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Oh, What Have We Done?

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Oh, What Have We Done? urges viewers to think about how human dependence on automobiles continues to irreversibly deplete natural resources as it destroys earth's climate.

The little hot wheel cars emerge from a crack in the clay plate and then collide. They are out of control, just as we are not in control of nature.

The wrapped steel hoop appears to pull the plate apart, and the crack cannot be repaired. *Oh, What Have We Done?* is a visual artistic statement of how humanity must stop stretching the natural laws of nature.

INTRODUCTION BY THE EDITOR

Marion Terry, Ph.D.

The *BU Journal of Graduate Studies in Education* is devoted to rural, northern, and Indigenous education. This supplement features six articles selected from 2009 to 2012, before ERIC started indexing our journal in 2013.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	page
Refereed Articles	
Diversity: Challenges for Change Susan Gilleshammer	3
Guidance Programs in Schools: A Shift to Group Music Therapy Crystal Barber	7
Issues Surrounding Teacher Burnout: Questions and Possible Answers to an Increasing Problem Ted Stouffer	11
Motivating High School Students To Revise Koralie Mooney	14
The School Counsellor and Divorce: A Child's Perspective Cherlyl Beaumont	19
Western Literacy and First Nations Education Bridgette Wright	26

REFEREED ARTICLES

Diversity: Challenges for Change

Susan Gilleshammer

Abstract

This article examines how school leaders, teachers and students experience the challenges resulting from the changing demographics of student populations in our schools. Increased cultural diversity in schools results in complex issues that require a proactive approach from school leaders. By utilizing strategies found to increase feelings of school connectedness in culturally diverse students, schools can mitigate negative outcomes and create the possibility of greater academic success for these students.

For some time, there has been a call for greater attention to be paid to multicultural education, due to the changes in demographics in many schools (Cooper Shaw, 1997). School administrators, teachers and students all experience different challenges in dealing with this diversity. When educators meet these challenges openly and proactively with effective strategies, all students can experience success as they move into the future.

Three Different Perspectives: School Leaders, Teachers, and Students

School leaders, teachers, and students experience cultural diversity and demographic change in a school community in different ways. Each of these perspectives must be considered when examining the effects of increased diversity in the school setting. From its unique position in this complex system, each group has its own understanding of diversity and the challenges that diversity creates.

School leaders play a significant role in facing the challenges presented in schools that are becoming increasingly culturally diverse. School leaders must consider numerous stakeholder groups as their schools' demographics change. The school board and community exist outside the walls of a building, but still have a significant influence on school leaders and their decision making. Communities often undergo other social and economic changes that drive the demographic change in a school. A school leader must be sensitive to these changes, without sacrificing the good of the institution in order to serve these outside interests. The administrative team, the school staff, and the students are all part of the internal school context. To further complicate matters, all of these groups can be broken down into various subgroups that should be considered by school leaders when dealing with any school-related issue. These multiple contexts create a complex and multilayered environment that a school leader must navigate in order to face the challenges that changing demographics present (Gause, 2008).

School leaders can set the tone in a school for the response to changing demographics, reflecting the multiple contexts of the school environment (Evans, 2007). Some school leaders choose to consult stakeholder groups and to open lines of communication, in order to facilitate progress. Others may delegate responsibilities to the level of the classroom teacher, without clear direction for the action that should be taken. Depending on how these leaders understand the changing demographics in their school systems, school leaders themselves may actually become one of the challenges to creating a successful school experience for culturally diverse learners. If school leaders move too quickly in trying to institute change, they may lose the support of their staff or their leadership may be delegitimized by staff members. School leaders may choose to take no action, thereby legitimizing the status quo, for better or for worse. School

leaders may only grudgingly recognize the issue of racism in their learning communities, for fear of tarnishing their own reputations or that of their schools (Evans, 2007). Often, acts of racism must be blatant in nature for school leaders to be propelled into action. Unfortunately, it is the more subtle resistance to fully integrating non-dominant cultures into a building that goes unrecognized and unchecked. It is imperative that school leaders address issues of diversity directly, so that a school can adapt in a positive manner as a system to meet the needs of all students.

