships are a key component to setting the stage for reconciliation and must be established with individual students and Indigenous community members in order to move toward reconciliation. The content taught in classrooms must validate Indigenous identities and perspectives, and impress upon all Canadians that Indigenous people are valued and appreciated members of our society. The physical environments of schools and classrooms must reflect Indigenous culture, in order to communicate to all Canadians the value of Indigenous people and to ensure that Indigenous people feel valued in these spaces. Relationships, curricular content, and learning environment are interconnected aspects of classrooms that will pave the way for reconciliation in Canada.

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# **Staff Collaboration for Student Success: Implementation Challenges of Professional Learning Communities and Response to Intervention**

**Deanna Henderson**

## **Abstract**

*A staff's ability to positively influence student learning potential depends on the attitudes of individual staff members toward change, a positive school culture, access to appropriate professional development, and most importantly, administration that is able to provide time in flexible and creative ways. Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Response to Intervention (RTI) can provide strong learner supports, if used effectively within a school.*

An educator's main goal is to ensure that all students learn required curriculum outcomes. However, no educator can provide all necessary supports for all learners. Using Professional Learning Communities (PLC) and Response to Intervention (RTI), staff work collaboratively to provide core instruction, scaffold at-risk learners, and build a community culture of learning. Collaboration requires a positive culture, collective purpose, open-minded staff, time, and appropriate professional development (PD) with administrative supports. Only through collaboration can staff guide all learners on their journey to reach their educational potential.

## **Professional Learning Communities**

PLCs are groups of educators working together with a collective purpose of high student achievement. PLCs are one response to the increasing demands to meet student needs despite strained resources and dissatisfaction with traditional methods of teaching and assessing. Educators have been forced to find more efficient methods to identify and respond to learner needs collectively (McIntosh et al., 2011). In response to systemic changes, educators have created PLCs to develop a shared vision for each school community, to act as a rudder to steer staff through unfamiliar and rough waters (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2007).

Teachers can not reach each student alone. Only a team effort will be successful (Vatakis, 2016). Each PLC must establish its guiding principles and core outcomes for instruction, with the addition of RTI to ensure that all students in their care meet the educational expectations of the school. With a collective purpose, or a sense of ownership, within a school students will reach their potential by using RTI strategies (Buffum, Mattos, & Weber, 2012).

## **Response to Intervention**

RTI is not a set system or special education program for schools to follow, but research-based interventions within tiers of instruction. It is a continuum of supports that begins with core instruction for all learners. Students who experience challenges with core instruction are offered secondary supplemental evidence-based interventions. Struggling individuals requiring additional, more intensive, interventions are often identified as having a learning disability, but all students benefit from RTI strategies (Martinez & Young, 2011; Vatakis, 2016; Williams & Hierck, 2015).

RTI originally focused on reading intervention with students identified for special education, but has evolved into a belief that all students, with interventions, will achieve outcomes in all subject areas. RTI begins with staff identification of clear core instructional goals. For example, staff will identify essential outcomes, which they believe all students must achieve to meet grade level expectations or to earn a specific credit. A PLC group may function initially to carefully

deliberate essential outcome identification. This may be initially time consuming, but will focus later efforts. Periodic assessment of skills, followed by a focused response of re-teaching or scaffolding, minimizes the possibility that a student would be left behind or have gaps in knowledge (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010; Stuart, Rinaldi, & Higgins-Averill, 2011). Students who are struggling to learn the essential outcomes would receive one-on-one or small-group instruction focused on specific outcomes. Each school must shape the RTI system by using strategies that best suit their school culture and goals, using the tiers of instruction as a template not simply in the area of reading instruction.

### **Building a Positive School Culture**

A common defining element of PLC and RTI implementation at a school is its culture. The culture of a school is created by the history, values, beliefs, symbols, and stories within the building (Muhammad, 2009). This evolving culture can be positive or toxic. A positive culture has ideals of caring and a sense of shared responsibility among staff. All staff must share a belief that every child can and will learn. For this learning to happen, all staff must organize in a shared quest while considering the viewpoints of all. Staff who are unable to establish a shared vision create an obstacle to learning (Williams & Hierck, 2015). Different viewpoints, however, should not prevent forward movement. Strong advocates will steer forward even if they must battle against the current.

