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Bumblebee on a Wild Rose



# *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*

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## INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

**Marion Terry, Ph.D.**

Welcome to the twenty-sixth issue of the *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education*, devoted to rural, northern, and Aboriginal education. Our authors for volume 13, issue 1, are current and past BU Faculty of Education graduate students. I thank these educators for sharing their work. Together, they have produced a collection of articles that reflect their experiences as educators in Manitoba.

- Michelle Levesque's research report uses narrative inquiry to reflect on her experiences as a resource teacher.
- Edward Khinich's refereed article addresses issues related to bullying at school.
- Nicole McIntyre-Garbutt's refereed article holds Manitoba accountable for enacting curricular reform to meet students' changing needs.
- Tracey Salamondra's refereed article focuses on trust, transparency, and active listening as critical components of effective communication in schools.
- Ryan Mangin's refereed article discusses professional culture, teacher accountability, and administrative support as significant for teacher morale.
- Patrick Loewen's refereed article recommends land-based learning as a means to repair disconnections created by the impacts of Residential Schools.
- Jennifer Metelski's refereed article challenges Manitoba to develop policies for acceleration programming to meet gifted students' academic needs.
- Kyle Berg's refereed article advocates schoolwide positive behaviour support (SWPBS) programs to improve students' behavioural and academic outcomes.
- Joshua Abraham's refereed article examines the different ways in which teachers shape their confidence when providing equal opportunity for all students.
- Fitzgerald Villanueva's refereed article considers online game rooms, video game clubs, and gaming tournaments as initiatives to resolve gaming addiction in schools.
- Hoanglan Cardinal's refereed article explains video modelling, pivotal response training, and script training as instructional strategies to teach play skills to children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

Also included in this issue is our "Celebration of Scholarship," to honour graduate students who completed their M.Ed. degrees with theses in 2020.

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## RESEARCH REPORT

### An Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry Into Curriculum Making Experiences as a Resource Teacher

Michelle Levesque

*At the time, I was one of two resource teachers. Both of us were new to the school; I had been there for just over a year. I sped walked down the hall to visit a few students whose stories filled the narrative of the previous day. My intent was to check in with the educational assistants, teachers, and students in order to get a temperature check prior to any incidents occurring. From down the hall, I heard Mrs. Wilson<sup>1</sup> call my name. "Miss Michelle," she said, "can I speak with you?" Her voice and body emanated tension as she called out.*

*Without breaking stride, I turned and mentally switched gears. Mrs. Wilson's class had two students on my radar whose needs were not yet being consistently met. Was her concern about one of these boys? Mrs. Wilson stepped out into the hall, closed her room door behind her, took a deep breath, and said, "You need to take Sam. He won't stop walking around, interrupting the class, and getting into things. He needs to be with someone who can meet his needs right now." I nodded and she swiftly turned around, opened her door, and walked to the front of the class to resume her lesson. As she talked to the class, I quietly gathered up Sam, his work, and a snack. Hand in hand, we headed to the resource area, both of us carrying some healthy snacks and items to support curriculum making.*

#### Coming to the Research

Teachers are often master students who thrive in structured school settings; however, not everyone learns well in school. There is a great responsibility for adults in schools to support students as thriving learners. What barriers are there to student learning? What changes are needed to nurture learning? How can we best learn alongside others? Through autobiographical narrative inquiry, I have explored these questions in an effort to bring forth transformation within myself. As a master student, perhaps I can learn to provide richer opportunities for others to engage in learning. As a resource teacher, perhaps I can experience learning alongside other adults with greater frequency and duration. As a human, perhaps I can learn to make curriculum alongside others and to let curriculum re-make me in a cherished relationship that never ends.

#### Autobiographical Narrative Inquiry

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) posed the question, "What does narrative inquiry help us to learn about our phenomenon that other theories or methods do not?" (p. 123). Narrative inquiry supports an exploration of how a person's position in the world affects the questions that person asks about the world. Through narrative inquiry, one can explore "the whole context of a life" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 101). In using autobiographical narrative inquiry with a field text, I am not just re-telling my experience to myself. I am transforming this field text into a research text so that I may understand myself in relation to myself and the world. I am part of the phenomenon that I wish to study.

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<sup>1</sup> All names are pseudonyms to protect the identity of others.

There are three ways to justify research: personal, practical, and social justifications. Personal justification is about finding points of tension or puzzles in life, and leaning into them. Practical justification is about exploring possible change in one's practice or perspective. The theoretical type of social justification concerns "how an inquiry can contribute to new methodological and disciplinary knowledge" (Shaw, 2017, p. 223).

My own research began with selecting experiences fraught with tension and a feeling of incompleteness, followed by writing personal autobiographical narratives of these experiences, and re-reading them. I then selected one autobiographical narrative with the purpose of delving into the research puzzle in an attempt to draw learning experiences from re-viewing the narrative, and exploring new understandings of how to learn alongside others. It is my hope that others in my discipline may also glean some information that will aid them in shifting practice and perspective.

### **Understanding Curriculum Making**

Schwab (1973) discussed five essential ingredients to the curriculum making process. First, general and specific knowledge of children is required. Second, there is knowledge of milieu, or the social environment in the classroom. The milieu is affected by the dynamics of many areas, such as the class, the school, student relationships to one another, family relations, the community, and the political climate. Third, there is knowledge of teachers: what they know and their flexibility, personality, prevailing moods, relation to children, feelings of self, background, and biases. Fourth, there is knowledge of subject matter and how experts in the field view their subject matter.

Here, I pause and digest these first four essential ingredients. Knowledge of children, milieu, teachers, and subject matter are essential. The interactions of these four ingredients is dynamic, which is the essence of the curriculum making process (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). The fifth ingredient is knowledge of the curriculum making process (Schwab, 1973). A teacher may understand and anticipate how these ingredients will collide to shape the learning experience for all. Since curriculum is being made not only by the teacher but also by the learners, the social environment, and the subject matter, it is a daunting task full of unanticipated interruptions. Tensions may arise when teachers view interruptions as something negative, an unhelpful disruption to their plan which requires immediate rerouting. Conversely, interruptions can also be perceived as new learning journeys, a way to acknowledge students as curriculum makers, and an opportunity for teachers to learn alongside their students. Sam, a master of interruptions, was a largely unacknowledged curriculum maker, and Mrs. Wilson gave me an opportunity to slow down and make space to learn from him.

Curriculum making occurs anytime a teacher interacts with a student, educational assistant, peer teacher, or other person. When Mrs. Wilson spoke to me, she provided me with enough information to take steps to support Sam. This is curriculum making. When I entered the class to "gather up Sam," I took time to greet him, do a temperature check, invite him to my space, ask him what we needed for that space, help him to gather items, and offer my hand. This guided Sam in transitioning to another space. He felt wanted, and he connected with me. This is curriculum making. The teacher, returning to the front of her class to teach, gave Sam and I space to do this without directing the class's attention to us. This is a good way to respect all students in the class by making private spaces within public spaces. The class received this message from Mrs. Wilson, Sam, and me. This is another snippet of curriculum making.

One may imagine school as not just an institution for subject matter, but as a space that shifts the focus to the learning process. The definition of curriculum making could be extended to include any intentional learning interaction made between people at any time and in any place. Curriculum making does not need to be done by a teacher, or even in an interaction with a human. It could be a dog owner interacting with her dog in the park. With this extension, a curriculum maker is one who consciously understands the dynamic mix of ingredients that make

up interactions in life, and uses them to support growth in self and others. To me, this is curriculum making. If curriculum making is any interaction, then teaching is the art of interaction, and the exploration of understanding how to learn alongside others and how to invite others to learn.

### **Finding Threads of Continuity**

Dewey (1938) outlined that “the principle of continuity of experience means that every experience both takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those which come after (p. 34). Expanding on Dewey’s ideas, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) wrote the following:

The linear notion that objectives and achievement were mediated by the teachers and curriculum was narratively in question. According to a narrative construction, the teacher is not merely a filtering variable factor to be considered as either an impediment or a catalyst for the achievement of objectives. Rather, the teacher is part of the curriculum and therefore part of the establishment of the goals in the first place and part of the ensuing achievement. (pp. 28-29)

Applying these ideas to my journey with Sam, I am beginning to understand curriculum anew. Do I *implement* or *make* curriculum, or is curriculum *making* me, shaping me continuously? And so I begin to search for new words.

As Sam and I walked down the hall, I reflected on the past few weeks and how I could have better supported this student, class, and teacher. I thought of possible next steps, planned on chatting with the teacher later in the day to discuss and decide what to do, and scheduled in possible times to fit these steps into my schedule. I paused, and asked myself how I could get into this classroom, crossing the boundary into Mrs. Wilson’s world, into Sam’s world, so that I could better understand what Sam needed to be successful in class. I wondered how I might transition from being an outsider looking in, to an active participant in the curriculum *exploring* process with Sam. So began my journey where I learned to cross boundaries, enter other worlds, and begin making curriculum in partnership with classroom teachers and students.

### **Travelling into Sam’s “World”**

As I interacted with Sam, I created space so that Sam could invite me into his world. Lugones wrote of “worlds,” referring to societal constructs that contain people. These worlds can even represent whole societies. Lugones (1987) also described the importance of playfulness.

Those of us who are “world”-travelers have the distinct experience of being different in different “world” and of having the capacity to remember other “worlds” and ourselves in them . . . The shift from being one person to being a different person is what I call “travel.” (p. 11)

As I spent time learning alongside Sam, I became someone else, as the curriculum Sam and I played with together changed us both. I began to view curriculum as something that *acts* upon me, upon us all.

### **Curriculum Making with Sam**

*Upon arriving in the resource area, we put our things on the desk. I quickly turned off the main lights, softening the room to hold natural light from the window, and drew the hall window shade to decrease distractions. I pulled out two chairs and sat in one, smiling at Sam, giving him space to direct our curriculum making.*

*Sam walked to the bookshelf and grabbed a fidget from the basket. He played with the item, chatting with me nonstop about his siblings, his morning on the bus, his pets, his favourite animals, and as he bounced from idea to idea, he slowly allowed me space to comment and ask questions. It was quite some time before we got to the classwork that day, which followed after chatting, having a snack, delivering some heavy books to different classes, and having another snack. Throughout the whole process, Sam and I learned much from each other, and we did this in a good way, with space to communicate.*

One place curriculum making occurs is “the moment where teachers’ and children’s lives interact as they meet in schools” (Driedger-Enns, 2014, p. 87). By this definition, Sam and I were making curriculum.

The teacher must have “intimate knowledge of the children” (Schwab, 1973, p. 502) as part of the essential ingredients in the curriculum making process. In this story, I understood that Sam’s nervous system was overactive. I reduced external stimuli by dimming the lights, removing distractions from outside the room, and putting out a chair to invite Sam to sit without words. Here, I was trying to set Sam up for success in calming his nervous system. I sat quietly with a smile, breathing deeply and relaxing my muscles to model how to calm my nervous system. All this was communication with an understanding of the ingredients needed to meet Sam where he was at and *invite* him to *grow* from this place. This is curriculum making.

At the same time, Sam was communicating with me. His response, or lack of response, told me what worked and what did not work in the moment. Nonverbal cues came to the foreground as he spoke through actions such as pacing and fidgeting, and more subtle cues such as breathing and the tension in his muscles. These interactions brought me more solidly into my own body, grounding my awareness of my own tensions, helping me to actively release my shoulders, slow my breathing, and be present in the moment with focus. Here, Sam was a curriculum maker, leading me to reflect. How could I communicate calmness nonverbally in a classroom while teaching a whole class? How long could I do it for? Is it a sustainable model?

## **Making Curriculum for Sam**

Later that day, I connected with Mrs. Wilson, but she was quite busy so we decided to chat the next morning. During our talk, we discussed the calls that Mrs. Wilson had already made to Sam’s home. We agreed that it was time to have an in-person meeting with the family to discuss strengths, challenges, and next steps. Sam’s mom shared that she had similar experiences at home with her son and told us that Sam’s older brother, who had also behaved in a similar way at Sam’s age, had been diagnosed with ADHD. Upon the meeting’s conclusion, I committed to writing a letter outlining the challenges that Sam faced in class, and Mrs. Wilson began to fill out a weekly reporting form. Sam’s mom visited the doctor, who prescribed medication for Sam, which we monitored at home and school. This medication supported Sam in self-regulation and focus, thus supporting him in interacting with and learning from others at school. Here, the doctor and Sam’s mother provided Sam with medication that was also a part of the curriculum making process.

Throughout this process, Mrs. Wilson communicated with Sam’s mom through phone calls and she continued with the weekly reporting form, which Sam’s mom took to the doctor. Through all of this, I popped in and out of class, but did not maintain a consistent presence in the classroom. While educational assistant time was provided as a resource to support this process and Sam was beginning to get the help he needed, I was not present enough to be an active participant in the curriculum making process with Sam, Mrs. Wilson, or the classroom.

The provocative question I had asked myself earlier about crossing boundaries to participate in the learning process had been lost in the busy shuffle of life as a resource teacher.

Here I pause and reflect on expectations of teachers and children. Sam, a bright young boy, thrived in co-creating curriculum in a room with natural light, few distractions, and an attentive participant. While it was difficult for him to focus on the worksheet, it was clear that Sam was capable of learning and leading learning. I wonder whether Sam's need for medication was created or exacerbated by the systems in schools, by the expectations set on young children, by the way schooling is done. If this is true, then the way schooling is done needs to change. The way curriculum is made needs to change. But how?

In the process of making a plan for Sam – making the curriculum *for* Sam – Mrs. Wilson and I drew on our professional knowledge landscapes, which Clandinin and Connelly (1996) described as the place where theory and practice intersect. As the resource teacher, I used my knowledge of interacting with doctors regarding ADHD to support Sam's mom with a letter and reporting form that provided the doctor with the information required to support a medical decision regarding Sam. In this process, Mrs. Wilson and I both explored information from articles and our previous experiences on understanding and supporting students with ADHD. As the resource teacher, I was able to collaborate with Mrs. Wilson in this process, enriching both of our professional knowledge landscapes, which directly affected our curriculum making process. Through collaboration, we shared what worked for each of us, expanded our understanding of the other's teaching practices, discussed the student's strengths, challenges, and possible supports in his learning journey. By simply having someone to talk to, we stimulated further self-reflection that brought about new ideas.

Throughout this part of the process, Sam was no longer present. We made the plan *for* Sam, not *with* Sam. Sam's part in curriculum making was interrupted. What does this mean for Sam, for his mom, for the teacher, for myself? What opportunities were lost because he was not there?

### **Crossing Boundaries: The Curriculum Making Cycle**

At home one night, I took some time to review my caseload, thinking about where I spent most of my time, and where there was wiggle room to make changes. I determined that most of my day was still being spent shifting the school climate from reactive responsiveness to proactive anticipation of needs. I acknowledged to myself that achieving this goal would take time and that, while things were definitely improving, much more needed to be done to make space for students and staff in anticipating student needs and proactively establishing supports to meet those needs.

Soon after, I emailed the classroom teachers I worked with about supporting their classrooms for one period every second day for an eight-week cycle. I asked each teacher to connect with me by email or in person to discuss this further. Mrs. Wilson, as always, was one of the first to chat with me. With an energy that permeated her every pore, she explained the guided reading process in her classroom and how I could support her and the students. "For guided reading, we can put them in four groups, and you and I can each work with one group at a time while the other two groups work on their other activity . . ." (Mrs. Wilson, personal communication, November 6, 2019), and so the conversation went for some time. I left Mrs. Wilson's room just as excited as she was, with an armful of books, a USB full of reading resources, and a few sticky notes quickly penned with shared ideas.

When it came to actually working in the classroom, it took me time to learn the ins and outs of Mrs. Wilson's world: the rules, the student expectations, and the different needs of each child. The students, too, had to learn how I was different from Mrs. Wilson, how the groups would work with new social expectations set for each grouping situation, and so on. Sam was wonderful at engaging with me, telling the others about his visits to the resource room and how he and I worked together. This helped to bridge a gap with other students who then also desired

to take a walk with me and learn together. I laughed and said, “But we’re learning together here in your classroom,” and we were all excited about the prospect. I was in the class, and I was making curriculum with students. I began to experience stories shared with Mrs. Wilson by proximity and camaraderie. Between lessons, Mrs. Wilson checked in with me to see how things were going (she was the expert in this world), and we discussed changes to make and celebrated successes. This, too, was curriculum making.

The secret stories that I experienced in Mrs. Wilson’s class no longer belonged only to Mrs. Wilson. I, too, had ownership of these stories. Clandinin and Connelly (1996) stated that secret stories are shared in private spaces with other trusted teachers. The classroom teacher and I had built a strong enough relationship to be comfortable in experiencing secret stories together. Some of these secret stories we discussed, to learn from our experiences, but other stories continued to exist as a shared memory, which in turn deepened the camaraderie between Mrs. Wilson and me.

We had built our relationship on a foundation of trusting each other’s knowledge, both professionally and practically. Driedger-Enns (2014) introduced personal practical stories that view teachers as a whole person, defined by all of their life experiences, not just the professional teaching experiences. Mrs. Wilson and I had many discussions that drew on our personal and practical experiences, which helped to stretch our thinking as we made curriculum together. I was able to journey into a classroom’s “world” and become co-curriculum makers with Sam and Mrs. Wilson, and as our relationships grew I became more comfortable “world-travelling” (Lugones, 1987) from the halls of the school into the grade 1 classroom and back again, making curriculum *alongside* groups of children.