Teachers are directly affected by demographic change as their classrooms transform in composition and they struggle to meet the requirements of learners with unfamiliar needs (Gause, 2008). These students' needs may be academic, linguistic or social-emotional in nature, and many teaching staff feel ill equipped to offer effective support in any of these areas. Conversely, some teachers see no need to change their teaching methodology to accommodate the racial make-up of the student population, adopting a Darwinian philosophy of "survival of the fittest" in building their classroom climate. Some claim "colour-blindness" (Gause, 2008, p. 184), using denial of the impact of racial differences as an excuse not to alter the way things are done (Evans, 2007). By denying that differences exist, teachers and administrators may feel that they are being more even handed in dealing with students and with people in general. However, denying racial differences sometimes results in equal treatment that can actually be discriminatory towards a group (Knight, 2008). Equal is not always fair. Teachers must recognize that differences should be explored in order to find the best instructional practices to produce success for all students.

Many teachers feel empathy towards groups of students whom they assume are living without necessary resources. Evans (2007) identified the danger of "deficit thinking" (p. 176), whereby certain racial groups are viewed as lacking such basics as a stable family, economic security, proper housing, and access to healthy food; these areas of deficit are assumed to be causally linked to students' being at risk of academic failure. Stereotypes are reinforced when responsibility is placed on the students, their families, or their racial group for academic problems, allowing teachers merely to tolerate these pitiable, underprivileged students. This view relieves the responsibility of those working in the system to examine institutionalized racism, and to acknowledge historical and present-day conditions that have contributed to the disadvantaged situation of certain racial groups (Knight, 2008). Without a critical examination of systemic racism and the accepted stereotyping in schools, no gains can be made towards a truly inclusive school system that supports students of all racial backgrounds.

Students who are culturally and linguistically diverse in relation to the dominant culture face many challenges that affect their school experience (Kaylor & Flores, 2007). These students may have difficulty engaging or connecting to school, due to language barriers. Their academic performance may be below grade level as a result of differences in prior school systems or gaps in past schooling. Behavioural problems may be an issue with these students, perhaps resulting from misunderstandings encountered in communication or from frustration while dealing with cultural differences. The cultural contrast between home and school may cause culturally diverse students distress and create barriers to their success (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005).

Students may find that they are in the same classroom or the same school as cultural groups with whom they have a political or historical context of conflict. This type of negative, shared past between two cultures may result in an eruption of cultural wars in a school (Gause, 2008). Violence between cultural groups is an extreme example of potential conflict. More pervasive – and more common – is the quiet discrimination whereby the dominant culture students fail to recognize racial differences or passively exclude racially marginalized students.

Schools may fall into the practice of celebrating diversity as their main method of including cultures other than the dominant one. Knight (2008) referred to these types of celebratory events as "exoticizing the Other" (p. 95), whereby cultural identities are reduced to costumes, dances, and traditional foods. While these types of celebrations are socially acceptable and encouraged

within school systems, they fail to address the discrepancy of power inherent in the construct of the quaint foreigners entertaining the dominant cultural group (Knight).

Many challenges emerge with changing demographics and cultural shifts in a school's population. School leaders face the responsibility of charting a new direction for their schools, while balancing the expectations of their school communities, their staff, and their students. Teachers are confronted with classrooms more diverse than ever before; the old way of doing things will not suffice. Culturally diverse students battle stereotyping, language barriers, and discrimination in their quest to succeed in a school system that is foreign to them. These three perspectives reveal the complex issues created by increased cultural diversity in schools.

Possibilities for Success

Culturally diverse students can benefit in many ways from an increased connection to school. A greater sense of school belonging has been attributed to improved academic motivation and performance, and to reduced misbehaviour, drop-out rates, delinquency, and substance use (Brown & Evans, 2002). Students can become more engaged in their school experience through instructional practices that connect their identity to the material being studied (Faircloth, 2009). Positive relationships with teachers and other caring adults bolster a sense of belonging in students, resulting in higher academic achievement (Kaylor & Flores, 2007). Students' involvement in extra-curricular activities also enhances their feelings of school connection (Brown & Evans, 2002). Increasing culturally diverse students' connection to the school context offers hope for greater success with this student population.