A dysfunctional school culture will create a system that maintains a learning gap and creates a toxic environment. If the culture of the school is not positive, it will be an obstacle for staff and students (Muhammad, 2009). Often, staff must battle against established institutional beliefs about what their school and students can achieve. For example, staff may be unable to work cohesively because of a perceived distinction between elementary and secondary staff. Staff may blame other staff members for the weakness of student achievements. The staff is not yet ready to work collectively until they are united in working together. A healthy school culture has staff, with a positive collective focus and purpose, who share a common vocabulary to have hard conversations. A staff climate built on trust, respect, and a willingness to share is the foundation for collaboration (Jappinen et al., 2016). A school's culture must be a positive shared vision of growth for PLCs and RTI to be successful and to avoid a toxic environment for staff and students.

### **Teachers' Attitudes Toward Change**

True collaboration of staff requires a varied staff to build a united school culture and structure despite individual strengths, weaknesses, and opinions (Buffum et al., 2012). If staff collectively have a purpose, they can act as a true compass for a school to follow toward improvement. Individual teachers can not be forced into creating a culture. Personal conflicts must be addressed through difficult conversations about what needs to be done for students. If a teacher opts out of the process, that teacher's students are not supported by the knowledge and skills of the entire school team. Staff members must be accountable and united as a part of their school's culture. Some staff may need to see results of change before they will commit to the process. Through sharing of positive outcomes and open reflection, change can be seen as being purposeful and towards improvement.

Educators' personal attitudes toward change influence the structure of collaborative groups and school culture (Muhammad, 2009). Most educators can be labeled as believers or fundamentalists. Believers have a positive view of change and are engaged daily in their quest for student success. They build a positive climate because they have high expectations for students, are committed to their jobs, and are open to learning and to implementing new strategies. Believers still need to be informed on best practices, because good intentions only are inadequate for optimal teaching (Buffum et al., 2012). Collaborative groups need to be led

by believers with a strong voice that can overpower the challenging voices. The attitude of an educator is important for change to happen.

Contrary to believers are the teachers who resist, and actively challenge change. Fundamentalists may want to protect their own views or simply do not want to change what they are doing (Muhammad, 2009). They are satisfied with what is already happening in their classrooms. For staff to collaborate, they must find a way to convince fundamentalists that change is necessary. A clear and objective appeal, from a person of trust, for change with evidence showing data, statistics, and research may show fundamentalists that change is necessary. Fundamentalists need professional development, strict monitoring, and trust building with their leaders and fellow staff. Believers must find a way to bring fundamentalists into the group so that they will “buy in” to change. A staff member may avoid attending PLC meetings and choose to not participate. However, if the educator sees a positive result of PLC and RTI, they may be more willing to try new ideas for the benefit of their students and to be “on board.” The fundamentalist maybe a challenge in the school, but will not deter change

Once staff have established a shared positive belief-based culture of collective responsibility, the school plans and reflects on how PLCs and RTI will be implemented (Williams & Hierck, 2015). The PLC establishes clear direction of student learning goals, universal assessment, and data usage for information sharing. When individual teachers use their own discretion to plan, it may lead to ineffective teaching practices and reduced teacher collaboration. Collective responsibility establishes a clear set of goals and procedures.

### **Time for Collaboration**

To accomplish planning and direction, collaboration requires appropriate scheduling and time (International Reading Association, 2010). Appropriate scheduling provides teachers time to meet during their contract hours with like-minded staff to outline evidence-based interventions concerning duration, frequency, and length of intervention sessions that apply to the scenario of a particular school (National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). Depending on the size of the school, PLC groups may be organized by grade level groups, subject area groups, or, in the case of a small school, with a vertical structure. A small school vertical structure group may include all Language Arts (LA) teachers from grades seven to twelve. At a larger high school, a PLC/RTI group may include only Grade 10 LA teachers, for example. However, often staff are not given time for collaboration. Time could be scheduled by overlapping prep times or with substitute coverage. Time, unfortunately, requires funding often not available (Katz & Sugden, 2013). A survey done in 2002 found that only one in five high school teachers regularly met to share ideas and instructional methods (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2007). Appropriate scheduling must be considered in order to make time for planning conversations.

Administrators must find creative ways to schedule collaborative time into staff schedules. Staff are not always available or willing to meet outside of school hours. One school implemented a Buddy Day system to provide a cost-free alternative to the use of substitute teacher time for class coverage during collaboration times (Ferguson, 2013). PLC meetings were held during the day for specific teacher groups. Another classroom teacher supervised the classes of the participating teachers. Teachers involved in the PLC were able to collaborate without sacrificing teaching time. However, the teachers who were called upon to supervise additional students complained of problems with the workload. Without additional funding, schools must find alternatives or be creative in finding time to collaborate.