### **Building Relationships**

Opportunities for co-curriculum making are rooted in relationships. Resource teachers cannot simply step into a teacher’s classroom and state, “I’m here!” and expect a warm welcome. Resource teachers need to be aware of the milieu, including the stories being told of them in the school and in homes. Trust is foundational in building relationships, and how a person is perceived by many is a big part of building trust with individuals. It is important, as well, that administrators are a part of this process. Through administrative support, spaces for co-curriculum making are born; these opportunities can be classroom teacher to resource teacher, but also administrator to teacher, teacher to teacher, parent to teacher – essentially anyone who is willing to invest time in supporting curriculum making. With administrative support, opportunities for relationship building flourish, thus supporting the co-curriculum making process.

### **Conclusion**

Circling back to my original questions, I reflect on what I learned through the autobiographical narrative process and the writing of this research report. These two questions provide me with focus on my journey. As I reflect, I find myself with new questions, rather than answers.

What barriers are there to student learning? For students like Sam, I have heard many say that the barriers are within the student. Some might discuss environmental barriers and how the teacher can support reducing stimuli. What about the barriers of the school structure? There are expectations that Sam must sit and listen to the teacher inside a building, that he should learn subjects by using items such as worksheets. Does the problem lie within Sam or within the system?

What changes are needed to nurture learning? In Sam’s story, medication was given to him to support regulation. However, when taken out of the classroom structure, Sam was able to learn and direct learning with co-regulation and without medication. Again, I reflect on whether I

could co-regulate Sam while working with a whole class. It would be very difficult for me to notice all of Sam's subtle cues at the same time as supporting a whole class of students, and sustain this attention to detail for one class, let alone a whole day. What does this say about the current structures that exist in most classrooms? What sustainable changes could schools make to support all students better?

How can we best learn alongside others? Within this story, I find evidence of my growth as a resource teacher. I believe that all good teaching comes from slowing down, and learning with and from others. I learned with and from Sam. I learned with and from Mrs. Wilson. I changed my practice with other teachers as a result of my learnings. I am becoming a sharer of curriculum making, creating space and silence so that I can hear and see what others are learning, increasing my opportunities for growth.

Sam's story is not finished. I warn the reader not to "freeze the narrative" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 166). Rather, I encourage you to think of Sam temporally, shifting your focus on him from the past to also include the now and the future. Contemplate the possibilities. Then, shift your focus once again to learners in your life. How can we make curriculum *with* others in a good way that makes space for everyone to learn?

I consider this last question beneficial to focus on for the next leg of my journey. Who knows what I will learn and what opportunities for learning will pass me by unnoticed? One thing I do know is that I will make time to re-explore my memories through autobiographical narrative writing, so that I may continue to make curriculum *with* myself.

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## About the Researcher

*Michelle Levesque is working toward a Master of Education degree with a focus on educational administration through Brandon University. She has a Post Baccalaureate with a focus on special education from the University of Manitoba and holds a Special Education Teaching Certificate. Michelle is the Kindergarten to Grade 7 resource teacher at St. Laurent School in St. Laurent, Manitoba. She loves spending time with her family and dogs.*

## REFEREED ARTICLES

### **Bullied at School: Improving the Odds for Our Children**

**Edward Khinich**

#### **Abstract**

*For many students, bullying is a daily struggle. It can undermine their self-esteem and the ability to succeed academically and socially. Educators have an opportunity to reverse this situation and to support students' attainment of successful life outcomes through classroom and school interventions. Supporting student development of social and emotional skills, and establishing a collaborative support network of classroom teachers, school staff, families and community members can mitigate the effects of bullying, prevent further incidents from occurring, and create a supportive community of learners that can sustain personal growth of all students.*

Schools, often espoused as institutions of learning, personal achievement, and self-discovery, for many students are places of adversity marred by a long shadow cast by bullying. The damaging effects of this behaviour have a lasting impact on its victims and perpetrators, undermining the development of individuals and entrenching social dissonance. Educators have developed and implemented strategies that mitigate the effects of bullying and foster a school climate that considerably reduces these behaviours.

#### **Risk Factors**

Personal characteristics can put many students at risk of becoming victims or perpetrators of bullying, making it difficult for them to transcend these roles. Often, classrooms in the same school exhibit variability of bullying behaviours despite the school-wide initiatives. Mounting public pressure has ignited political will to address bullying in our schools directly. Governments around the world recognize the need to combat this type of behaviour and to protect the well-being of our children. Many Canadian and international jurisdictions have codified anti-bullying measures into law (Schott, 2014). Educators are on the front lines of this issue and are tasked with fostering social cohesion, and establishing an environment that nurtures student development and will prevent and successfully address bullying.

While definitions of bullying vary to some degree, there appears to be a consensus that bullying is a pronounced imbalance of power between the bully and the victim, and is used by the perpetrator to achieve personal goals (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). Bullying can involve extreme violence or a more subtle play on the victim's emotions. Perpetrators physically, verbally, or emotionally target the victims by employing various means to hurt or to humiliate (Soares Salgado et al., 2020). Some researchers point to personal characteristics playing a central role in this behaviour, while others argue that it is primarily a result of social interactions (Schott, 2014). Likely, personal traits intertwine with social environments that allow bullying to occur. For some children, protective personal characteristics help to mitigate the effects of bullying. For others, vulnerabilities cause them to experience lasting damage and a continual loop of victimization. Consequently, it is necessary to determine what learning environment encourages positive interactions, strengthens relationships, and fosters pro-social behaviours and attitudes of the students.

The highest prevalence of bullying occurs in schools (Niejenhuis et al., 2020). In North America, 1/4 to 1/3 of all school-age children are bullied, with 15% of those experiencing cyberbullying (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017, p. 241). Up to 10% of students engage in bullying behaviour (Downes & Cefai, 2016, p. 22). These behaviours peak in junior high schools and

subside by the end of high school (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). Boys tend to engage in physical bullying, while girls exhibit more emotional forms. The alarmingly high rates of bullying in schools underscore the urgency for educators to address this issue in order to provide a safe learning environment for students (Benn-Frenette, 2019).

Low empathy, a sense of entitlement, and a dislike of authority figures are common traits in bullies (Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017). These students can also be very perceptive of social cues and social opportunities (Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017). Bullying behaviour often affords them a rise in social status. Positive social reinforcement of this behaviour strengthens their motivation and perpetuates bullying. Although bullies may not be highly regarded by other students, they are often seen as being socially popular and “cool” by their peers (Menesini and Salmivalli, 2017, p. 245). The pursuit of social status and a lack of empathy allow bullies to victimize their peers without much regard for their actions or the consequences.

Victims of school bullying often encounter bullying in various aspects of their lives. Many of these children exhibit personality traits that can make them targets for bullying (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). These include not being able to fit in with their peer group, displaying insecurities, and acting submissive or timid. They may internalize social conflicts, often blaming themselves, and can view setbacks or mistakes as a reflection of their personality flaws. For some, supportive family and positive relationships with other children protect them from becoming victims of bullying (Downes & Cefai, 2016). Vulnerable children, such as those with special needs, immigrants, minority groups, and students who are socially isolated, are especially likely to be victimized (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). Social isolation and a lack of confidence can predispose children to become victims of bullying which, in turn, can make them retreat further from their peer group and become increasingly insecure.

The effects of bullying on a child can be severe. Damaging psychological and physical consequences can last a lifetime, markedly increasing mental health problems and undermining academic, social, and economic attainment (Fischer & Bilz, 2019). Victims of bullying are also more likely to experience social isolation (Soares Salgado et al., 2020). These children can develop an increasingly negative self-view and become more prone to attributing conflicts and setbacks to personal shortcomings (Schott, 2014). The effects of bullying create a vicious cycle whereby bullying causes victims to develop deep-seated self-doubt that predisposes them to become more vulnerable to subsequent bullying (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017).

The perpetrators of bullying become more likely to exhibit future criminal behaviour and negative psychological effects. These students are more inclined to externalize the cause of interpersonal conflicts and, as a result, are less likely to engage in self-reflection which can undermine their attainment of personal goals (Niejenhuis et al., 2020). They often attribute conflicts and personal failures to external causes, neglecting to recognize aspects of social interactions that are within their control. This becomes disempowering and can limit the bullies' emotional growth and attainment of self-efficacy (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017).

Instances of bullying can vary significantly between classrooms in the same school. The classroom environment and teacher characteristics appear to be important determinants of bullying (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). Hierarchical classrooms, with a small group of popular students, are much more likely to give rise to bullying behaviours. Student-teacher interactions and the classroom climate can foster social bonds, promote an appreciation of individual differences, and support students' exploration of their strengths, or they can encourage divisiveness and promote bullying (Schott, 2014).

The corrosive nature of bullying decays the social fabric of our schools and our communities. It undermines children's ability to feel safe, and it can limit their development and derail their ability to achieve self-efficacy (Schott, 2014). The frequency with which bullying occurs in schools requires educators to examine the key factors that produce and sustain bullying behaviours, such as personality traits of bullies and the victims, effects that bullying has on the victims and perpetrators, and to differentiate between classrooms that are successful at combating bullying and those that are not. Educators' ability to establish a pedagogy that

addresses these questions will not only frame the immediate classroom experiences of students but will impact their life outcomes.

### **Effective Interventions**

The considerable repercussions of bullying on students' well-being and their future development necessitate a school environment that supports positive social interactions and relationship building among students. This can minimize the likelihood of bullying occurring and can protect children who might otherwise become victims, perpetrators, or observers of this behaviour (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). The most effective anti-bullying strategies unify classroom interventions with a comprehensive, long-term, school-wide program while establishing collaboration and ongoing communication with families and the school community (Downes & Carmel, 2016). While broad classroom or whole-school interventions are effective for most students, some require a more individualized approach. At each level, the success of the school-based anti-bullying strategies is predicated on the ability of educators to ascertain and skillfully implement interventions that are well-suited for the unique needs of their student population.

A wide variety of anti-bullying interventions have been developed and successfully implemented by educators (Low & Van Ryzin, 2014). An approach favouring rewards and punishments dominates school policies (Rigby, 2010). The perpetrators of bullying are punished to extinguish the undesirable behaviour and to send a clear message to students that these behaviours will not be tolerated. This approach is grounded in the work of I. Pavlov on classical conditioning, as well as B. F. Skinner and other behaviourist theorists (Rigby, 2010). Unfortunately, it has limited long-term success. This may be attributed to the lack of opportunities for the development of social skills for bullies and victims, and inadequate possibilities for perpetrators of bullying to internalize reason for exhibiting more positive behaviours. While effective at reducing bullying behaviours in the short-term, a more comprehensive strategy may be needed to create a lasting impact.

More recently, student-centered approaches have gained acceptance. They focus on the co-development of strategies with students, providing them ownership of this process, and encouraging their emotional and social development (Rigby, 2010). These methods include "mediation, restorative justice, support group, and Method of Shared Concern," as well as many others (Rigby, 2010, p. 69). While these strategies provide many opportunities for emotional growth, acquiring social skills, and developing intrinsic motivation for pro-social behaviours, they can have limited success with younger students who lack self-awareness. With them, a more teacher-directed approach is often more successful.

Student-centred bullying interventions aim to replace punitive, reactive strategies with proactive methods that directly involve students in their emotional and social development (Rigby, 2010). Successfully teaching genuine empathy and an appreciation for other people may require educators to forgo the traditional approach of punishing the offender and forcing compliance. A student who never had an opportunity to make authentic decisions about the school climate and to experience the benefits of a positive social environment is limited in the ability to grow emotionally.

Each of the abovementioned school-based strategies can foster a positive school climate and establish social norms that are supportive of the diversity in a school (Doumas & Midgett, 2019). To determine the most appropriate approach to use with students, educators need to understand their student population as well as the benefits and limitations of each intervention. Most often, a multi-layered strategy that combines numerous methods is required to address school bullying (Rigby, 2010).

Classroom strategies are often the most effective bullying interventions (Yoon & Bauman, 2014). When bullying occurs, it is critical for teachers to condemn it explicitly and to enforce appropriate consequences (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Students' perceptions of the teacher's

response to bullying significantly influence the likelihood of bullying occurring (Fischer & Bilz, 2019). How readily and successfully a teacher addresses bullying is an important determinant of students' views of the school climate and the likelihood of bullying and other disruptive and antisocial behaviours occurring (Yoon & Bauman, 2014).

Teachers can harness the support of their students by involving them in a collaborative development of anti-bullying strategies. Establishing an authentic positive environment and providing ownership of the classroom community to the students demonstrate the teacher's respect and value of students' opinions and their contributions to the group. It gives students an opportunity to build social bonds by learning and exhibiting positive social skills. This fosters social norms that are appreciative of the diversity in the classroom (Rigby, 2010). For students who may become victims of bullying, this allows them to feel in control of the situation and to foster much-needed social connections (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

The opportunity to determine classroom norms creates an awareness and a buy-in of the behaviour expectations by the students (Schott, 2014). It is also important for teachers to educate students on specific strategies that prevent and address bullying, such as informing the teacher and "speaking up" when it is safe to do so (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017, p. 249). In classrooms where children support one another, bullying is far less likely to occur. This disincentivizes bullying, making it socially disadvantageous for the bully, eliminating the main motivating factor (Schott, 2014). For perpetrators, the value of being part of this social group can outweigh any desired outcomes that may have been achieved through bullying (Rigby, 2010). Coupled with school-wide strategies, a classroom-based approach can create a shift in the social environment of the student population.

An anonymous survey of the students about bullying provides a good starting point for school-wide anti-bullying initiatives. This information should be used to develop policies that address student concerns (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Policies that reflect school needs should target specific problem areas. For example, a policy may reinforce behaviours in "less structured settings" such as lunchrooms and the school playground (Nickerson, 2019, p. 20). Consistent implementation of these policies is necessary to achieve meaningful results through an ongoing collaboration between the administrators and staff (Nese et al., 2014).

When developing an anti-bullying approach, schools can draw on the combined experience of their educators and the multitude of research-based programs and methods that have been successfully implemented by teachers throughout the world. Numerous commercially available school-wide anti-bullying programs provide rich reference resources, including PBIS, Social-emotional Learning (casel.org), Olweus Bullying Prevention Program, KiVa, and Early Childhood Friendship Project (Morgan, 2012). These programs have been associated with a significant reduction in bullying behaviours and with a marked increase in student-reported perceptions of school safety (Nickerson, 2019).

To use the available resources and establish the necessary supports for students, schools should enlist families and the larger school community in the school anti-bullying initiatives (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Schools need to ensure that parents and community members can voice their concerns and are invited to participate in the ongoing work that is being done at the school level. Collaboration with parents not only provides a broader perspective on the bullying problem, but it offers an opportunity for parents to feel invested in the anti-bullying work undertaken by the school.

Enlisting families and other community members in school-based anti-bullying programs helps to establish inclusive social norms by communicating to students broad support for pro-social behaviours. Community support for school anti-bullying initiatives creates greater awareness and can provide long-term, sustainable development of a positive social climate (Rigby, 2010). Additionally, community involvement can enhance the individualized supports that are being provided for some students. For example, a conference involving students, parents, and educators from the school can show bullies the true impact of their actions and is

more likely to make them remorseful (Rigby, 2010). This can also help the victims to recognize the extensive support network that is available to them, mitigating feelings of social isolation.

For victims, bullies, or observers who require interventions beyond those offered by the broad, classroom-based, or school-wide programs, educators may need to provide one-on-one or small group guidance (Rigby, 2010). Working with a small group offers the advantage of sharing experiences and strategies, and can help students to feel supported by their peers. At times, teachers, counsellors, or other adults in the school may need to work with individual students on developing the necessary social and personal skills (Domas & Midgett, 2019).

Work with a student may focus on having the child acknowledge their strengths and work through various bullying scenarios (Rigby, 2010). Collaboratively, student and educator would come up with strategies that they believe would be successful. Throughout this process, students are given ownership and are in control of its outcomes. For victims or potential victims of bullying, assertiveness training, teaching social skills, and providing leadership opportunities reduce the risk of victimization (Schott, 2014). Teaching students how not to react to provocations from bullies can also help them to extinguish bullying behaviours (Rigby, 2010). Learning to cultivate and maintain authentic friendships provides additional protection from bullying (Menesini & Salmivalli, 2017). For students who might engage in bullying, it is important to focus on building empathy, teaching them to resolve conflicts positively, and becoming more appreciative of individual differences (Nickerson, 2019).

An effective implementation of anti-bullying strategies hinges on educators' ability to implement interventions at the classroom, school, and community levels. The external resources that support student development must be developed in conjunction with the internal resources of the students. Establishing a clear roadmap for preventing and addressing bullying is paramount to creating a transformative shift in school culture, and ultimately produce an internalization of pro-social behaviours by students.

## Conclusion

The prolific images of students humiliated online, beaten, teased, or tormented in other ways by their peers at school do not have to become a reality. School bullying is not an inevitability. Effective interventions can establish schools as places for growth, development, and discovery and provide children with a sense of belonging. Educators can successfully mitigate the effects of bullying and create an environment that nurtures the emotional and mental development of our students, producing a long-lasting impact on their quality of life.