The search for identity can be a powerful process for teachers to draw upon in their campaign to make course content relevant to adolescent students (Faircloth, 2009). When students are directed to draw upon their own experiences, family history, and cultural background to make sense of their learning, they are empowered to build meaningful connections to the subject matter. These connections, in turn, support students' sense of belonging in the classroom and in the school. Students in Faircloth's study reported that they felt a stronger relationship to their teacher and to their classmates after participating in the identity development exercises. There is compelling evidence that identity exploration, linked to classroom subjects, can increase school connectedness.

Another significant factor contributing to school connectedness is the influence of positive relationships with teachers and other caring adults in the school community (Kaylor & Flores, 2007). Successful students in Percy Calaff's (2008) study were able to identify at least one adult in the school context who had encouraged them and helped them to feel a sense of belonging. Percy Calaff was careful to point out, however, that "authentic caring" (p. 105) was valued by the students and seen as positively affecting motivation and learning; those teachers deemed lacking in sincerity were either endured or outright rejected. Those teachers who are naturally endowed with the ability to form genuine, positive relationships with students must themselves be nurtured so that they can continue to grow and to influence young people (Stewart, 2009). According to Brown and Evans (2002), "One theme in any successful outreach or involvement effort is the quality and sensitivity of staff" (p. 55), emphasizing the importance of having caring individuals involved in projects that target diverse student populations. Students' engagement in learning and sense of belonging can be improved by the encouraging influence of understanding adults, but support for these adults must not be overlooked.

Participation in extra-curricular activities can create a stronger school connection for many students (Brown & Evans, 2002). As hours spent involved in extra-curricular activities increase, there tends to be a corresponding increase in academic effort and achievement (Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). Taking this evidence into account, there is a strong argument for creating greater access to extra-curricular activities for all students. Greater accessibility may mean providing transportation, changing the time that activities take place, or providing more user-friendly information. The most important strategy to increase at-risk student involvement in extra-

curricular programming is to involve those at-risk students and their families in the discussion, so that their concerns are addressed (Brown & Evans, 2002). Strategies that give culturally diverse students greater access to extra-curricular activities would certainly be worth the investment, especially when higher academic engagement can be a result.

Culturally diverse students can gain a sense of school connectedness from curriculum-based tasks that include identity exploration, from positive relationships with adults in the school, and from extra-curricular activities. Each factor has a significant effect on school connectedness, and therefore on academic motivation and achievement. One wonders what the impact might be if all three factors were employed in concert.

Conclusion

Cultural diversity in our schools creates challenges on various levels, but with these challenges come significant opportunities for positive change. There are strategies and approaches that have made a difference and contributed to success for many schools facing diversity challenges. It is imperative that school leaders and teachers examine the challenges of diversity honestly and openly, so that true progress can be made for all students.

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Guidance Programs in Schools: A Shift to Group Music Therapy

Crystal Barber

Abstract

Guidance programs in school may not be meeting the current needs of students. School counsellors are forced to make decisions about which students should receive services, because of budget cuts and increasing demands placed on counsellors. This article proposes that, in the face of budget cuts to counselling services, students' needs would be better met with the incorporation of group counselling sessions. Music therapy is proposed as a preferred means of group counselling. The universality of music, the high success rate of clinical music therapy, and the strong music-adolescent connection are convincing reasons to incorporate group music therapy in schools.

Current guidance counselling programs in schools may not be serving the needs of their students. Students' needs, including social, emotional, behavioural, and academic, appear to be increasing. Unfortunately, it has been this author's experience that this increase in student needs has been met with budget cuts to many school counselling services. These budget cuts do not match the mandate of schools to provide adequate guidance services to all students in need. In order to address the current counselling dilemma, there needs to be a change in the current delivery of counselling services. Providing more opportunities for group therapy would enable the guidance counsellor to meet the needs of more students without requiring schools to invest substantial budget dollars for their guidance programs. Music therapy provides a safe medium for communicating feelings because of the universality of music, and it has been used successfully with children and adolescents for a number of years in clinical settings. The addition of group music therapy sessions available in the public school setting would help to meet the increasing needs of more students than the current approach to school counselling.