RTI also requires flexibility or reform to school scheduling, particularly in high school scenarios, because the typical structure limits time for collaboration. It is more difficult for instructors to connect across different curriculums. Traditionally, high school teachers taught subjects, rather than students, and it is, therefore, more difficult to build collective responsibility. Successful schools can, with a strong leader, schedule collaboration time into the schedule for experimentation, reflection, peer observation, and assessment or feedback discussions to

increase teacher confidence in the necessity of collaboration (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2007). Some high schools, for example, have scheduled half days, or delayed start days to accommodate planning. Summer institutes or meetings provide teachers time to plan, but they still need time throughout the school year.

Students requiring additional supports need in-house leaders who use shared standards, vocabulary, and conversations despite different curriculum areas. Teachers need scheduled time designated for collaboration in addition to their preparation and teaching times. Collaboration must be embedded in the contract day. Meetings must be mandatory, have ground rules for expectations and behaviour, and occur frequently to be effective (Buffum, et al., 2012; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2007). Meetings need to be a time of productive conversations. Without change in scheduling, there will be no time to design collaboration.

A well-designed RTI system should be effective for about 80% of students (Harlacher, Potter, & Weber, 2014; National Center on Response to Intervention, 2010). Students moving through the RTI process into the third tier, more intensive, or tertiary level, are those students who may have a learning disability and require special education services. Initially, RTI was based on a preventative model to reduce the disproportionate numbers of minorities within special education. It was an alternative approach to determining eligibility for learning disability services, but has evolved into an initiative that focuses on optimized instruction or inclusion for all students by using research-based practices that are proven to work with most students (International Reading Association, 2010).

RTI can delay or even prevent a special education referral, and supports inclusion (Martinez & Young, 2011). RTI is comparable to Universal Design for Learning (UDL), because it also requires collaboration, which expects all students to learn through differentiation or necessary scaffolding through a three-block model or tiers of learning. Learners may be in different tiers depending on the academic areas. A student who is strong in literacy may need significant supports in numeracy. Each student was be considered individually, but improved instructional practice supports all learners (Katz & Sugden, 2013). RTI can be considered as an additional scaffold for inclusion and provide all learners with equal opportunities, if all staff are properly trained.

### **Professional Development**

To function within PLC and RTI parameters, staff need appropriate professional development (PD) and to feel competent in their RTI abilities. Teachers must be trained to use assessments effectively, to interpret data to monitor progress, and to adjust their instructions as needed (Dexter & Hughes, 2017). Some concepts may be difficult to track, and RTI requires frequent comparison of a student's expected and actual rate of learning. Monitoring helps teachers be accountable and make informed instructional choices for appropriate instruction (Dexter & Hughes, 2017).

Direct teacher training, either in-house sharing or outside consultation, on specific focus areas uniquely required by a school such as specific math or LA interventions, will improve an educator's self-perceived RTI skills and increase efficiency and collaboration (Castillo et al., 2016). In my school division, all resource teachers and school administration teams have been trained in PLC and RTI. The division has committed to training all staff over the next three years at significant cost. These leaders share their new ideas with individual school staff members to design their own unique PLC and RTI plan. PD is required for competence in RTI and it must be a financial priority.

### **Conclusion**

Collaboration is vital for a school's success. No single teacher has all of the resources necessary to change his/her school. Available time and strained resources require staff to

consider new strategies to collaborate effectively. Using PLC and RTI ideals, educators can work together to see all students reach their potential. Educators must build a positive school culture, find a shared purpose, be willing to change, find planning and reflection time, and attend relevant PD for collaboration to work. An atmosphere of trust and respect along with assertive administration may create a culture of openness to change. PLCs and RTI can act as a guiding rudder against the current. Without a rudder of purpose, educators are rowing a boat without a paddle, aimlessly drifting on the tides of change.