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# Curricula Reform for Student Preparedness

Nicole McIntyre-Garbutt

## Abstract

*Curricula reform that sets students' future success, as the main objective requires insights into the demands of our society. These demands include economic and social needs. The fast-paced changing nature of our society makes it difficult to clearly define content necessary for students' post-graduate success, so curricula reform should focus on skills essential for content mastery, personal growth, and self-management. This article discusses moving Manitoba's "patch-work" curricula updating to a global reform that includes changing roles for teachers, restructuring priority subject areas, and placing students' needs in the central role of curricula design.*

Preparing our students for an uncertain, but demanding, future should be the goal of most educational curricula. Curricula reform in Manitoba is a slow, piece-meal process of reviewing, piloting, and implementing subject curricula in isolation of other areas. Modifying content to meet the current trends or standardized testing does not prepare students to deal with the complex, changing nature of our future society. Literacy and numeracy proficiency remains an important skill for learners, but research indicates that lifelong learning skills and emotional literacy need equal attention in our educational curricula for citizens of our future (The Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015; Schleicher, 2018). Though the obstacles for curricula reform are great, student preparedness needs to be a priority in our educational system.

## The Current State

Creating appropriate curricula becomes more daunting as we personally experience obstacles and issues that we could never have forecasted, and we need to prepare students for careers and obstacles that we cannot predict (Fahnert, 2019). Identifying curricular objectives that will benefit students "to achieve their full potential, to contribute to an increasingly interconnected world, and to convert better skills into better lives" (Schliecher, 2018, p. 2) goes beyond traditional, content mastery. Most of the current core curricula do not include socio-emotional training, skills training, ethics, community connections, and appropriate individualized programming outside of an IEP (Individualize education program). Some streams of elective curricula, such as social studies (Manitoba Government, 2007), English language arts (Manitoba Government, 2020), and visual arts (Manitoba Government, 2015), are moving toward including competencies that recognize the impact of the individual, the family, and the community on learning. The social studies curriculum specifies that "citizenship is a fluid concept" (p. 6), recognizing that interpretation and guidance are required to maintain relevance. With the exception of English language arts, standardized testing does not assess curricula with an emphasis on personal awareness and self-development. The concepts are not easily evaluated quantitatively or reported statistically, and cannot be held up and compared with other provinces. They are labeled "electives," and students may opt out of the experiences presented in the arts, humanities, and vocational streams.

Well-being and socialization are bubbling to the surface as issues that need to be addressed in the education of our young people. However, as in Australia most Manitoba curricula do not currently address developing resiliency in students "to manage uncertainty and complexity" (Wyn, 2007, p. 36). Special programs, optional seminars, or guest speakers address topics in mental health and making good choices. Physical education classes include a health unit to teach some topics formally. These efforts skim the surface of socio-emotional awareness, but fall short of becoming a useful tool for them to integrate in their lives.

Skills training for students to become functioning members of our global economy and to make ethical decisions about how they wish to function in society (Guyotte, 2020) is marginally touched on in the current curricula. Critical-thinking, problem solving, creative innovation, and collaboration are desired competencies being included in new curricula reform in Canada (Government of Alberta, 2016). These skills rely on open-ended, collaborative, integrative processes with multiple solutions, such as in Manitoba's English language arts curriculum (Government of Manitoba, 2020), which is "conceived as a learning landscape" that enables learning to occur "in the dynamic, complex, living field of English language arts" (p. 31). Professional development in the area of skills based learning and authentic assessment is optional and with limited resources for structural change. Current curricula, geared toward standardized testing, have prescriptive content, time frame, and delivery methods to cover all content required for success. Incorporating valuable, lifelong learning skills need to be a priority to for students to be competent members of a constantly changing society.

Learning about citizenship needs a place in curricula reflective of future demands on students, but vastly different from how it is currently integrated. Opportunities for students to function as productive members of society through community or technology connections are not part of the core curricula training. Educational systems can be quick to incorporate technology with the best intentions of providing opportunities for students, but "these tools must be evaluated soberly and critically" (Anderson & Keehn, 2019, p. 146). There must be purposeful learning surrounding ethics and curating information (Spencer, 2020) for all students, not just those who choose the optional courses.

Programming for students is currently a "one-size-fits-all," with individualization available for students who struggle or have been identified with a need. There is limited room for choice that authentically connects students to learning. Dewey (1938) identified the role of familial, cultural, and regional identities to build learning on established understandings. Mason (2013) indicated that the loss of community places for interactions, discussion, and observation is an obstacle to students developing a healthy sense of self and belonging. Student timetables currently cannot afford the flexibility needed to customize a student's program to accommodate this type of individualized learning.

Manitoba teachers, policy makers, and curricula designers need to work together to address the discrepancy between current curricular outcomes and the needs for students to participate effectively in their future economies and societies. Students are being filled with content and knowledge. However, they are missing the essential skills, socio-emotional awareness, cultural and societal awareness, and individualized programming needed to meet the demands of a rapidly changing society. Curricula based on government policy, funding, and traditional structures do not prepare our students, nor do they acknowledge the need for our communities to have confident, resilient community members.

### **Reforms To Meet Students' Needs**

The focus of education in Manitoba and elsewhere in the world needs to reflect the future values of the society and the future economy. No one can predict the future, so curricula makers need continually to refocus the priorities or create a flexible, fluid curricula structure to accommodate for change. Today's students need to have a strong set of skills more than they need content mastery. Our current educational structure therefore needs to focus on a more student-focused system, rather than subject-focused. There is a demand for people who are adaptable in their thinking and can make ethical connections. Individualization, technology, and communities are all essential tools for learning by making strong connections, but this needs to be done safely and with guidance. The uncertain, ever-changing future that we are preparing our students to enter should be recognized and accounted for in the curricula we use to teach our students.

There is no way to develop a concrete set of knowledge objectives that will carry a student successfully into the future, so the focus needs to be on developing the student's skill set to master any required knowledge. Curricula must move from "the product towards the process of education" (Lynch & McGarr, 2016, p. 730). Every curriculum needs to give attention to the skills "to interrogate knowledge, to find it for oneself, and to respond to rapidly changing situations" (Economist Intelligence Unit, 2015, p. 21). These skills overlap traditional curricula areas, both core and optional. A developed skill set will lead to blurring the boundaries of traditional subject areas (Lynch & McGarr, 2016), which will then lead to connected and integrated learning. New curricula should focus to engage students' "learning muscles" (Claxton, 2009, p. 97) and take the focus off what was previously considered mastery learning. Business and technology, drama, graphic and visual arts, and practical arts currently offer skill-based, community, and cultural connections that are missing in core subject areas. The opportunities offered in the optional courses will facilitate essential skill-based learning that moves students into deeper connections between subject areas and relationships within a real-world context. Focusing on "how" to learn instead of "what" to learn is necessary to develop lifelong learners.

A new framework is needed to integrate the traditional subject area curricula. The traditional view of teaching content areas in isolation of each other has been replaced with the realization that "the world is rarely experienced in disciplinary silos" (Molebash et al., 2019, p. 20). The STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) movement has highlighted common skills that are in demand. Further consideration of essential future skills has recognized skills like creativity and design from the arts discipline, in order to rename the group as STEAM skills. The emerging importance of common skills and integration of content areas calls for a restructure of how we are currently teaching, evaluating, and reporting on students' learning. Communication and sharing between subject areas should be structured for efficiency and to ensure a student has experiences and demonstrates learning in all areas. Teachers working as teams, sharing, and communication will also encourage appropriate planning for individual student growth. Creating a new framework with subject integration and sharing of students' abilities and needs will focus effective, student-centered programming.

Restructuring curricula would have to include teaching professionals and para-professionals to take on the demands of praxis in individualized, future ready curricula. This includes a wide scope of related concerns, including the increasing demand on teachers. The training of para-professionals may take some of the strain off teachers. For example, Krause et al. (2019) presented the success of Emotional Literacy Support Assistance in schools in the United Kingdom in supporting the well-being of students. Pre-professional training programs for teachers may take on more of a management role to include training in team teaching and collaboration and managing para-professionals, as well as mastery of content and teaching skills. From my personal experience, I feel the largest obstacle would be the professional development of current teachers who may be resistant to large-scale change. Re-envisioning training in the educational realm to restructure curricula is a daunting task, but it is a necessary endeavor to restructure the curricula in order to ready our students for a future that is every changing, integrated, and demanding.

Educational systems should build responsible connections to enhance student experiences and learning. Connections start with community, family, and culture being integrated in curricula, and also taking the curricula out of the schools to enhance a student's experience. This will require special attention to the individualization of programming for students. Technology could be used as an essential tool to help with connecting students locally and globally, but only if there is essential instruction related to the digital citizenship (Hollandsworth, 2011). Currently, most programs involving career development, community awareness, and technology are not required for graduation, yet contain, or could contain, valuable essential learning for students. Individualized connections outside of the educational system, which examine the student's roles in society, should be an essential consideration in school curricula.

Reviewing curricula and their current structure is an intimidating process, but necessary to set students up in a society that is constantly changing and is demanding skills from young people to adapt. Attention needs to be given to the structure, the content, and methods of our current curricula. Further attention needs to be given to individualizing programs in order to ensure that connected and essential learning is being taught to every student in Manitoba. Professional and para-professional training in ethics, team management, and communication will facilitate the change of focus from the subject to the student. Reform is an overwhelming task, but it is an essential task in student preparedness.

### Conclusion

Our curricula in Manitoba currently focus on student literacy and numeracy by making them core subjects and instituting provincial assessments in these areas, but there is some essential learning missing because of these established priorities. This essential learning is related to preparing students for the dynamic, unpredictable future. Restructuring the curricula to include skill, socio-emotional, and ethics-based learning would promote independence and resiliency in our students to be able to support themselves in their economic and cultural future. With restructuring, support for educational leaders and communication with concerned groups must be addressed, then overcoming these obstacles will lead to a stronger program in the end. Preparing our students is the focus of our educational system, so, just like the future our students are moving into, change must be a norm.

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# Effective Communication in Schools

Tracey Salamondra

## Abstract

*Schools are complex, dynamic systems that require effective communication to meet the diverse needs of its stakeholders. Communication is essential to maintain healthy relationships between the students, faculty, and parents. Establishing effective communication practices in a school requires understanding the characteristics of communication, including the benefits and common barriers. The three critical components of effective communication – trust, transparency, and active listening – build the relationship necessary to engage in challenging conversations.*

## Effective Communication in Schools

Effective leadership in education, as a teacher or administrator, requires excellent communication skills and a willingness to engage in challenging conversations. Schools have many stakeholders: students, teachers, administrators, and families. Each group has high expectations of the educational system, and fulfilling those expectations depends on excellent communication skills, both verbal and non-verbal (Glaze, 2014). The benefits and barriers to effective communication need to be understood in order to develop and promote the practice. All three essential components - trust, transparency, and listening - must be established. The characteristics of each stakeholder relationship pose unique challenges and recommendations.

## Benefits and Barriers of Effective Communication

Communication is the transmission of information from a source to an audience. Effective communication requires that the audience understand the message in its intended form (Fashiku, 2017). Challenging conversations include elevated emotions, differing points of view, and a resolution valued by at least one participant (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). People communicate both directly and indirectly. Direct communication is intentional, while indirect communication includes expressions, physical behaviours, and speech patterns (Bender, 2005). Awareness of indirect communication and active listening are essential components of face-to-face conversations (Tyler, 2016). For communication to be effective, we must be mindful of our message and indirect communication, actively listen, and engage in challenging conversations.

Education is continually changing, and effective communication builds the positive school culture required to implement change (Hollingworth et al., 2017). The primary relationships in most schools, apart from the teacher-student link, are among staff, administrators, and parents (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). When implementing new programs or initiatives, these stakeholders' voices disappear without established relationships and effective communication (Safir, 2017). Staff need to feel heard and valued to welcome change, and change without consultation alienates veteran teachers. Effective communication promotes motivation and builds staff culture, while poor communication creates dissatisfaction (Tyler, 2016). School culture influences how the organization responds to change, and unwillingness to accept change accompanies poor morale (Hollingworth et al., 2017). Leaders who choose to ignore staff feelings of apprehension will spend more time dealing with undesired behaviours (Brown, 2018). Engaging in challenging conversations by using effective communication and listening is necessary to implement changes that enable school improvement (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). Communication and relationship with stakeholders are more effective methods of school improvement than new policies or programs (Safir, 2017).

The benefits of challenging conversations are clear, yet barriers exist that keep educators and administrators from engaging in these conversations. There is an apprehension of challenging conversations because they can be unpredictable and emotional (Brown, 2018). The prospect of managing upset or aggressive people is one of the most daunting parts of engaging in difficult conversations (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). The cultural norm of being nice hinders our ability to have tough conversations or give honest feedback (Brown, 2018). People often lack clarity in their communications in an attempt to be kind, but a clear message is more kind than an ambiguous message. Leaders often avoid challenging conversations due to fear of damaging relationships, fatigue, misinterpreting the significance of the issue, or lack of confidence in their skills (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). The intent of the communication can be complicated when the participant's lack of skills obscures the intended message (Bender, 2005). It is critical that body language and manner of speaking match the intention and set the desired tone. The absence of tough conversation can lead to passive-aggressive discussions occurring behind the scenes (Brown, 2018), so we must work to overcome the barriers to effective communication.

### **Essential Components of Effective Communication**

Trust is the first of three essential components to build a relationship capable of engaging in challenging conversations effectively. People earn trust through daily interactions that demonstrate they listened and cared, not through grand gestures (Brown, 2018; Tyler, 2016). Building trust is comparable to building interest in a bank account; it takes time and requires commitment (Safir, 2017). Each interaction is a bid for acknowledgment; if the experience is positive, trust grows, but if it is negative, it depletes the previous balance. Staff must believe they are in a safe space, where they will not be ridiculed for making mistakes, in order to engage in difficult conversations (Brown, 2018). If mutual respect, collaboration, and trust in leadership are already the norm, it is much easier to engage in challenging conversations (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). After establishing a trusting relationship, retracting the statement if the other person gets defensive is not necessary (Safir, 2017). The relationship creates an environment for the participants to examine the reaction and express their thinking. Critical conversations, while using the essential components of effective communication, can repair previously damaged school cultures (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Trust is the first critical element needed to build the relationship necessary for effective communication.

Transparency underpins trust, because it demonstrates the stakeholder's purpose, goals, and values. Transparent leadership leads to increased productivity because the employee's focus is in better alignment with leadership goals (Lavoie, 2015). Stakeholders seek transparency in the organization's directives and vision because they have experienced overwhelming changes and lack of focus in the past (Llopis, 2012). Leaders who are open and transparent about their struggles are more relatable to employees. During the low points, honesty encourages stakeholder trust in future decisions (Llopis, 2012). Challenging conversations are most successful when the parties involved have a clear vision and are open about their intent (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). Without clear communication with staff, changes feel forced at the last minute (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). In-person communication is more transparent, because people can read indirect communication, and this leads to fewer misunderstandings (Llopis, 2012). Transparency is key to building the earned trust needed for effective communication.

The final essential component of effective communication is listening. There are two types of listening: deep listening wherein the expectation is to hear concerns but not solve the problem, and strategic listening that involves guiding questions and suggestions (Safir, 2017). Strategic listening is active; it requires the listener to ask relevant questions and clarify the message (Bender, 2005). Behaviours that inhibit effective communication include judgment, offering unwarranted advice, lack of confidentiality, and interrupting the speaker (Brown, 2018).

Ineffective communicators often ask whether there are questions but do not leave adequate time for people to respond. Awareness of indirect communication is also essential; gestures or body language can signal to the other person to finish speaking (Brown, 2018). Listening is the foundation for productive responses during difficult conversations (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). When involved in a difficult conversation, it is vital to resist the urge to respond before listening. Another component of effective communication is listening to criticism or feedback, especially when it is difficult to hear (Brown, 2018). The goal should be to create a culture in the classroom and school whereby active listening and engagement in collaborative conversations are expected (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). Trust, transparency, and listening – the three essential components of effective communication – must be present to achieve a collaborative culture in a school.

### **Effective Communication Between Stakeholders**

Education contains a variety of unique relationships, each with its own communicative needs and characteristics. The primary relationship in school is at the classroom level. Communication at this level serves two functions: to support the teacher to meet the learning outcomes and to build a relationship between the participants (Fashiku, 2017). Classrooms must be a place where participants can be vulnerable and know that they will be safe (Brown, 2018). Creating a relationship with students is vital, but that relationship needs to be intellectually based and not focused on building a friendship (Safir, 2017). Adults and students have different roles and levels of status in the school, even with open communication and established relationships. Challenging conversations with students, including honest feedback, often begin with the student perceiving the message negatively (Judkins, 2019). The purpose of the conversation is to encourage the student to develop beyond what they feel is possible. Teachers must be mindful of student non-verbal communication, in order to understand the student's thoughts and feelings (Safir, 2017). Active listening and emotional intelligence are crucial for identifying and understanding students who have experienced trauma. Establishing and maintaining a classroom with effective communication supports teachers to accomplish the goal of meeting the learning outcomes while creating positive connections.