Weaknesses in Current Guidance Programming

Current guidance programming in Manitoba schools may be inadequate to meet the increasing needs of students, which has led to a decrease in the accountability of schools to the communities in which they serve. Schools are mandated to provide adequate services for all students, yet they are not supporting this educational policy with their current fiscal policy (Griffin, 2010). School administrators are demanding guidance counsellors to demonstrate that their work contributes to positive student development and success, yet ongoing budget cuts to counselling services have forced guidance counsellors to jeopardize their accountability by making decisions about which students are able to receive services (Gysbers). In many cases, this type of decision-making means that only those students with the most critical needs will receive treatment, and many of those students will not receive an adequate number of counselling sessions (Hui, 2000, p. 71). Students who would benefit from guidance counselling, but who are not regarded by staff as high needs, simply go without therapy at school because the guidance counsellor does not have time to see these students.

In spite of school budget cuts, today's students have higher emotional, behavioural, and academic needs than in the past (Bauer, 2010; Gold et al., 2004; Sausser & Walker, 2006). Students are facing new challenges at a younger age, such as coping with grief, drugs, alcohol, and bullying. Many of these students will not receive treatment because they cope well enough to maintain average grades and do not cause behavioural problems at school. Their need for counselling goes undetected because their difficulties are not known to the counsellor or teachers. Due to the lack of adequate guidance services for these types of students, families often resort to seeking therapeutic services outside the school. However, in the face of the

current economic crisis, many families cannot afford to obtain counselling services outside of the school system (Griffin, 2010). Students should be able to receive these services at the school level. Therefore, schools should endeavour to provide an alternative to the current delivery method of counselling services.

In most guidance programs, individual counselling sessions are the only method of therapy. These one-on-one sessions are not the most practical use of time for the guidance counsellor. An effective guidance program should “address the needs of all students and offer a balanced service to all” (Hui, 2000, p. 80). Many schools, despite having a student base of more than 200, employ only one guidance counsellor. In smaller schools, guidance counsellors are often also employed as part-time teachers, or work as the sole counsellor for several schools. In these situations, it is not reasonable to expect the guidance counsellor to provide services for all students. The reality is that the guidance counsellor’s time is monopolized by a select group of high needs students seen on a regular basis. In seeking a solution to the current lack of balanced guidance services, approaches other than individual counselling should be considered.

The Benefits of Group Therapy in Schools

Group therapy is a practical alternative to the current individual case-file method of counselling that is currently being used in most guidance programs. Group therapy in schools, in addition to individual therapy, can help to meet the needs of more of the student population. The inclusion of group therapy is a viable option for many schools because of its cost efficiency and its ability to increase accountability to the school community. School counsellors maintain the flexibility to meet with students requiring individual counselling, as well as have the ability to create focused therapy groups to help the needs of students dealing with similar issues. An example of a focused therapy group that could be created would be for children affected by divorce. This group would give these students a chance to express their feelings, gather support from peers, and receive meaningful feedback from the guidance counsellor. The counsellor is likely to be more effective in delivering services to a greater number of students with the addition of therapy groups. This means of therapy would increase accountability of counsellors to their students.

Group counselling promotes a whole-school approach to counselling. In group therapy programs, counsellors would be able to move from remediation to prevention. This holistic approach enables schools to become more proactive in their method of providing services to students. Counsellors work to help students develop healthy attitudes through group therapy, while maintaining individual curative therapy sessions with those in need. One of the goals of group therapy in schools would be to create communities of support for students to deal with issues such as grief, bullying, and abuse. Bringing these students together in a group therapy setting can create a school environment that promotes wellness through counselling. Students experience relief and bond with others who have shared similar experiences (Dalton & Krout, 2005). Group therapy, in addition to the individual counselling sessions, improves accountability of counsellors by providing services to more students without requiring schools to dramatically increase their guidance budgets. It promotes the use of counselling services by students through increased awareness in the whole school.

The Benefits of Using Music Group Therapy in Schools

Music therapy is an effective mode of therapy to use in the school system. Music therapy can be seen as “the use of organised sounds within an evolving relationship between client and therapist to support and encourage physical, mental, social, and emotional well-being” (Bunt, 1994, p. 8). The therapist essentially uses music as a medium to develop a helping relationship with a client in order to maximize optimal functioning (Wigram et al., 2002). Music therapy has been used extensively with many populations in clinical settings with dramatic positive results. It

has been shown to be particularly effective in treating a number of emotional, behavioural, and social problems in children and adolescents (Accordino et al., 2007).