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# **Urgent Attention: Damage to Teenagers' Online Reputation**

**Shengqing Wang**

## **Abstract**

*Past decades witnessed increasing background checks via social media conducted by post-secondary education institutions' admission offices and human resources departments for many companies. As the most active users, adolescents may be tempted to share their personal lives on social media without fully understanding the long-term consequences. The author makes suggestions on how to help teenagers make wise choices when they use social media, maintain positive online persona, protect it from potential damage, and even further strengthen their online reputation.*

When high schools employ social media as a way to implement teaching activities, the students use social media in their self-learning. Teenagers tend to be fast learners about technologies. However, as they become more involved in online communication, their teachers have reason to become concerned about issues such as cellphone addiction and falling grades because of computer games, misuse of iPads in classrooms, and so on. Adolescents' online reputation damage and the reasons for it are the problems that we need to address.

## **Problems Associated with a Negative Online Reputation**

The consequences of online reputation damage can be serious. Online reputation damage can have a significant negative effect on students' college applications, job applications, career development, and self-identity. Personal information can easily be obtained by using search engines and, to a certain degree, conclusions about individual applicants' personalities are made by employers looking online (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). An increasing number of employers use profiles and postings on social media to select potential employees. Postings on social media such as Twitter can accurately show a person's tendencies or personality (Orehek & Human, 2017). Employers view applicants' profile information and postings as supplemental information to resumés before interviews. They may also view candidates' Twitter remarks after interviews, in order to see further comments made by candidates about their interviews (Higginbotham, 2017). Several Canadian medical schools check students' profiles as part of the admission procedure (Law, Mylopoulos, Veinot, Miller, & Hanson, 2016). Any negativity, bias, cruelty, lewdness, or rude social trait can be displayed to the world online. Therefore, fully understanding the importance of an online reputation is urgent for our students.

Online reputation can be damaged by clumsy language usage, inappropriate words, personalities revealed by online messages, and misbehaviour. Profiles and postings with spelling and grammar mistakes may affect job interview impressions (Higginbotham, 2017). Other ongoing postings or messages that are closely associated with personal lives can truly present a person's personality and values (Park et al., 2015). Misbehaviors online such as swearing, bigotry, nasty pictures, and sexual insults, or posting negative accounts, could prohibit job hunting and college applications as well (Van Ouytsel, Walrave, & Ponnet, 2014). However, many adolescents post their comments without apparent concern for the consequences. Some teenagers have been suspended (Cambria, 2012) or taken away by police (Bernardo, 2017) because of statements on social networking sites. These suspensions and arrests will inevitably have a significant effect on their career lives, but students often do not fully understand the power of words on social media and the damage that can bring to their and others' lives.

Another underlying reason is that teenagers seem determined to share personal information and can be unaware of the dangers and long-term consequences of oversharing.

Researchers found that 73% of adolescents use social media every day (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014). The most popular social media they use are Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Myspace, and Tumblr. Teenagers may be obsessed with sharing online because they want to maintain good relationships with peers and further their psychological development by getting instant feedback or attention from others (Steinfeld, Ellison, & Lampe, 2008). Social media is a primary way to “enhance communication among friends and family . . . to maintain social contact outside of their day-to-day face-to-face conversations” (Bryant et al., 2006, as cited in Barnes, 2012, p. 108). Therefore, it is crucial to help teenagers understand the importance of an online reputation and what the consequences can be, if it is bad.

Compared to 43% of employers who decided not to hire certain employees because of the information they found online, around 19% of managers decided to hire certain candidates because of the information they found online (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014). Therefore, job hunters can increase the possibility of being hired by making certain postings. Because Internet users spend years on creating and maintaining their ongoing digital footprint, teachers can encourage students to protect and strengthen their online reputation as early as possible, and in this way, they can increase their future employment opportunities.

### **Creating a Positive Online Reputation**

The key aspects of improving teenagers’ online reputation can be listed as follows: case studies and seminars, core netiquettes, Internet skills, and multiple positive online profiles. In order to stimulate students’ awareness of protecting and strengthening their online reputation, schools need to provide case studies and seminars about online reputation management for both teachers and students, including inquiry into the motivational factors that impel people to post personal information online. Teachers’ online behaviour has great influence on students’ ways of using social networking sites (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014). Students tend to follow teachers’ examples. A case study is one of the best ways to bring teachers and students into an in-depth discussion. Only when teachers are aware of the risks of online reputation damage and negative consequences, can they teach students, give students appropriate suggestions, and set a positive example for teenagers. Some students may think they have nothing to hide, but they fail to understand that not everything about their lives is appropriate for everyone all of the time, such as the new tattoo they have, who they go out with, where they went, their religious life, and their political opinions. Some things that they believe awesome when they are young may seem in the opposite way when they approach adulthood. During seminars, the teacher can show students some fictional postings in terms of their school life, relationships, work experience, family, religious life, and political comments. Students can be divided into groups. They can discuss what is appropriate, what is not appropriate for postings online, and the reasons for their choices. Those activities can shed a light on their future online behavior and help them to make wise decisions.