A faculty is much like a classroom: there are individuals with various personalities and communication styles that must work toward a common goal. Discussions with colleagues can be intimidating. It is essential to express ideas clearly and not take exception when others do not share points of view (Judkins, 2019). When a colleague's disagreement occurs during a presentation or meeting, it is acceptable to ask for further discussion in the future. Experienced teachers may view colleagues who support new programs or initiatives as challenging their experience and methods (Steen, 2017). Colleagues do not require the same deference as administrators or parents, but teachers should still practise effective communication techniques to promote a positive relationship (Bender, 2005). Apathetic colleagues require set deadlines and clear guidelines; it is possible to avoid difficult conversations if everyone in the group is aware of their role and the purpose it serves. Dominant colleagues do not process subtle messages; therefore, they require responses with clear boundaries. The essential elements to remain assertive are knowing the facts, maintaining focus, finding common ground, and staying calm (Ontario Principals' Council, 2011). It is advisable to document conversations with authoritative colleagues in e-mail records or meeting minutes (Bender, 2005). Collaboration is necessary for growth, and communication promotes effective collaboration.

Honest conversations between administrators and staff are the prerequisite for growth. Growth occurs through reflection, and effective communication can reveal diversions from the goal in a teacher's practice (Safir, 2017). Both teachers and administrators must learn to listen and reflect on feedback, both positive and negative (Hollingworth et al., 2017). Resistant or under-performing staff need to engage in difficult conversations with administrators. Participants should paraphrase the concerns during the discussion, in order to ensure active listening and to

clarify the message (Tyler, 2016). This technique also helps the participants to remain mindful and keep them from becoming defensive while receiving feedback (Brown, 2018). Teachers must remember that difficult conversations are part of the administrator's job, and they should avoid venting frustrations to colleagues or creating an adversarial environment (Bender, 2005). Teachers are more likely to adopt the recommended changes if the relationship with the administrator is strong, and they feel safe and heard through the conversation (Hollingworth et al., 2017). Positive staff relationships form when teachers feel appreciated, and their strengths are acknowledged. Honest conversations must occur between teachers and administrators; effective communication is key to maintaining the relationship.

The final relationship to be examined occurs between the school and the parents. The teacher's ability to communicate effectively is the essential resource to create a strong partnership between the school and the family (Gartmeir et al., 2016, p. 207). This relationship contributes to the students' increased academic success. To establish this relationship, teachers should inform parents at the start of the year of their expectations, support them when they assist, and thank them for their effort (Bender, 2005). Parents are more supportive when teachers ask for input about their students' strategies and listen without becoming defensive (Judkins, 2019). Teachers engage in difficult conversations with families for a variety of reasons. Highly demanding parents require the teacher to inform the parents about whether their requests are realistic, and connect them to other professionals for additional support (Gartmeir et al., 2016). Communicating with an overly protective parent necessitates patience, reassurance, and composure (Bender, 2005). Staff may need compromise when dealing with angry parents, in order to avoid a power struggle. If a solution is not evident, both parties may find common ground in a goal for the student. Teachers who discuss parent communication techniques with their colleagues report increased confidence in their communication abilities (Gartmeir et al., 2016). The characteristics essential for positive staff-family conversations are positive relationships, transparency, and cooperation. All school-based relationships require effective communication in order to fulfil the prime function of the school.

## Conclusion

Excellence in education stems from high-quality stakeholder relationships, and communication is the key to building these relationships (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Effective communication creates positive school cultures wherein staff can adapt and embrace change. Increased skill in all components of effective communication decreases the fear associated with challenging conversations. Trust is essential to build strong relationships among stakeholders. Clarity of intent increases transparency, and active listening supports people to process feedback and implement changes for growth. These essential characteristics build the strong stakeholder relationships necessary for productive schools focused on improvement. Communication will enable the maintenance of relationships while delivering honest assessment, challenging colleagues, engaging in difficult conversations, and creating partnerships with families.

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# Increasing Teacher Morale

Ryan Mangin

## Abstract

*High teacher morale is important for the overall well-being of a school. Due to this importance, maintaining teaching-staff morale should be a key focus of administrators and teachers. The professional culture of a school is one area that can be addressed when looking to improve morale. As well, administrators can focus on concerns related to accountability and visibly support teachers in order to improve morale.*

Teacher morale is an issue that affects every stakeholder in education (Heick, 2020). Teachers with low morale feel stressed, are not satisfied with their job, develop burnout, and are emotionally exhausted (Will, 2021). The stress and exhaustion that comes from their workplace comes home with these teachers and affects their personal lives, as well. When teachers have low morale, they do not do their job to the best of their abilities and the quality of students' education is impacted. The professional culture of a school, teacher accountability concerns, and a lack of support from schools administrators are three issues that negatively influence teacher morale (Bradford & Braaten, 2018). There are many solutions to counteract these problems affecting teacher morale. Professional culture is positively influenced by a shared vision and set of goals, and an emphasis on professional development. Accountability concerns can be addressed by using accountability practices focused on improvement, making teachers accountable to their peers, and a focus on professional development. Support from administrators is improved by public recognition of teacher achievements, including teachers in decision making, and showing visible leadership within the school.

## Issues Affecting Teacher Morale

A strong professional culture in a school is something that can help teachers to overcome difficult situations that may arise in their job (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). A healthy school culture can be characterized as one in which staff and students are positive in their ability to set and achieve ambitious goals (Zahed-Babelan et al., 2019). The staff in healthy cultures collaborate, trust one another, and share a vision of what success looks like; and the school has an atmosphere of lifelong learning. A poor professional culture is one that leads to teachers becoming demoralized. When teachers do not believe that those around them are doing their best to improve the education they provide to students, when they do not respect their colleagues, and when they do not agree with what others see as being important, poor cultures will develop (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). Schools with poor cultures are often ones that have high teacher turnover rates (Noddings, 2014). When turnover rates are high, the culture often continues to suffer when new, less experienced teachers take the place of the more experienced ones. This often leads to a cycle of turnover that must be ended in order to correct the root cause of the culture issues. A poor professional culture can be extremely hard to fix and can drive the best teachers out of the occupation.

A second problem affecting teacher morale is the perception of unnecessary teacher accountability practices. Although these practices are intended to improve the level of education provided by schools, they are too often demoralizing for teachers who do not see them as valuable or accurate (Bosso, 2017). Many educators do not view these practices as useful to their classroom instruction and instead see them as data used by educational administrators for their own purposes (Bradford & Braaten, 2018). Some view teacher evaluations as being unfair or biased due to their often subjective nature (Morris et al., 2020). Teachers who work in districts with greater accountability practices often see their working conditions more negatively

than those who work in ones that enact less stringent accountability measures (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). Poor accountability measures from schools are one of the major causes of teacher demoralization.

A lack of support from the leaders in an educational setting can cause a deterioration of staff morale (Morris et al., 2020). If teachers are not reassured that they will be supported if challenges arise, they will feel vulnerable and avoid innovative practices (Heick, 2020). Without innovation, educators will stick to the methods that have always been used and never evolve their practice. Administrators often believe that having an open-door to their office makes them approachable, but this is not always how it is seen by teachers in the school (Morris et al., 2020). As well, when teachers do not feel like they are trusted to help in decision-making, they may believe their expertise is not valued.

### **Developing Professional Culture**

One way schools can boost teacher morale by improving their professional culture is to create a professional vision of what teachers should be striving for with a shared set of goals. Creating this shared vision will help develop trust amongst the staff of a school, which is important to improving things within the school (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). The best way to get people involved in creating this vision is to engage staff in whole-school professional learning opportunities (Morris et al., 2020). These opportunities will ensure that everyone understands what good professional practice looks like. Once the vision and shared goals are created, staff treating others like they want to do what is right, even when they disagree with the other's opinion, positively contributes to the sense of trust (Whitaker et al., 2008). When people disagree on serious issues within a school, a trust that everyone is doing what is best for students' education brings people who disagree to respect the others' opinion and the solution that has been determined to be best even if it is not the one they proposed (Santoro, 2018). The end of the 2019-2020 school year and the entirety of the 2021-2021 school year were extremely difficult and stressful for many educators. The educational challenges that came with the Covid-19 pandemic were ones that few teachers were prepared for. Schools in which teachers trusted their colleagues' professional judgements were able to meet these challenges through teacher collaboration. Relying on the knowledge of trusted sources, even when given unfamiliar recommendations, empowered many educators to handle teaching through the pandemic. A shared vision and trust between colleagues are very valuable to individuals when teachers are going through difficult situations.

An emphasis on professional development is another important way to improve the professional culture within a school. When a staff has good chemistry, it is important to the morale of everyone that the staff stays together, if possible. Because of this, teachers that may be underperforming should be offered professional development to build their knowledge rather than be dismissed from their position (Noddings, 2014). Not only will this keep together a staff that works well together while improving lower-performing teachers, but it also reassures other teachers that they will have support if they need it (Morris et al., 2020). If these professional growth opportunities are supported by meaningful feedback and connect to the school's shared vision, teacher efficacy will increase (Bosso, 2017), which in turn will cause that teacher's colleagues to develop a deeper trust of that individual.

### **Maximizing Teacher Accountability**

One way school administrators could improve school morale through accountability practices is by using teacher assessment as a means of improvement rather than focusing solely on evaluation and accountability (Bosso, 2017). This will better align with what teachers need from evaluation, which will create a process that teachers will see as more authentic to their improvement (Bradford & Braaten, 2018). A focus on professional development is

something that teachers can see the benefit in and helps poorly performing teachers to improve their craft rather than simply recognizing their deficits. If teachers are included in the creation of their own evaluations, the act of performing the evaluation will itself help a teacher develop an understanding of how they can improve their teaching. When teachers are given opportunities to assess the quality of their teaching, they are likely to find ways to develop as professionals.

A second way schools can use accountability measures to improve the morale of teachers in their school is to make teachers more accountable to their peers. Morale is improved when all members of a school's staff believe that those around them are doing their equal share of the work. Using colleagues to help struggling teachers build an understanding of professional competence creates a culture of lateral accountability (Tucker, 2019). This means that teachers would be accountable not just to their administrators but also to their colleagues. This form of peer-pressure would help teachers feel the need to improve upon their weaknesses so that they would be better able to contribute to their "team." It would also enable teachers to help those around them who are struggling. Often, teachers do not help colleagues who are struggling simply because they do not notice the struggles. Within a culture of lateral accountability, these struggles would be highlighted for a colleague who would then help mentor the struggling teacher. Doing this will not just improve academics, but will also create a more caring culture where people look to help those around them who are having difficulties. As well, making teachers accountable to their peers would make it more likely for teachers to work on teaching with a cross-curricular aim (Noddings, 2014), which causes students to make connections between their subjects and have a deeper understanding of how the material is important to them.

Once teachers are more accountable to their colleagues and there is a greater focus on professional development to improve teachers' areas of relative weakness, administrators need to be willing to increase teachers' individual autonomy. A strong sense of purpose and passion exists in teachers who have the ability to teach according to their professional values and by using methods that they feel are most effective (Bosso, 2017). Policymakers need to be willing to trust teachers to know what works best and what is most important for their students to know. Many great teachers are unhappy with their jobs because they are not able to act like professionals and determine these things (Noddings, 2014). An example of how teachers are worried about policymakers overreaching and affecting teacher autonomy is in the Government of Manitoba's proposed Bill 64. This legislation, if passed and given Royal Assent, would give school community councils, consisting of local parents, the duty of assisting the school in assessing the effectiveness of educational programming. Teachers are concerned that this assessment will be short-sighted and based on what individual parents believe is best educational practice. Innovation might be abandoned in favour of the status-quo, because parents are more likely to assess what is familiar to them as being effective. Teaching in a way that one is not passionate about will lead to less effective teaching. Students are expected to use and improve their creativity, problem-solving, and collaboration skills, but current practices do not afford teachers these same opportunities.

### **Solidifying Administrative Support**

Recognizing the efforts and achievements of the members of a staff is an important way an administrator can support staff and improve morale. This recognition can come in many forms and can occur in both formal and informal settings (Bosso, 2017). Staff members who feel valued by the leaders in their school are more likely to go above the requirements of their job and positively contribute to the school community (Morris et al., 2020). Praise could be used in several different ways to improve the morale of individuals, including positive reinforcement for desirable outcomes (Buenvinida & Tamayo, 2020) or as a chance to show teachers the respect their colleagues have for them (Bosso, 2017). Both of these cases will cause teachers to act in ways that are beneficial to the school culture. In addition to individual praise, administrators

should also use whole-staff recognition opportunities to bring staff together and share in group successes. These events can be simple things like food in the staff room, but can be highly valued and remembered by those who are being recognized.

Another way administrators can show teachers they support them is to include teachers in the making of decisions within the school. Teachers who are included in the decision-making process are often more committed to their jobs (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). As well, teachers feel more supported, motivated, and have greater trust that administrators want what is best for them when they are included in making decisions (Bosso, 2017). Administrators should include teacher leaders in any decision making that involves change within the school (Whitaker et al., 2008). With the support of these leaders, administrators will have an easier time convincing other teachers that the decision was made with the best interest of educators in mind. When teacher input is not included in the decision-making process, administrators should use evidence to justify the changes that need to be made, in order for teachers to understand why the decision was made the way it was.

A third way administrators can positively influence staff morale by supporting teachers is to be visible and lead by example (Morris et al., 2020). Principals are the people who most influence the culture of a school, and they need to use their actions to set the tone of what is expected by the staff in the school (Buenvinida & Tamayo, 2020). A school administrator needs to be not only approachable but also visible within the school (Morris et al., 2020). Showing leadership around the school can lead to other members of the school community participating in leadership roles, as well. Being visible also causes the administrator to know the staff of the school better and to show the staff respect for what they do. When teachers feel respected, they are more committed to doing their job well (Erichsen & Reynolds, 2020). When issues arise and the principal needs to take disciplinary action with a student, teachers will be more likely to feel supported by an administrator that they trust to do what is best. If teachers feel supported by administrators, the disciplinary action itself becomes less important to the morale of teachers (Whitaker et al., 2008). When they show visible leadership, principals earn the trust and respect of the teachers that they are charged with leading.

## Conclusion

Professional culture, teacher accountability, and administrative support are all aspects of educator's lives that can affect their morale negatively. Because high teacher morale is important to the overall well-being of a school, administrators must do whatever they can to ensure morale stays high. In schools where morale is low, creating a shared vision or set of goals and emphasizing the importance of professional development can help educators form a better professional culture. Public recognition for teachers who are performing well, and lateral accountability with a focus on improvement for those who are underperforming, help teachers feel supported and valued. Finally, being a visible leader who includes teachers in decision making will help administrators improve and maintain teacher morale within their building.

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# Land-Based Education: Stepping Back To Save the Future

Patrick Loewen

## Abstract

*The impact of Residential Schools on Indigenous People has left a long-lasting crippling effect on the subsequent generations of Indigenous youth. The resultant intergenerational loss of identity and self-value has cost the Indigenous People and their communities immensely. Aboriginal People based their education system on the real world around them for centuries and are intrinsically attached to nature. This article investigates the benefits of re-introducing Indigenous youth to a land-based educational system as a means of re-attaching the severed familial and communal ties. The very nature of traditional Land-based education practices such as hunting and gathering form strong bonds between participants and nature, and lays the foundation for interpersonal community relationships. It is believed that, by returning to a land-based teaching approach, Aboriginal communities can be rebuilt.*

Roman Catholic, Anglican, United, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches were the major denominations involved in the administration of the residential school system. The government's partnership with the churches remained in place until 1969 and, although most of the schools closed by the 1980s, the last federally supported residential schools remained in operation until the late 1990s (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). These schools were designed to ruthlessly remove the cultural identity from the Indigenous youth through community isolation and colonial immersion, thereby stripping them of their sense of social belonging and self-worth. The stories of that experience are sometimes difficult to accept as something that could have happened in a country such as Canada, which has long prided itself on being a bastion of democracy, peace, and kindness throughout the world. Children were abused, physically and sexually, and they died in the schools in numbers that would not have been tolerated in any school system anywhere in the country, or in the world (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

As children, Indigenous elders of today were forced to attend Residential Schools, where they suffered many hardships from racism to physical and sexual abuse to dislocation from community and family. For children, life in these schools was lonely and alien. Buildings were poorly located, poorly built, and poorly maintained. The staff was limited in numbers, often poorly trained, and not adequately supervised. Many schools were poorly heated and poorly ventilated, and the diet was meagre and of poor quality. Discipline was harsh, and daily life was highly regimented. Aboriginal languages and cultures were denigrated and suppressed (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). After centuries of land-centred living, followed by decades of oppression, the First Nations people of North America are struggling to reconnect with their identity. Family and community connections that provided emotional, spiritual, and physical support have been brutally and systematically dismantled (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019). Entire generations were removed from their communities, and knowledge systems rooted in land were disrupted (Madden, 2019).

Re-introduction of land-based education has been a stepping stone to reversing the effects of Residential Schools. Many of the traditional/cultural activities require multiple participants to work collectively toward common goals and offer a wide range of opportunities to establish meaningful instructional relationships while sharing knowledge in the sustainability of resources in a natural habitat. While gathering firewood, a discussion about the importance of not removing all of it since it is necessary to replenish nutrients in the soil. When hunting, there are many discussions around ethics and proper handling techniques to ensure that the life of harvested animal is honoured, and the creator is thanked for the offering, by utilizing as much of the carcass as possible. Students have found that reconnecting with the land through traditional

practices has facilitated the transition in their lives from the sense of desperate one-ness to a feeling of collective belonging.

### **The Detrimental Legacy of Residential Schools**

Callously disallowing an Indigenous worldview approach has maintained the disparity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in education and, ultimately, multiple areas relating to employment, health care, and treaty rights. Residential Schools played two roles in intergenerational transmission of disadvantage: it dispersed socio-economic reproduction while at the same time inhibiting socio-economic mobility (Rebeiz & Cooke, 2016). Circumvention of hands-on, traditional approaches discouraged a reconnection of community relations to the land, water, plant, and animal species that have sustained Indigenous peoples for generations (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019).

Forbidding land-based, traditional education denied a natural pathway for survivors and their descendants to revive and revitalize the language and culture of their ancestors while providing a better foundation for academic success. Indigenous students still struggle mightily with the various social and emotional challenges of having their storied heritage scorned and shamed. As a result of the historical injustice of Residential Schools, the Indigenous youth of today are the product of the many oppressive factors of yesterday and the symptoms of disjointed, severed familial relationships of today. Aboriginal peoples feel that they used to have each other but now they only have themselves (Downie & Lemire, 2016). The students were left with a lonely existence where they were without any semblance of belonging.

Residential schools were created for the purpose of separating Aboriginal children from their families, in order to minimize and weaken family ties and cultural linkages (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Indigenous communities endured an intergenerational loss of culture, land, medicine, language, knowledge, and traditional lifeways. The eradication of educational, cultural, environmental, spiritual/religious, and gender-based practices that sustained and structured the ancient communal relationships and values have left Indigenous youth and communities with multiple social-economic disadvantages (Corntassel & Hardbarger, 2019). It is believed that land-based pedagogies can be one of the instrumental pathways to educational successes, and community resurgence and sustainability, by reclaiming the relationships intrinsically grounded in land, culture, and community.

As a result of Residential Schools, disparities in educational successes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Rebeiz & Cooke, 2016) are very apparent across Canada. Disallowing Indigenous students to maintain their natural connections to the land and familial relations mired the students' ability to adjust to a completely foreign education system. Indigenous students were savagely stripped of everything they knew, and were violently forced to conform to Western Education ideals with no support system. Educational excellence gaps have been found to be present from the beginning of third grade due to the influence of poverty, which is typical in First Nation communities (Rambo-Hernandez et al., 2019). Gaps in educational attainment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students persist, with numerous studies suggesting that restoring traditional ways of teaching and learning can offset this trend (Rebeiz & Cooke, 2016) due to these renewed bonds.

### **Land-Based Education as a Cultural/Educational Bridge**

We call on the federal government to draft new Aboriginal education legislation with the full participation and informed consent of Aboriginal peoples. The new legislation would include a commitment to sufficient funding and would incorporate the following principles:

- i. Providing sufficient funding to close identified educational achievement gaps within one generation.
- ii. Improving education attainment levels and success rates.

- iii. Developing culturally appropriate curricula.
- iv. Protecting the right to Aboriginal languages, including the teaching of Aboriginal languages as credit courses.
- v. Enabling parental and community responsibility, control, and accountability, similar to what parents enjoy in public school systems.
- vi. Enabling parents to fully participate in the education of their children.
- vii. Respecting and honouring Treaty relationship.

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, pp. 321-322)

It is well-documented that Residential Schools were established with a goal of destroying family and community ties, and aggressively cleansing Indigenous People of their culture and natural connection with their surroundings. It was found through many studies that fostering relations with elders, grandparents, and parents while working shoulder to shoulder on traditional practices perpetuated Indigenous knowledge and was seen as a catalyst for change, thereby promoting community/cultural sustainability, specifically regarding interpersonal relationships (Harper et al., 2019). Forging a new path by employing Indigenous-based education practices improved graduation rates and increased post-secondary education success (Rebeiz & Cooke, 2016).

In order to engage the next generation's development, growth and spirit, educators need to understand the lived experiences of Indigenous youth, and the monumental importance of reviving their relations with their land-based heritage. Engaging in cultural practices such as basket making, pottery and beading, gathering and cooking certain foods, upholding communal and cultural values, and perpetuating language honour relationships also instills a feeling of responsibility, awareness, and tenacity to resurrect Indigenous communities and traditions. The success of adventure-based education, stressing ethnobotany (the study of plants and animals as they relate to the traditional practices and knowledge of a society and culture), has proven to be extremely effective in engaging students of Indigenous and non-Indigenous ancestry (Hansen, 2018). Spiritual ceremonies, peacemaking practices, and stories have been used from time immemorial to restore harmony and maintain good relations (Madden, 2019). Educators must stress the reciprocating relationship between human, land, and spiritual worlds when reworking the curriculum to respect the natural balance and reflect Aboriginal educational values).

An Indigenous-centred program that incorporates land-based learning, spirituality and the Medicine Wheel has created a blueprint for heightened student engagement and retention (Rebeiz & Cooke, 2016). School divisions have called upon their educators to build cultural bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and students in an effort to overcome educational, emotional, and social barriers. There is evidence to suggest that the implementation of traditional Indigenous worldviews and land-based initiatives inspired and directed by Elders and knowledge holders has increased the educational engagement of students of Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous backgrounds (Marker, 2017).

To counteract the effects of Residential School legacies, numerous ministries of education are mandating that an Indigenous perspective be integrated in curricula development. Many modern school divisions and First Nations communities have realized that Indigenous students must rediscover their heritage and embrace their culture to be successful students scholastically and socio-economically. Canadian educators are charged with reforming their approach incorporating pieces of Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and history into their practices. Each educational institution requires situation-specific adaptations to address the challenges and successes unique to their demographics, school cultures, and community dynamics.

One such community is Waywayseecappo First Nation, situated in southwestern Manitoba. The Education Director for Waywayseecappo recognized the need for an Off-Campus School for students aged 15-21 who were unable to succeed in the mainstream high school systems of neighboring communities. The students' feelings of exclusion and alienation from the

surrounding traditional Western schools resulted in an elevated dropout rate. The Off-Campus School staff gradually began to introduce land-based education experiences in conjunction with local Knowledge Keepers as the leaders. The staff and students attended various cultural events within the community together, involving members of a wide array of generations. Off-Campus became involved in several land-centred projects in the area with multiple environmental agencies, enabling the students to learn invaluable hands-on skills from highly trained professionals. The staff brought the outdoors into the classroom and the classroom into the outdoors by processing wild game and writing essays when in natural surroundings.

With the direction of local Knowledge Keepers, Elders, and environmental experts, the school has tanned hides, produced drums, netted and canned fish, participated in traditional ceremonies, and enhanced marine and terrestrial ecosystems. Most importantly they have formed a cohesive family culture among the staff and students, community members, partner agencies, Elders, and Chief and Council. The students have gained Manitoba Education approved credits toward graduation while learning interpersonal, cooperative, and collaborative skills, and developing lifelong traditional methods of sustainability. The students' engagement and attitudes toward the educational facility have exponentially improved, and attendance continues to rise. The culturally relevant approach of land-based education has paved the way for students to be successful and has instilled in them a sense of self-purpose. Cultural bridges have formed between staff and students while working together on multidisciplinary adventure-based activities.

## **Conclusion**

The impacts of sexual, mental, and physical abuse, shame, and ancestral connection deprivation continue to affect Residential School survivors, their families, and communities today (Hudson, 2016). Indigenous youth suffer from the methodical loss of cultural identity, strained familial relationships, and disintegrated community connectedness that was imposed at Residential Schools throughout Canada. With a virtually non-existent community socio-economic support system left in place, Indigenous community administrators are desperately searching for ways to resurrect a once-proud heritage and create a positive outlook for their youth. Modern educational leadership needs to promote the integration of lifelong intergenerational wisdom traditions in conventional science and environmental education (Datta, 2016). First Nations knowledge holders, who deem land as their first teacher, in conjunction with school teachers must work together with school teachers to fill the gaps between Western and Indigenous educational ideologies.

A land-based enriched educational program has been identified as a foundationally sound approach to restoring traditional, cultural values, thereby initiating an ever-ascending vision of communal and familial connectedness and life purpose. Land-centered literacies are believed to instill a sense of one-ness with land, water, and non-human relationships that are essential to cultural resurgence and the feeling of strength of unity. A documented consequence of the experiential and dynamic learning strategies of Indigenous society is heightened knowledge retention and applications due to the synchro-kinetic aspects of the naturally cyclic world that Indigenous culture embraces. Youths engaging in traditional activities are able to close the generations-old educational gaps that still exist, and realize sustained scholastic successes while working with Elders, community members, local Knowledge Keepers, and family members. Student engagement is improved through employing the age-old traditional approach of hands-on learning in a naturally cooperative learning environment.

Researchers and Indigenous leaders feel that by incorporating land-based education strategies, Indigenous youth can shift the paradigms, thereby creating a balance in educational successes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, and lead the resurgence of cultural spirit for all Aboriginal People of Canada. By reconnecting with their ancestral identity

through land-based education, Indigenous youth will form lasting relationships with Elders, community members, family, and nature.

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## About the Author

*Born and raised in a small northern Manitoba town, Patrick Loewen was immersed in the wilderness from a very young age: fishing, hunting, and trapping. Many of his closest friends are Indigenous, and he now works as a teacher at a First Nation Off-Campus School. It is from this background of influences that he drew inspirations for this article.*

## Overlooked and Underserved: Gifted Students in Manitoba

Jennifer Metelski

### Abstract

*Gifted education in Manitoba is neglected by policymakers, leaving gifted students without assurance of access to appropriate consideration in the province's classrooms. The needs of students with intellectual disabilities are addressed and protected by the Public Schools Act, but guidance for understanding and accommodating the needs of gifted learners is lacking. Programming for gifted students is necessary to meet their affective and academic needs. Acceleration, which may take many forms, is an effective intervention that is appropriate for gifted learners; as they stand, Manitoba's guidelines for accommodating student needs do not support acceleration as a viable option for gifted students.*

Manitoba's public schools do not attend to the needs of gifted students adequately. The curriculum used in Manitoba's public schools is designed to meet the learning needs of most students (Manitoba, 2006), but there are groups of students with atypical developmental trajectories whose needs are not addressed by the standard curriculum. These trajectories exist at both ends of the IQ scale, but the needs of gifted students are largely unrecognized, while students with cognitive deficits (deservedly) receive attention and support. Although there is substantial focus on students having difficulty fulfilling curricular outcomes, gifted students who may have already met or who can exceed those standards are not addressed in Manitoba's *Public Schools Act (PSA)* (Manitoba, 2020, Regulation 155/205). Wide variation in options for gifted students exists because Manitoba's policies do not ensure broad, consistent access to provisions for those students at the divisional, school, or classroom level. As it is written, Manitoba's policy on varying the curriculum disqualifies gifted students from having Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) (*Student Services*, n.d.). Manitoba policy fails to recognize that gifted students vary significantly from the norm, and that they have a right to differentiations including acceleration, for which there is expansive and consistent research support (Colangelo et al., 2004).

Public school curriculum is targeted toward typical children with typical needs who progress at a typical pace (Manitoba, 2006), but atypical children's needs are not adequately addressed by standard curriculum. Atypical development patterns are characteristic of the 3% of children at both the top and bottom of the IQ scale; these children require educational programming that is significantly different from the programming provided for typical children (Silverman, 2012, Appendix, sect. 23). Collectively, the children at each end of the IQ scale can be considered "exceptional learners"; that is, they are the exception to the rule that their intellectual abilities match those of their chronological peers. Children with significant cognitive deficits score two standard deviations below average on IQ tests, resulting in a score of 70 or below (Diagnostic Criteria, n.d., "Deficits" section, para. 2). At the other end of the IQ scale, a score of 130 (two standard deviations above average on IQ tests) represents the threshold for the identification of giftedness (Silverman, 2019). Educational systems typically ignore the fact that gifted children differ from the norm as significantly as their peers with cognitive deficits.

Both groups of students are atypical, but students with intellectual disabilities receive attention and support while the students at the other end of the spectrum are largely unrecognized. The welfare of students with cognitive deficits both in school and beyond is justifiably paramount when their educational plans are developed; these students are vulnerable individuals who require support to function with safety and dignity as members of society. Programming for students with intellectual disabilities is widely available, and the legal requirement for these provisions is well understood; the guarantee of appropriate education for gifted students, however, is seldom applied on the same large scale (Kanevsky, 2013). There

are members of the education and research community who go so far as to argue that gifted children do not need any special services, and that they should receive consideration only when and if it seems reasonable to offer it (Subotnik et al., 2011). Indeed, even teachers have been found to hold stereotypes about gifted students, causing them to question the need for any support at all (Matheis et al., 2019).

Manitoba's documents focus on students having difficulty fulfilling curricular outcomes, while ignoring those who have already met or can exceed those standards. "Appropriate education" is assured to all children in Canada under the Charter of Rights and Freedoms (Kanevsky, 2013); Manitoba considers the provincial curriculum appropriate educational programming for most students (Manitoba Education, 2010). The *PSA* states that differentiated instruction and adaptations should be in place for those who are having difficulty meeting curricular outcomes, noting that other methods for differentiating instruction or other suitable curricular goals may need to be developed based on the results of specialized assessment (Manitoba, 2020, Regulation 155/205). Inherent in these directions is the assumption that disabilities or deficits are the root cause of many students' difficulties in achieving curricular outcomes. At the same time, the instructions presume that if a student is not having difficulty reaching outcomes, the outcomes must then be suitable for the learner. Additionally, the documents imply that differentiated instruction is a scaffold for struggling students rather than a broad range of practices with strategies that must be applied with consideration for the individual learning profile of each student.

Canada, and Manitoba in particular, relies on a patchwork of policies and provisions about gifted students that vary from division to division, school to school, and even classroom to classroom. Internationally, special education law often does not cover gifted students (Assouline et al., 2015), and Canada is no different. While some provinces have documents focused solely on provisions for gifted students, Manitoba does not (Kanevsky, 2013). Unless a province or territory develops its own official policy for the provision of education to gifted students, nobody holds major responsibility for it (Goguen, 1998). There is a strong relationship between a jurisdiction having a document focused on gifted education and the number of forms of acceleration explicitly supported by that jurisdiction's policies (Kanevsky, 2013); currently, Manitoba has neither. The lack of provision for gifted students in Manitoba policy means that there is no real accountability at any level for providing these students access to specialized programming.

Students with significant cognitive disabilities are required to have IEPs developed as a customized curriculum designed to meet their unique learning needs, but gifted students have no such provision. By virtue of their learning speed and depth of knowledge acquisition, gifted students often have mastered advanced levels of content in subject areas (Subotnik et al., 2011), compared to their chronological peers. For a student to be allowed to work on outcomes different from their age-mates, Manitoba requires that an IEP be developed that modifies the provincial curriculum by changing the number, essence, and content of the curricular outcomes that a student is expected to meet (Student Services, n.d.). VanTassel-Baska and Brown (2007) contended that differentiated specialized curriculum is necessary for gifted students, and Kanevsky (2011) noted that gifted learners, with their facility with abstract understandings and rapid learning, prefer content that is aligned with their capacities, and that is distinctly different from the content preferred by peers. Manitoba policy, however, states that modification is appropriate only for students who have a significant cognitive disability as determined by specialized assessment (Student Services, n.d.). Giftedness does not qualify as a disability for the purposes of developing IEPs in Manitoba.

Understanding the needs of gifted students is vital to ensuring that they receive appropriate educational programming. Cognitive deficit is one reason why students may underachieve; giftedness is another. Gifted children retained in classes with same-age peers typically underachieve (where underachievement is defined by grades); they also have underachievement thrust upon them in the form of being asked to think in ways and understand

concepts beyond which they have already moved (Gross, 2004). Additionally, affective consequences occur when gifted children are kept in the regular classroom working at the regular pace. Many experience lowered self-esteem, anxiety, and social isolation, and the more gifted the learners, the lower their self-concept will be in a regular classroom (Silverman, 2012). Underachievement tends to be maintained when negative self-perceptions and lack of learning skills occur in gifted students (Desmet et al., 2019) when their needs are not met.

Academic acceleration of high-ability youth is one of the most well-researched topics in education (Neihart, 2007), and the results are overwhelmingly positive (Subotnik et al., 2011). Enrichment-type supplementary provisions, including classroom differentiation, do not produce the same compelling level of affirmative research evidence as accelerative options (Colangelo et al., 2004). Acceleration encompasses a variety of strategies, some of which may take place in a classroom with same-age peers (Subotnik et al. 2011). Neihart (2007) claimed that acceleration should be routine for gifted students, and Colangelo et al. (2004) stated that rather than wondering whether a gifted student should be accelerated, educators should instead focus on the best method of acceleration for the student in question. Gifted students flourish when presented with accelerated content, and Manitoba does them a disservice by failing to recognize the importance of differentiation through acceleration.