Learning and following core netiquette is another way of protecting and strengthening online reputation. Some of the core netiquettes are civility, respect, and responsibility (Barnes, 2012). We should treat people how they want to be treated. Students need to understand that they should treat people nicely online, as well as in their life experiences. Teenagers most of the time do not ask for permission before they post videos or pictures about others. Teenagers may need to change their names when they become older in order to get rid of hijinks stored on others’ social media sites (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014). Teenagers need to know the necessity of asking for others’ consent before they put others’ information online. Also, using standard grammar and correct spelling is an essential part of showing respect to others, especially when they send an email. Students need to follow appropriate format, send emails with a meaningful subject, address the receiver appropriately, keep emails’ content clear, direct and concise, and make sure that they proofread before they click send. Furthermore, students need to know the power of words online, and they need to be responsible for what they put online. A girl

committed suicide because of others' negative comments on her (Barnes, 2012). All of the words, such as personal information, moments, messages, and even email, to some extent are public to anyone all of the time. The Internet allows people to view, follow, screenshot, copy, edit, share, retrieve, and forward information with one tap. Following netiquettes is the basic way for students to protect themselves and others in the online environment, now and as technology continues to change their online identities over time.

Teachers can show students how to use social media settings appropriately to protect themselves, how to search themselves online, and introduce some useful resources to them. People who have a higher level of Internet skills are less likely to suffer the negative consequences resulting from online activities (Litt & Hargittai, 2014). Teachers can choose one or two of the most popular social network sites, and post questions about how to set up certain filters. Students can research, discuss, and answer questions; they can think about when we need to set it up, and why we need to customize those filters. One suggested question is how to choose the audience of certain postings and why we need to choose settings that control access to our activities. Our friends on Facebook can be family members, friends, classmates, co-workers, and others. Some of the postings may be attractive to friends, but may be inappropriate to co-workers (Litt & Hargittai, 2014). In order to avoid potential negative consequences about certain postings, students must learn to group the people they know on Facebook.

Also, teachers can teach students to use search engines and to search effectively themselves. They are encouraged to remove content that may mislead people who read it, and ensure that all of the information represents them positively and correctly. Teachers can also introduce tools for students to check their online reputation, and even companies may provide suggestions and services to maintain online reputation, such as Google Alerts, KnowEm, BrandYourself, and Reputation.com (Merritt, 2013; University of Arizona, n.d.). As educators, we do our best to prepare students for the possible consequences of all online activities.

Finally, students can enhance their online reputation by creating multiple positive online profiles. College admissions officers and employers use search engines and social media to get to know more about application candidates. Deletion of accounts may make people feel that the candidate is unsociable and eccentric (Merritt, 2013). Therefore, teachers can help students to create a true and positive Internet persona to strengthen their online reputation and to enhance their employment prospects. Positive online activities can show students' active participation in social activities and present their qualifications for a college application or a job application. Also, teachers can teach students to enhance their online reputation by providing supplemental proof of their qualifications listed on their resumés (Van Ouytsel et al., 2014). Teachers can create a blog for the courses they teach, and also encourage students to share course projects they are proud of, well-written articles on blogs, and social media such as YouTube, Vimeo, and Facebook. Teachers can give assignments such as writing a blog to report students' findings, no matter how small. Through positive sharing, students show their projects, healthy lifestyle, and their passions to potential employers and college admission officers, which can help their accomplishment of academic goals and career goals. Creating positive online profiles, promoting case studies and seminars, boosting Internet skills, and learning core netiquettes will significantly improve the online reputation of adolescents.

## **Conclusion**

The problems in using social networking sites have been increasing. Any damage to an online reputation can have long-term and severe consequences for teenagers' lives. I, as an educator, hold the view that schools should take responsibility for educating adolescents about the importance of their online reputations. Educators can also help teenagers to raise their awareness of the importance of following online netiquette and taking good care of, even

strengthening, their online reputations, because the damage that they can inflict on themselves is online forever.

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