Closing our eyes to the differences between gifted children and the rest does not change the fact that the differences exist and need to be addressed. As diversity increases in our classrooms, the one-size-fits-most approach to curriculum and differentiation falls short of meeting the needs of gifted students. Every student is guaranteed the right to appropriate education, but Manitoba does not have any regulations enforcing the right to necessary conditions for gifted learners. Mandates to differentiate for all students muddy the waters when clear guidance at all levels of policymaking is lacking, and this lack of consideration damages the mental health and academic growth of gifted students. Until acknowledgement of and support for accelerative options for gifted students is supported by Manitoba's government, their needs will remain subject to the whims of local educational institutions. All students deserve equal access to public school education, but we must not confound equal access with identical outcomes. Gifted students deserve educational goals that move them forward, and guarantee that their learning in our classrooms is intentional, not merely incidental.

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### **About the Author**

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# **Schoolwide Positive Behaviour Support: The Positive Effects and Barriers to Sustainability**

**Kyle Berg**

## **Abstract**

*Schoolwide positive behaviour support (SWPBS) programs have proven to be largely effective at reducing problem behaviour in schools. Full implementation of SWPBS has been associated with positive behavioural and academic outcomes. However, despite their effectiveness, implementation rates of SWPBS remain low. For SWPBS to be sustained, a number of barriers need to be addressed. Insufficient investment from school administrators, staff buy-in, and school culture are the main barriers to successful implementation. By attending to these barriers, the chances of successful implementation of SWPBS are enhanced.*

Schoolwide positive behaviour support (SWPBS) programs are among the most promising approaches currently used to address challenging behaviour in school, though they are not without their challenges. SWPBS is a proactive, positive approach to managing behaviour that focuses on managing the learning environment, controlling consequences, and teaching replacement behaviours that reduce problems and promote learning (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). SWPBS programs manage student behaviour by creating schoolwide positive behavioural expectations, and providing reinforcement for students who meet those expectations (Bradshaw et al., 2010). When implemented with fidelity, SWPBS leads to positive student and schoolwide behavioural outcomes (Gage et al., 2017). SWPBS holds an advantage over traditional, punitive behaviour management programs, which can lead to worse behavioural outcomes in the long run (Amemiya et al., 2020). Additionally, one of the side effects of SWPBS appears to be improved academic outcomes (Bradshaw et al., 2010). However, despite their success, SWPBS programs are typically not sustained beyond a few years. Multiple barriers impact the successful implementation and sustainability of SWPBS. As with many new school initiatives, lack of administrator involvement and leadership, negative staff attitudes, and pre-existing school culture and structure represent some of the main barriers to implementation (Chitiyo et al., 2019). While SWPBS holds great potential for curbing problem behaviour at school, the barriers to implementation make it difficult to sustain over time.

## **The Positive Effect of SWPBS**

Implementation of SWPBS in schools has proven to be beneficial at multiple levels of analysis. SWPBS interventions are schoolwide, and include classroom interventions, non-classroom supports, family and community connections, and individualized interventions for specific students (Sugai & Horner, 2009). Through creating schoolwide plans that describe positive behavioural expectations, and providing incentives to students who meet those expectations, SWPBS is a consistent, effective strategy for managing student behaviour (Bradshaw et al., 2010). When compared to other, more punitive behaviour modification programs, SWPBS advances beyond reactive responses, and is more effective in managing problem behaviour at school (Caldarella et al., 2011). Beyond its immediate focus, SWPBS is effective in improving academic outcomes for students, by removing behavioural barriers to education (Gage et al., 2017). By shifting focus away from punishment, and toward universal positive expectations, SWPBS is an effective approach to improving behavioural and academic outcomes.

Any programmatic effort to manage disruptive behaviour at school needs to demonstrate its effectiveness. Though still relatively new in many regions, SWPBS holds a robust and growing

evidence base to support its implementation (Gage et al., 2017). Recent findings indicate that implementation SWPBS is associated with a decrease in office disciplinary referrals, a decrease in suspensions, and an increase in students' sense of safety at school (Bradshaw et al., 2010). SWPBS approaches to managing student opposition have been successful in curbing defiance, and promoting positive replacement behaviours for some of the toughest students (Hall & Hall, 2003). In addition to decreased problem behaviour, SWPBS has a positive impact on the school climate and it promotes pro-social student behaviour. Schools where SWPBS is implemented demonstrate better problem-solving skills by their students, and are more efficient in their ability to deescalate and support students who engage in negative behaviour (Caldarella et al., 2011). Many schools struggle to put together a coordinated response to challenging behaviour. SWPBS organizes the smallest amount of evidence-based interventions necessary, and implements them with high fidelity (Sugai & Horner, 2009). When focusing on a limited number of universal interventions, schools using high fidelity SWPBS can clearly articulate to students what behaviours are expected throughout the school, and can start to establish community norms. High fidelity SWPBS has the greatest potential for positive behaviour modification and long-term sustainability (Kim et al., 2018). SWPBS has shown to be effective in reducing problem behaviour and promoting a positive climate at schools.

SWPBS offers a positive, effective alternative to punitive behaviour management systems. While SWPBS and traditional, punitive behaviour management programs are both effective in reducing problem behaviour, SWPBS programs are significantly more effective in their pursuit (DeJager et al., 2020). For many traditional school professionals, punitive behaviour management systems are the norm in their buildings. Despite their popularity, these systems tend to lead to increased defiant behaviour in the classroom, especially for students who previously had positive attachment to school (Amemiya et al., 2020). SWPBS programs, when implemented with fidelity, have been effective in reducing office disciplinary referrals, and increasing feelings of safety at school (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Even small-scale examples of positive behaviour support programs, such as token economies (using small rewards to motivate students to engage in positive behaviours and eliminate negative behaviours), are more effective than the punitive approach of negative reinforcement for unwanted behaviour (DeJager, et al., 2020). While punitive behaviour management systems may be more familiar, SWPBS is more effective in reducing problem behaviour.

While SWPBS is fundamentally concerned with reducing problem behaviour at schools, there are academic advantages that accompany implementation of the program. Many school staff are inclined to believe that there is a tradeoff between academic success and positive behaviour support (Lohrmann et al., 2008). However, most children need to feel safe and supported at school before they are ready to learn (Hall & Hall, 2003). While any positive changes in academics are distal, sustained SWPBS programming seems to be associated with improved academic performance (Bradsaw et al., 2010). By reducing behaviour exclusion, students are exposed to more classroom instruction, which leads to higher academic achievement in schools where SWPBS is implemented (Gage et al., 2017). In fact, schools that implement high fidelity SWPBS can predict significant academic growth the longer they sustain the program (Kim et al., 2018). In Gage's (2017) study of approximately 2,033 schools and 10 years of data, sustained implementation of SWPBS led to significant improvement in both reading and mathematics. There are both academic and behavioural benefits of implementing SWPBS in schools.

SWPBS holds a great deal of potential to decrease negative school behaviour and promote positive alternatives. It is built on the principles of prevention, continuous behavioural support for all students, and commitment to environmental and systemic change (Caldarella et al., 2011). These principles are implemented through interventions that outline universal school expectations, provide incentives to meet those expectations, and modify environmental factors to promote student success (Bradshaw et al., 2010). These interventions are extremely effective in reducing problem behaviours, improving overall quality of school life, and promoting

appropriate social behaviour (Caldarella et al., 2011). When compared to other behaviour modification programs, specifically more punitive programs, the benefits of SWPBS are clear. An added bonus to the behavioural outcomes of SWPBS is the academic benefits that accrue because students are better able to access learning activities without the distraction of problem behaviour (Gage et al., 2017). The benefits of SWPBS are clearly documented, and many school districts are in favour of implementation. However, the implementation of the practices and principles of SWPBS remains low (Chitiyo et al., 2019). For SWPBS to be successful, a better understanding of the barriers to implementation and sustainability is necessary.

### **The Barriers to SWPBS Implementation and Sustainability**

While the benefits of SWPBS are evident, significant barriers to implementation exist. Many school personnel agree with the principles of SWPBS, but see the path toward implementation as daunting. Among the many barriers to implementation, three of the major hurdles reflect the core values of SWPBS (Kincaid et al., 2007). Sustained investment from the school administrator is crucial in adopting new practices, including SWPBS (Lohrmann et al., 2008). Staff confidence, ability, and attitude toward implementing SWPBS can often present a barrier to successful implementation (Lohrmann et al., 2008). Since SWPBS involves evaluating and readjusting environmental factors in the school, structural and environmental barriers can interfere with implementation (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). These barriers need to be understood and mitigated in order for SWPBS to be implemented and sustained.

School administrators, by way of their position, can serve as key facilitators or barriers to implementing SWPBS. For school personnel, administrative commitment to SWPBS is pivotal to its success (Bambara et al., 2009). Administrators are often the catalyst for school change. However, it is not uncommon for administrators to resist change passively by delegating the implementation of SWPBS to others, and separating their role from the project (Forman et al., 2009). For SWPBS to succeed, it is important for administrators to have the knowledge of SWPBS, and the ability to implement schoolwide changes. Beyond their managerial skills, administrators need to be the instructional leaders of their schools, and to have a positive attitude about the interventions (Forman et al., 2009). Perhaps most importantly, administrators play the biggest role in supporting school staff in implementing SWPBS at the classroom level. Administrators play a crucial role in providing the necessary resources, training, and release time for staff to implement SWPBS. Beyond the tangible support, moral support and active participation in team decision making makes successful implementation possible (Bambara et al., 2009). For these reasons, the role of the school administrator in the success of SWPBS programs cannot be understated.

Unsurprisingly, implementing SWPBS without adequate staff buy-in severely hinders any chance of its success. Staff confidence in their abilities, and their attitudes toward the effectiveness of SWPBS, are essential factors to consider for SWPBS to be sustainable long term (Chitiyo et al., 2019). For many professionals, implementing SWPBS may require changing their practice, which can be uncomfortable for them. If teachers are not confident, they may abandon the practices of SWPBS and resort to traditional, punitive behaviour management practices (Chitiyo et al., 2019). Another barrier to staff buy-in is lack of training in SWPBS. Inadequate staff training in SWPBS methods and interventions can decrease staff confidence, and make them reluctant to implement new strategies (Bambara et al., 2009). Most teachers are not taught the principles of SWPBS during their university training, and unless they have regular professional development on the topic they will not be prepared to sustain SWPBS practices over time (Chitiyo et al., 2019). Lastly, many staff fail to see the relative advantage of SWPBS practices. For staff to buy into SWPBS practices, they need to see the positive impact of the interventions (Forman et al., 2009). Implementors also need to control for the idea that there is a tradeoff between SWPBS practices and academic priorities (Lohrmann et al., 2008). In order to track the positive gains in both the academic and behavioural domains, SWPBS implementation

needs to include extensive data collection and representation. Cultivating staff buy-in is crucial for the implementation and sustainability of SWPBS.

School culture and structure can hold major barriers for the implementation and sustainability of SWPBS. Schools, and school staff by association, are locked into a rigid yearly and daily schedule. Because school staff need to be confident in using the SWPBS mode, they require additional training, collaboration, and follow-up to ensure its success (Chitiyo et al., 2019). School personnel often experience SWPBS activities as labor intensive and time consuming, and thus indicate that they do not have adequate time to sustain the practice (Bambara et al., 2009). Philosophical misunderstanding of SWPBS is another common challenge found in the culture of schools. When the philosophical beliefs of a school are in line with the principles of SWPBS, successful implementation is more likely (Forman et al., 2009). A common example of philosophical misunderstanding is misperception of what constitutes effective behaviour management at the schoolwide level (Bambara et al., 2009). Many school staff experience frustration and hopelessness when interventions fail, and fall back on punitive consequences for behaviour (Lohrmann et al., 2008). For others, the principles of SWPBS are viewed as unfair: they see the interventions as giving special treatment to students who behave badly (Bambara et al.). These philosophical difference and misunderstandings need to be addressed with data supporting the effectiveness of SWPBS interventions in order for barriers in the culture and structure of schools to be mitigated.

## Conclusion

High fidelity SWPBS holds the capacity to transform behavioural and academic outcomes for all students. As a universal system, SWPBS defines and promotes expected behaviours, and emphasizes adjustment of the learning environment and reinforcing positive behaviour change (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). SWPBS is associated with large, sustainable changes in multiple positive behaviour outcomes, including decreased office discipline referrals, decreased suspensions, and increased pro-social attitudes (Bradshaw et al., 2010). Even small examples of SWPBS, such as token economies to reinforce expected behaviour, are quite effective in curbing problem behaviour in the classroom (DeJager et al., 2020). In opposition to punitive behaviour management systems, the principles of SWPBS consider the systemic conditions and multiple variables that impact student behaviour, rather than simply focusing on the individual child (Chitiyo & Wheeler, 2009). In doing so, SWPBS is far more effective in managing problem behaviour across the school system, and creating an enhanced learning environment for students. Schools that implement and sustain SWPBS have demonstrated higher academic achievement by reducing problem behaviour and thus exposing students to more instruction (Gage et al., 2017). The positive effects of SWPBS student behaviour and academics are well documented, but full implementation and sustainability remain a challenge.

Despite widespread support, SWPBS implementation and sustainability faces many barriers. SWPBS focuses on delivering universal supports that require system-wide coordination and high fidelity to ensure quality implementation (Kim et al., 2018). School administrators can become passive barrier against successful implementation (Forman et al., 2003). As the main school leaders, administrators are the drivers of change, and administrative support for SWPBS is seen as crucial for its sustainability (Bambara et al., 2009). School staff are not usually trained in implementing SWPBS, and their attitudes and beliefs can act as a major barrier implementation. For SWPBS to be successfully implemented and sustained, school staff need to be confident in their abilities, and believe that their efforts to implement SWPBS will be successful (Lohrmann et al., 2008). Collaboration and universal consistent reinforcement of positive behaviours is necessary for high fidelity SWPBS success (Parrish, 2018). Pre-existing school structures and culture can make this difficult, and present another barrier to implementation. Beyond the fact that there is limited time in the school year for additional training, personal and community beliefs regarding proper discipline can make it difficult to

sustain SWPBS (Bambara et al., 2009). It will be up to school and system leaders to prioritize the implementation and sustainability of SWPBS, and ensure that adequate training and resources are made available for its success. Even though the success of SWPBS is evident, careful consideration of the barriers is essential for long-term sustainability.

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# Self-Efficacy and the Inclusive Teacher

Joshua Abraham

## Abstract

*The success of inclusive education is dependent on the self-efficacy of classroom teachers. This research examines the different ways in which teachers shape their confidence when providing equal opportunity for all students. For teachers to successfully implement inclusive practices within the classroom, they must first believe in the right for education for all students and understand the legislations surrounding inclusive education. Teachers must also continue to grow their knowledge through participation in Professional Development that is supported by collaborated Professional Learning Communities within the school. In order for teachers to continue to adapt their practice to suit the needs of their students, school leaders are responsible for developing a culture of inclusion and providing opportunities for collective growth among all educators within the system.*

In most countries around the world, schools are a place where students, regardless of culture, gender, language, and ability, are entitled to the opportunity of equal education (Chao et al., 2017). The end goal of inclusive education is to provide every child with the chance to flourish in a safe learning environment, as well as within society (Nishan, 2018). Teachers play a central role in the implementation of inclusive education (Chao et al., 2016); seeing themselves as capable educators will guide inclusive philosophy (Specht et al., 2015). In order to strengthen teacher this self-efficacy, teachers must believe in the culture of inclusion (Nishan, 2018), and learn about local legislation and policies of inclusion (Chao et al., 2016). While the attitudes and beliefs of inclusion are an important starting point for educators, pre-teacher training provides teachers with the knowledge of differentiating instruction and experience working with alongside students with exceptional needs (Friesen & Cuning, 2018). School leaders are essential in establishing a culture of inclusion while supporting educator's needs for inclusive practices (Jung et al., 2019) by providing sustainable professional development and building collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs).

## Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes

The beliefs and attitudes that teachers hold toward inclusive education are foremost in understanding the importance of providing equal opportunity for all students. Positive attitudes toward inclusion are important in the successful implementation of inclusive practices and creating a positive learning environment for all students (Sannen et al., 2020). Individual attitudes and beliefs vary from teacher to teacher and are influenced by factors such as personal experiences, culture, exposure, and local policy and legislation (Peček & Macura-Milovanović, 2019). Since culture can play a role in one's belief of inclusion (Steen & Wilson, 2020), increased knowledge and understanding of local law and legislation is found to increase self-efficacy (Chao, 2017). When pre-service teachers are given a chance to evaluate their own skills with regards to inclusive education that is consistent with local law and legislation, the effect is greater than learning teacher skills alone. Teacher beliefs and attitudes toward inclusive education are significant factors that relate to the success of inclusive education, and these attitudes and understanding of local legislation are generally formed during teacher training courses (Chao et al., 2016). It is important that educational institutions, such as universities and teacher colleges, continue to inspire positive beliefs and attitudes toward inclusivity, but also provide teacher candidates with ample exposure to diverse classroom settings.

## **Pre-Service Training**

Pre-service training has a positive influence on teachers' attitudes of inclusive education and improves teacher self-efficacy for inclusive practices (Chao et al., 2017). In order for pre-service teachers to be confident entering diverse classroom settings, it is imperative that educational institutions, such as universities and teacher colleges, offer specific training that provides teachers with the skills and experiences they require to feel successful in implementing inclusive teaching practices (Specht et al., 2015). Pre-service teachers who are offered more extensive programming to understand behaviour management and other inclusive practices enter mainstream schools with more inclusive beliefs and positive self-efficacy. Pre-service teachers engaged in courses that are specific to inclusive education report a higher level of confidence than other pre-service teachers who do not engage in such specialized courses (Chao et al., 2017). Teachers will, therefore, advocate for the importance of educating all students when entering mainstream classrooms. My current role as resource teacher provides me with the opportunity to collaborate with first-year teachers. An issue that is continuously mentioned by teachers is the lack of preparedness experienced when first exposed to a diverse classroom, particularly students with exceptional needs. It is, therefore, crucial that educational institutions, such as universities and teacher colleges, offer pre-service teachers sufficient opportunity to engage in practical experiences working with students with exceptional needs (Kiel et al., 2019). Along with teachers requiring the opportunity to expose themselves with a range of student profiles, they will also require training and feedback in adapting curriculum and instruction to meet the learning needs of all students.

For teachers to be successful within the classroom, educators must understand and engage in differentiated instruction that will enable them to support the needs of all students (Friesen & Cuning, 2018). Teacher self-efficacy includes the belief in one's ability to adopt innovative teaching strategies that are required to handle the range of learning profiles within the classroom (Keil et al., 2019). Beginning teachers typically experience low self-efficacy when it comes to adapting curriculum for all students in their classroom (De Neve & Devos, 2015). Educational institutions must provide pre-service teachers explicit instruction for the implementation of differentiated teaching approaches, and opportunity for these teachers to implement these strategies in a practical environment (Wan, 2015). It is important to realize that, since self-efficacy is based on personal and cultural beliefs, teachers require guidance when adapting curriculum for marginalized and minority groups, such as LGBTQIA+ groups (Taylor et al., 2015). With classrooms more diverse than ever, it is necessary that educational institutions provide pre-service teachers with the knowledge and skills that they need to differentiate instruction for their diverse classrooms (Specht et al., 2015), in order to develop self-efficacy. As educational institutions shape the self-efficacy of new teachers, it is the beliefs and attitudes of the leaders within schools that continue to shape and support the successful implementation of inclusive practices within school.

## **School Leadership**

School leaders play a central role in establishing a culture of inclusion within a school and providing teachers with the support needed to build self-efficacy when implementing inclusive practices (Jung et al., 2019). Teachers also view the skillset of their school leaders as a direct influence on their own self-efficacy (Sakiz et al., 2018). Personally, since my school leader is educated and experienced in the area of inclusive education, it provides me with the confidence to support teachers with implementing the best practices for all students. When inclusive education involves cultural and personal beliefs, school leadership is crucial in fostering open dialogue to alleviate fears and providing a strong system of support to teachers (Taylor et al., 2016). My wife is a school social worker and LGBTQIA+ ally leader, and within the realm of teacher collaboration, her experiences presently range from supportive advocate to judgemental

avoidance. When working with students from kindergarten to grade 12, the students on her caseload often find it difficult to find consistency with the multiple teachers they have each day. School leaders are central in cultivating an environment where teachers can feel safe, develop further understanding of inclusive practices, and collaborate with peers without bias, all of which increase the self-efficacy of teachers and attitudes of students.

### **Professional Development**

Teacher professional development, both at the pre-service and experienced teaching level, is critical in promoting the most appropriate inclusive practice and continuing to strengthen teacher self-efficacy (Sharp et al., 2018). Teachers of all levels, especially beginning teachers, experience barriers when it comes to not having enough time and support to adapt curriculum for the diverse needs within the classroom (De Neve & Devos, 2015). It is important that school leaders provide effective professional development that is content specific, delivered by experts, and offered over an extended period so that teachers can engage, apply, and reflect on learned inclusive practices (Sharp et al., 2018). It is also important that school leaders identify the type of support needed among the differing levels of teacher experience within the school, and provide professional development that is specific to the needs of each teacher (Kiel et al., 2019). Understanding which teachers have low self-efficacy in certain areas will assist school leaders in tailoring professional development that is intentional and specific to school needs.

Professional development should also be made available to all staff who work within the classroom, including educational assistants (Villafuerte, 2020). Since educational assistants do not require official qualification to work within classrooms, these individuals require ongoing professional development in areas such as basic information about disabilities, instructional strategies, and different methods to support students with academic, behavioural, and emotional needs. Educational assistants who are qualified and have the knowledge needed to work in a variety of school settings increase the self-efficacy of both themselves and the classroom teacher and can promote successful collaboration needed for effective classroom environments. Professional development is perceived to be a key factor in building self-efficacy among all teachers, including educational assistants, and ultimately contributes to supporting the needs of all students within the classroom (Chao et al., 2017). Professional development not only provides teachers and educational assistants with knowledge and understanding, but also promotes a collaborative environment that is needed to establish networks in which all educators can reflect on educational practices, and co-construct successful learning opportunities for all students.

Providing teachers with professional development and the awareness of inclusive practices is an important first step to creating a culture of inclusion. However, if teachers are not provided the support network that is created through PLCs, new knowledge does not result in lasting changes (Meyer et al., 2019). Although teachers play a central role in the implementation of inclusive practices, we cannot expect that teachers can independently meet the needs of all students (Sannen et al., 2020). PLCs enable teachers to develop new skills and provide necessary feedback to each other that, in turn, enhances student learning (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017). Collective efficacy refers to the beliefs that school members hold about the specific work groups to which they are assigned and their capability to follow through with the action plan that is necessary to reach a desired goal. Working with a range of students in different classrooms from year to year, it is essential to hold case management meetings with multiple teachers in order to provide consistent and up-to-date programming. I rely on our school's collective efficacy to make the best decisions for student-specific programming. When engaged in connected PLCs, teachers develop the confidence required to provide all students with intentional learning opportunities.

## Conclusion

One of the most challenging tasks teachers face is providing all students with equal opportunity to succeed within the classroom (De Neve & Davos, 2015). Teachers need to feel confident in providing all students with appropriate teaching, and feel that they can support behavioural needs when implementing inclusive practices (Chao et al., 2017). In order to build teacher self-efficacy, individuals must first hold positive beliefs toward inclusion (Sannen et al., 2020). Understanding local laws and legislation of inclusion makes teachers more confident in advocating for their students (Meyer et al., 2018). To build self-efficacy, it is important that educational institutions develop suitable teacher programs that provide pre-service teachers with the practical experience working alongside students with exceptional needs (Kiel et al., 2019), and the ability to differentiate instruction (Wan, 2015). When teachers enter mainstream classrooms, it is important that school leaders create an inclusive school climate that provides support and encourages inclusive dialogue among teachers (Taylor et al., 2016). Encouraging teachers to engage in regular professional learning impacts both teacher self-efficacy in inclusive practices and student achievement (Sharp et al., 2018). To make professional development effective, school leaders need to build PLCs (Yang, 2019) that enable teachers to learn together, provide feedback, and reflect on successful inclusive practices.

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## Some Resolutions for Gaming Addiction in Schools

Fritzgerald Villanueva

### Abstract

*Gaming addiction is a behavioural disorder that requires clinical therapy because of its symptoms, which often overwhelm children's sense of self-control. However, the credibility of the screening test for gaming addiction is contentious in the literature, resulting in some ambiguous distinctions between excessive video gaming and the disorder. Furthermore, the effectiveness of clinical treatments for the disorder lacks empirical evidence. Online game rooms, video game clubs, and gaming tournaments offer some opportunities for educators to resolve these problems. Consequently, exploring these problems and resolutions related to gaming addiction is worthwhile.*

Gaming addiction is a concern in schools because of the following problems. First, the symptoms of gaming addiction are overwhelming (Tomoniko, 2019). Second, the distinctions between excessive video gaming and gaming addiction are ambiguous (von der Heiden et al., 2019). Third, the clinical treatments for gaming addiction are unreliable (Bean et al., 2017). These problems have some implications for children's academic and social life, vulnerability to the disorder's comorbidities, and continued dependency with video games. As a result, addressing these problems related to gaming addiction is important.

Some practical resolutions for gaming addiction involve organizing an online game room, a video game club, and a gaming tournament. These resolutions help children to cope with gaming addiction, to become well-informed of the disorder and its comorbidities, and to acquire a sense of purpose for playing video games. Furthermore, such resolutions offer some opportunities for educators to raise awareness of internet safety and mental health crisis, and the importance of regulating internet use, seeking help in times of crisis, and participating in the school community. Consequently, the practicality of these resolutions helps to resolve the issue of gaming addiction in schools, despite the problems related to the disorder.

### Challenging Disorder

The problems related to gaming addiction undermine children's school experience. First, the overwhelming symptoms of gaming addiction cause impulsivity in relation to video gaming (Carels, 2019). Second, the ambiguity between excessive video gaming and gaming addiction often results in some cases of misdiagnosis (Bean et al., 2017). Third, the unreliability of clinical treatments for the disorder often leads to a sense of false hope in recovery (Chia & Zhang, 2020). Some implications of these problems for children's school experience include the inability to concentrate with schoolwork, to socialize with friends and classmates, to sleep early, to attend school regularly, and to make the right choices between schoolwork and video games (Tomoniko, 2019). As a result, educators have the responsibility to help students overcome gaming addiction in schools because of some implications of these problems for children's school experience.

### Overwhelming Symptoms

Gaming addiction is a health concern characterized by intense urges to play video games (Bean et al., 2017). Some symptoms of the disorder include cravings or fatigue. These symptoms are involuntary responses on some stimuli (MacLeod & Clarke, 2013) associated with playing video games, such as cellphones or computer desktops (Chia & Zhang, 2020). Furthermore, such symptoms cause impulsivity in relation to video gaming (Carels, 2019), which

affects children's sense of self-control (Ludden, 2018; Schmeichel & Inzlicht, 2013). As a result, the symptoms of gaming addiction are overwhelming because of the intense urges to play video games, which are involuntary and cause impulsivity (Tomoniko, 2019).

The expectation for children to exercise restraint, or to self-regulate their impulsivity, underestimates the symptoms of gaming addiction (Carels, 2019). Underestimating these symptoms has some implications. For example, gaming addiction amplifies impulsivity when playing video games (Bean et al., 2017), which affects children's ability to concentrate with schoolwork or to socialize with friends and classmates (Tomoniko, 2019). Consequently, educators have the responsibility to help students cope with gaming addiction because of some implications of underestimating its symptoms for children's academic and social life.

### **Ambiguity with Excessive Video Gaming**

Excessive video gaming and gaming addiction are distinct. Although excessive video gaming also affects children's school experience, addiction is more severe because of its symptoms (Terry & Malik, 2018). The screening test for the disorder uses some indicators to measure impulsivity in relation to video gaming, such as intensity of urges or time spent with video games (Bean et al., 2017). The credibility of such indicators, on the other hand, is contentious in the literature (Feng et al., 2019). As a result, the distinctions between excessive video gaming and gaming addiction are ambiguous, despite the empirical evidence, because of the credibility concerns with these indicators (von der Heiden et al., 2019).

Such ambiguity often causes confusion, resulting in some cases of misdiagnosis (Bean et al., 2017). Misdiagnosing gaming addiction has some implications. For example, gaming addiction often causes sleep deprivation or insomnia (Tomoniko, 2019), which requires medical treatment (Bragg et al., 2019). When left untreated, sleep deprivation or insomnia aggravates gaming addiction, which affects children's ability to sleep early or to attend school regularly. Consequently, educators have the responsibility to help students become well-informed of gaming addiction because of some implications of misdiagnosing the disorder for children's vulnerability to its comorbidities.

### **Unreliable Clinical Treatments**

Clinical therapy is the most common treatment for gaming addiction (Chia & Zhang, 2020). The effectiveness of such treatment, on the other hand, is contentious in the literature (Bean et al., 2017). One promising therapy is cognitive bias modification, which uses the technique of modifying biases on some habits (MacLeod & Clarke, 2013) associated with playing video games, such as excessive cellphone use (Carels, 2019) or unregulated internet exposure (Tomoniko, 2019). However, cognitive bias modification is a new area of research and its effectiveness remains inconclusive (Chia & Zhang, 2020). As a result, the clinical treatments for gaming addiction are unreliable because of the lack of empirical evidence.

Such unreliability often leads to a sense of false hope in recovery (Chia & Zhang, 2020). Relying on false hope has some implications. For example, children who require clinical therapy remain at risk for gaming addiction because of the unreliability of clinical treatments (Bean et al., 2017). Continued dependency with video games clouds judgement, which affects children's ability to make the right choices between schoolwork and video games (Tomoniko, 2019). Consequently, educators have the responsibility to help students acquire a sense of purpose for playing video games because of some implications of relying on false hope for children's continued dependency.

## **Practical Resolutions**

Organizing an online game room, a video game club, and a gaming tournament is a practical approach for resolving gaming addiction. First, the online game room provides for students a safe and appropriate place to play video games. Second, the video game club encourages students to discuss some personal stories related to the disorder. Third, the gaming tournament helps students to acquire a sense of purpose for playing video games. These resolutions help to overcome social isolation (Tomoniko, 2019) and other comorbidities of the disorder. Furthermore, such resolutions offer some opportunities to raise awareness of important issues, such as the consequences of depression (Brådvik, 2018) or the need for policy change on cellphone use (Carels, 2019). As a result, educators have some opportunities to help students overcome gaming addiction and to raise awareness of the disorder and its comorbidities because of the practicality of these resolutions.

### **Monitored Online Game Room**

Organizing an online game room helps students to cope with gaming addiction. The online game room is a safe place for playing video games with friends and classmates. Playing video games in a monitored setting creates a bond of friendship, which helps to overcome social isolation (Tomoniko, 2019). Furthermore, the online game room serves as an appropriate place for playing video games in schools, which helps to overcome impulsivity in relation to video gaming during class time (Carels, 2019). In other words, the online game room helps students to concentrate with schoolwork and to socialize with friends and classmates. As a result, the online game room helps students to cope with gaming addiction by providing a safe and appropriate place to play video games.

The online game room also offers the opportunity for educators to talk with students about some issues related to unregulated internet use, such as cyberbullying or overexposure on social media (Tomoniko, 2019). Another important discussion is to talk about regulating internet use, which helps to overcome excessive video gaming (Terry & Malik, 2019) and unregulated internet use (Tomoniko, 2019). Such discussions reinforce the importance of the online game room in helping students to cope with gaming addiction. Consequently, organizing an online game room offers some opportunities for educators to raise awareness of internet safety and the importance of regulating internet use.

### **Well-Informed Video Game Club**

Organizing a video game club helps students to become well-informed of gaming addiction and its comorbidities. The video game club is a support group for sharing personal stories related to the disorder with friends and classmates. Sharing personal stories in a closed-door setting creates mutual trust and understanding, which encourages students to discuss some challenges, such as the inability to sleep early or to attend school regularly (Tomoniko, 2019). Furthermore, the video game club also encourages students to discuss some mental health crisis, such as depression or low self-esteem. As a result, the video game club helps students to become well-informed of gaming addiction and its comorbidities through sharing personal stories of challenges and mental health crisis.

The video game club also offers the opportunity for educators to talk with students about some consequences of depression, such as suicidal thoughts or self-harm (Brådvik, 2018). Another important discussion is to talk about seeking help in times of mental health crisis, which helps to overcome depression and low self-esteem (Tomoniko, 2019). Such discussions reinforce the importance of the video game club in helping students to become well-informed of the disorder and its comorbidities. Consequently, organizing a video game club offers some

opportunities for educators to raise awareness of mental health crisis and the importance of seeking help in times of crisis.

### **Purposeful Gaming Tournament**

Organizing a gaming tournament helps students to acquire a sense purpose for playing video games. The gaming tournament is a community-based competition for showcasing talent with friends and classmates. Showcasing talent in a competitive setting creates a sense of purpose, which helps to turn some challenges into strength, such as intense concentration or obsession to win (von der Heiden et al., 2019). Furthermore, acquiring a sense of purpose often leads to goal setting (Papies & Aarts, 2011), which helps students to make the right choices between schoolwork and video games (Tomoniko, 2019). As a result, the gaming tournament helps students to acquire a sense of purpose for playing video games by offering a community-based competition.

The gaming tournament also offers some opportunities for educators to talk with students about some community service, such as educating the public of gaming addiction or fund-raising for the tournament. Another important discussion is to talk about some issues related to the disorder, such as the need for policy change on cellphone use (Carels, 2019) or open communication between home and school (Tomoniko, 2019). Such discussions reinforce the importance of the gaming tournament in helping children to acquire a sense of purpose for playing video games. Consequently, organizing a gaming tournament offers some opportunities for educators to raise awareness of the importance of participating in the school community.

### **Conclusion**

Gaming addiction is a concern in schools because of its overwhelming symptoms, ambiguity with excessive video gaming, and unreliable clinical treatments. These problems have some consequences for children's school experience. The practicality of organizing an online game room, a video game club, and a gaming tournament offers some opportunities for educators to help students overcome gaming addiction and to raise awareness of the disorder and its comorbidities. Consequently, exploring these problems and resolutions related to gaming addiction is worthwhile.

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# Teaching Play Skills to Children with Autism: A Review of the Literature

Hoanglan Cardinal

## Abstract

*Play is a universal activity that is an integral part of childhood experiences and aids in the development of important skills. While most children naturally engage in play, children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) do not follow the typical pattern of play development and often exhibit delays in play skills. One of the defining characteristics of autism is a lack of pretend and imitative play. Given the academic, social, and cognitive benefits of learning through play, educators should make play an intervention goal for children with ASD. The majority of studies reviewed identified three effective instructional strategies for teaching play skills: video modelling, pivotal response training, and script training. These strategies result in increased levels of play, positive social interaction, and decreased inappropriate behaviours.*

Through play, young children acquire various skills that are critical to their development. In addition to the sheer joy that comes from play, appropriate play behaviours can facilitate social, language, and cognitive skills. The importance of play and its benefits are emphasized in most early childhood classrooms in order to provide plentiful opportunities for children to engage in play for both learning and enjoyment (Carrero et al., 2014). However, children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) often have a deficit in play skills, which may contribute to delays in social development. The objective of this literature review is to gain a deeper understanding of play, its relevance to young children with ASD, and the implications for educators. The following questions were formulated to guide this literature review:

1. What is play and why is it important for the development of young children?
2. What is the relationship between play and children with ASD?
3. What are instructional strategies that promote play in children with autism?

## Background to the Research: An Introduction to ASD

ASD is a complex neurodevelopmental disorder that features social and communication skills deficits as well as restrictive and sensory behaviours (Chester et al., 2019). Children with ASD encounter challenges in developing the skills needed to initiate and sustain interactions with typically developing peers. Social behaviours such as eye contact, sharing, and turn-taking are often lacking in children with ASD, making it difficult to engage in play with others. One of the core characteristics of ASD is a lack of pretend or imitative play (Barnett, 2018). Children across the spectrum can demonstrate some basic functional play skills that are rote and repetitive (e.g. spinning or lining up objects). However, structured supports and systematic interaction is required in order for children with ASD to have opportunities to practise and develop their skills through play.

## Method

In order to find and review research about children with ASD and play skills, a search was conducted using three electronic databases: Academic Search Premier, APA PsychINFO and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC). The studies were located by using search terms such as *autism, play, play skills, and instructional strategies*. Only studies that took place

between 2010 and 2020 were considered, in order to review recent studies and have “up-to-date” knowledge about effective instructional strategies used to teach play skills to children with ASD. The search was also limited to English-language publications from peer-reviewed journals that included empirical data. The criteria used to select studies were: (a) focusing on children with ASD, (b) definitions of the concept of play, and (c) identified instructional strategies that support the teaching of play skills. The results varied in range of instructional strategies that target play skills. Some studies used strategies to target play skills in combination with social skills. The common strategies that appeared across the studies have been reviewed in this article. Since children with ASD have deficits in social and communicative behaviours, play is often used as the context to improve these behaviours. It was difficult to locate studies focused on directly teaching and assessing play skills.

### **Play and Its Importance**

A large amount of literature reflects the difficulty of defining the concept of play. It is a broad idea that influences people’s experiences and changes over time from childhood to adult life. For the purposes of this literature review, play is defined as “actively and functionally engaging with objects and/or other people for the purposes of enjoyment” (Carrero et al., 2014). Learning to play supports children’s development of social, language, and cognitive skills since it engages several areas of the brain. Children learn social skills through play by having exchanges with peers and adults. They also learn how to express their thoughts to others during play, cooperation, and problem solving. Interactions with others during play also teach children early functions of language, including making declarative and interrogative statements (e.g., asking to play with a specific toy). Play involves multiple cognitive skills such as interpreting another person’s intentions, understanding symbols, and developing the ability to be imaginative. Play is considered to be so important that it has become an integral part of effective early childhood practices. It provides a setting for implementing academic instruction, embedding learning opportunities, and prompting responses (Carrero et al., 2014).

Play can be classified into three categories: functional, symbolic, or socio-dramatic play (Jung & Sainato, 2018). Functional play refers to the appropriate and functional uses of an object and cause-and-effect actions (e.g., a pop-up toy). Symbolic play is defined as a child’s ability to act on an object as if it were something else. This type of play involves three forms: object substitution (e.g., using a block as a car), the attribution of false properties (e.g., pretending the dolls are eating), and the attribution of presence to imaginary objects (e.g., sailing a boat over an invisible lake). Socio-dramatic play is an advanced form of symbolic play that involves engagement in role-playing.

### **Play and Children with ASD**

Although most children can learn various skills through play with others, children with ASD have pervasive challenges in the development of play. The definition of play would fail to recognize that children with ASD demonstrate any play behaviours at all (Mastrangelo, 2009). One of the defining characteristics of ASD during early development is a lack of pretend or imitative play. Children with ASD do not follow the typical pattern of play development. Symbolic play skills are often delayed and exhibit less complex play activity. Most children with ASD can demonstrate functional play skills but it is often basic and less elaborate than that of typically developing peers. The lack of complex play is intertwined with the core diagnostic features of ASD which include rote, repetitive, and restrictive range of interests and activities. Another defining characteristic of ASD, which is central to a diagnosis, are challenges in social interactions. Social skills deficits prevent children with ASD from being able to engage in regular play. Children with ASD have deficits in communication, responding appropriately to social cues, and forming social relationships.

Given the known benefits and skills that children can develop from engaging in play, promoting play should be a critical intervention goal for children with ASD since they have play-related and social difficulties and the fundamental importance of early play. Children with ASD require structured supports and explicit interventions to acquire play skills.

### **Instructional Strategies That Promote Play Skills**

Video modelling is a strategy that uses videos to provide modelling of targeted skills. The learner repeatedly watches a video of another individual or themselves correctly performing a targeted skill. After viewing the video, the learner has the opportunity to perform the targeted skill. There is growing evidence that supports video modelling as an effective practice for teaching children with ASD appropriate play skills. In addition to play skills, video modelling positively affects motor skills and social communication, and results in an increase in spontaneous requests (Barnett, 2018; Ganz et al., 2011). Video modelling is an effective strategy to teach play skills because it uses the visual strengths and interests of children with autism. As well, it can be implemented on its own or in combination with other instructional strategies to teach skills.

Another instructional strategy that has effective outcomes is pivotal response training (PRT), which has been popular because it can be used in a variety of different settings (Mastrangelo, 2009). It is based on the principles of applied behaviour analysis that incorporates the child's interests to teach pivotal behaviours. A pivotal behaviour is defined as "a behavior that is central to performing a variety of other behaviors in different areas of functioning" (Carrero et al., 2014, p. 19). PRT has been particularly effective with teaching skills necessary for successful peer interactions during play, such as turn-taking or verbal exchanges. Three key elements have been identified in the literature for using PRT to teach play skills: (1) provide clear, uninterrupted instructions for completing play-based tasks, (2) model appropriate play behaviour that is being targeted, and (3) provide immediate positive reinforcement or rewards for appropriate play and take turns with the child.

Script training is another strategy used to teach children specific sequences of play. Scripts are an effective tool for children with ASD because they are explicit and prepare children for certain play scenarios and how they can respond. Scripts can be written scenarios, visual prompts, or skits that provide statements and responses that would be appropriate or expected in a given situation. Script intervention suggests that children with ASD demonstrate an increase in scripted and unscripted spontaneous communication with others, and in the duration of time spent playing appropriately (Barnett, 2018).

### **Discussion**

The concept of play is crucial to children's development of various skills. However, many children with ASD have deficits that prevent them from engaging in play. Studies on teaching play skills to children with ASD indicate that they are able to engage in play with systematic teaching. Although there is a wide range of instructional strategies, – video modelling, PRT, and scripts – were most commonly used in the studies reviewed. These strategies resulted in increased levels of play, improved social interaction with peers, and decreased inappropriate behaviours (Barnett, 2018; Duenas et al., 2018; Jung & Sainato, 2013). The general consensus across all of the studies on teaching play skills was that children with ASD respond well to play intervention. Many of the studies used a combination of various strategies to teach play skills.

After reviewing the studies, there are implications for practice and future research. It was difficult to locate studies that focused specifically on directly teaching and assessing play skills for children with ASD. Many of the studies that were located used play as the context to improve social and communicative deficits. Given the importance of play for children's development, further research is needed that targets and assesses play skills for children with ASD.

Another implication comes from the inconsistencies across studies in the classification of types of play skills targeted (Jung & Sainato, 2013). For instance, the same play behaviours were often categorized under different types of play skills: functional, symbolic, or socio-dramatic play. Clear and consistent definitions and measurements of play skills are necessary in order to target specific play skills for children with ASD.

Another factor to consider is the setting where children with ASD are taught play skills. Children with ASD have often been taught play skills and assessed in a clinical setting one-on-one with an adult (Jung & Sainato, 2013). Although the findings of these studies demonstrate an increase in play skills, more studies need to be conducted in classrooms where children with ASD will have more opportunities to participate in play with others. In the natural environment of a classroom, play skills instruction can be embedded into daily routines and the interventions are ongoing, which can promote maintenance of skills.

Play is an essential experience for all children to learn and enhance their cognitive and social development. However, children with ASD are at risk of being excluded from the benefits play has to offer. The challenges that children with ASD encounter with engaging in play highlight the need for purposeful instruction and intervention. Difficulties with social interactions place children with ASD in a vulnerable position to being isolated and rejected by their peers. All children benefit from having a sense of belonging and developing friendships. Explicit guidance and supports ensure that children with ASD have opportunities to actualize their developmental potential.

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## About the Author

Hoanglan Cardinal is a Learning Support Teacher and Reading Recovery Teacher at a K-6 school in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She completed her B.A., B.Ed., and Post-Baccalaureate at the University of Manitoba. She is in the Master of Education program at Brandon University, specializing in inclusive education. Hoanglan enjoys spending time with her husband, being a first time mother, and travelling.

## CELEBRATION OF SCHOLARSHIP

We are honoured to recognize the following students who defended M.Ed. theses in 2020.

**Natashia Herring**                      January 10, 2020                      Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Cam Symons

### *A Study of Self-Regulation in Classroom Teachers*

The purpose of this mixed method research study was to investigate the factors that influence self-regulation in teachers. Self-regulation is defined as the ability to adjust one's level of energy to match the situation monitor, evaluate and modify one's emotions, shift attention or ignore various stimuli, engage in social interactions in a sustained way, and, connect and empathize with other people.

Research participants were teachers with K-12 teaching experience from both rural and urban Manitoba school divisions. Data sources included an initial survey that gathered information from 100 participants, followed by an optional interview in which 9 teachers participated. Findings indicated that teachers face various forms of work-related social, emotional, mental, physical, and environmental stressors that have an impact on their ability to self-regulate and achieve overall wellness in both their professional and personal lives. Extensive research has gone into examining student self-regulation and its relationship to academic performance. The findings of this study indicate a need for the education system to take a more holistic approach and make systemic changes to support teacher self-regulation in a similar way for the benefit of both teachers and students.

**Kelly Otto**                                      March 27, 2020                      Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Jacqueline Kirk

### *Understanding Healthy Administrator-Teacher Relationships Through Appreciative Inquiry Case Study*

Through an appreciative leadership lens, the purpose of this case study research was to utilize appreciative inquiry as a methodology to analyze the professional relationships developed and sustained among school administrators and teachers. Additionally, the study sought to understand the associated impacts of healthy administrator-teacher relationships on the school system. This research took place at an alternative high school in a western Canadian city characterized by successful leadership based upon positive relationships between the administrator and the teachers in addition to a positive school culture. The data was collected through narrative free-write, paired interview, focus group, and one-on-one interviews with three teachers and one administrator. The research was guided by the following questions: (1) How do teachers and administrators understand the development of symbiotic relationships between administrators and teachers? (2) How do interactions with administrators have personal impacts on teacher bystanders? (3) How do teachers and administrators understand the impact of emotional competence on relationship development? Adding to the current literature, the findings of the research indicate that relationships develop through the supportive practices of the administrator and that strong relationships have a positive impact on school culture. Teachers need to be emotionally and professionally supported to develop a positive relationship with the administrator. Teachers feel valued when their opinion is solicited, feedback is given, and appreciation is shown. The findings also indicate that emotional competence, which assists individuals in becoming more aware of their emotions and acting accordingly, builds relationships. When administrators and teachers have positive relationships, the school culture is fruitful.

**Davion Johnston**

April 17, 2020

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Chris Brown

*Acculturation and Leisure: A Case Study on Jamaican Immigrant Newcomers in Southwest Manitoba*

This in-depth descriptive qualitative case study examined the acculturation experience of Jamaican immigrant newcomers in Southwest Manitoba. Acculturation is cultural exchange between two distinct culture groups, resulting in psychological and socio-cultural adaptations. Using Berry's model of acculturation as the theoretical framework, the purpose of this research was to understand the lived experience of Jamaican immigrant newcomers and examine if and how sport, leisure, and recreation supported their acculturation.

The findings indicate that sport, leisure and recreation play an important role in Jamaican immigrant newcomers' acculturation experience in Southwest Manitoba. As well, participants preferred integration (defined as being engaged in both their cultural heritage and that of the dominant society), as opposed to either assimilation or separation (value for one or the other culture) or marginalization (having value for neither culture). Noticeably, participation in sport, leisure, and recreation provided a platform for socialization whereby individuals experienced cultural exchange and cultural immersion, with a positive increase in mental health and well-being. The study found that providing access to sport, leisure, and recreation activities that were meaningful and culturally relevant to Jamaican immigrant newcomers mitigated acculturative stress and supported greater integration.

The results of the study have important implications for policy and program development regarding immigrant newcomers in the Westman area, particularly as they relate to sport, leisure, and recreation. Future research on acculturation that considers other factors such as age, gender, length of settlement time, immigration motivation, previous leisure activities, and educational attainment could be explored.

**Natalia LEEANNE RITZ**

August 4, 2020

Thesis Supervisor: Dr. Alexa Okrainec

*Why Not Play? An Analysis of Teachers' Perspectives of the Effectiveness of the 2017 Kindergarten Educational Reforms on Enhancing Play-Based Learning Practices in Hong Kong Kindergartens*

The city of Hong Kong has mandated play-based learning in local kindergartens for several decades; however, despite multiple educational reforms over time, the Hong Kong kindergarten system consistently embraced an academic pedagogy (Cheng, 2010). In 2017, three initiatives including an updated curriculum guide, additional professional development for teachers, and the Free Kindergarten Scheme were implemented in a further attempt to strengthen the play-based nature of the program (HKGOV, 2017, 2018a, 2018b, 2019a, 2019b). A survey was developed to measure teacher satisfaction regarding these reforms. To further understand the historic and present challenges with the Hong Kong kindergarten system, and to identify areas for possible further change, the survey results were measured against Disconnections Theory (Walker, 2004, 2010). The results of the analysis engendered a better understanding of the areas of weakness in the Hong Kong kindergarten system and led to the design of possible steps forward for the Hong Kong Education Bureau in order to strengthen the program.

*Teacher Metacognition: Teacher as Curriculum Maker with Metacognition at the Centre of the Classroom*

This study examined teacher awareness and teacher use of metacognitive practices in Canadian schools within Manitoba. The literature on teacher metacognition was limited because the majority of the literature centred on student metacognition and there was a call for more research regarding teacher metacognition. This narrative inquiry research created a narrative of the individual internal dialogue that exposed the impact that metacognitive understanding has within teachers who practise metacognition conversations and strategies daily within their classrooms.

Four participants from urban and rural Manitoban schools were interviewed in this narrative inquiry. The research created reflective stories through an analysis of transcripts of interviews. The Metacognitive Awareness Inventory (MAI) tool activated the participants' thinking, which helped to tune their reflections and the qualitative transcripts of the interviews, revealing trends in metacognitive vocabulary and reflective story. The primary research question was as follows: Does a teacher's understanding of metacognition influence the development of metacognitive skills and metacognitive conversation in classroom practices and routines?

The participants' reflections highlighted six threads of teacher metacognitive practices employing metacognitive strategies and metacognitive conversations in the classroom that helped to increase their perceptions of student achievement. The analysis wove together the three main ways teachers influence their students' metacognition, as found in the literature review, with the six threads of teacher metacognitive practices that were found in the current research. This created a rich tapestry revealing evidence that the teachers' understanding of metacognition does influence the development of metacognitive skills in their practices and routines.

The conclusion is that a teacher's awareness around metacognitive strategies did influence the participants' decision making within planning, classroom set up, and daily routines. Therefore, a teacher's understanding of metacognition does influence the development of metacognitive skills and metacognitive conversations in classroom practices and routines. The hypothesis of this research study can be deemed valid. The more profound the teachers' understanding of the metacognitive process, the more apt they are to recognize students' metacognition. This research suggests that collaborative work around improving metacognitive strategies and conversations within the classroom would greatly benefit teachers' personal practical knowledge. Therefore, more training is recommended to help to solidify and improve the use of metacognitive strategies and conversations, increasing the personal practical knowledge of teachers. It is recommended that secondary institutions' courses and professional development opportunities within the school divisions of Manitoba build collaborative efficacy around implementing metacognitive strategies. This study's results have reinforced the fact that metacognitive strategies and conversations can be successful agents in helping students achieve higher quality standards from the teachers' perspectives. However, further research is recommended that includes a larger teacher sampling size, because the sample size of this research was only four participants. More extensive studies are required to seek teachers' understanding of metacognitive practices.

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