Music therapy's effectiveness stems from the universality of music. For most people, music is a part of everyday life, and many people find that listening to or creating music is therapeutic. Music is "a non-invasive medium that enhances self-expression, self-esteem, motor skills, coordination, and socialization. It facilitates creativity, inventiveness, independence and success" (Sausser & Walker, 2006, p. 8). The use of music in group therapy provides a sense of safety to participants, because music is a familiar territory (Robarts, 2006).

Adolescents seem to have a particular tie to music, which makes its use for therapy more effective and inviting than possibly other forms of group therapy. Music tends to play a significant role in the lives of teenagers. They often use music to identify themselves with a particular peer group, and express their feelings. The relationship between music and adolescents "serves as a platform for connectedness and emotional expression that is utilised within a therapeutic, support group format" (McFerran et al., 2010, p. 541). Studies have also suggested that young people use music for to discover meaning and purpose (Choi et al., 2010). In this way, group music therapy sessions help students to develop self-esteem, self-worth, and self-confidence (Chong & Kim, 2010). The role that music plays in the lives of students makes music a useful medium for group therapy.

Music therapy is a viable option for counsellors because of the flexibility of music therapy techniques. Sessions are structured by the guidance counsellor to meet the needs of particular groups of students, which are achieved through the type of music therapy used in each group setting. Counsellors can pull ideas and activities for each group from the two main types of music therapy: active and passive. Active music therapy includes a variety of activities such as singing, drumming, playing wind instruments, and body movement, while passive music therapy involves activities such as lyric analysis, composition, and active listening (Choi et al., 2010). The types of activities done in a group music therapy session also depend on the composition of the group. For example, a counsellor would structure music therapy activities differently for a group of bereaved children than for a group of highly aggressive adolescents. The flexibility of music therapy sessions lends itself to use in the school system in dealing with a variety of student issues.

Conclusion

The current state of guidance counselling programs in schools is inadequate in serving the mandate to provide services to all students. Budget cuts, met by increasing student needs, have decreased the level of accountability that counsellors are able to maintain with the students they serve. The addition of group therapy to the current method of individual counselling enables counsellors to address the needs of more students without requiring schools to increase their guidance budgets. Group therapy helps counsellors to move from dealing with strictly remediation of students to a more preventative approach to counselling. Music therapy has been used as an effective mode of group therapy to treat a number of social, emotional, and behavioural disturbances. The universal nature of music and its strong role in the lives of children and adolescents make music therapy a convincing form of group therapy to use in the school system.

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Issues Surrounding Teacher Burnout: Questions and Possible Answers to an Increasing Problem

Ted Stouffer

Abstract

Too many teachers are quitting the profession due to stress, exhaustion, and burnout. Stressors include feelings of little input, lack of support, changes in teaching assignments, low self-efficacy, and failure to team-build. Principals play a key role in countering these concerns in order to create a thriving school community that will stem the exodus.

Teachers today are on the front lines of stress, exhaustion, and burnout. Few other professions experience the mass exodus of staff as does the teaching profession, with stress-related burnout cited as the most common cause. Stressors include feelings of little input, lack of support, changes in teaching assignments, low self-efficacy, and failure to team-build. Addressing these stressors has potential to reduce the number of resignations due to burnout.

Feelings of Little Input

Just like the children in the classroom, many teachers feel unimportant because they have little input into the decisions that affect them. Their interactions with students, parents, other staff, and administrators are often based on policies that they had no part in creating, such as disciplinary measures. If the teachers do not feel in control of the process, they are apt to withdraw and become discouraged. Their feelings of being undervalued may turn to fear, and a perceived threat takes on the spectre of something larger (Chang, 2009).

To combat this stressor, teachers need first to be involved in policy-making and other decisions. Even if they do not agree with the final decisions, they need to know that they were part of the process, and were heard. Then, particularly in relation to student discipline, they need to recognize their own emotions and learn appropriate coping strategies (Chang, 2009). When teachers understand that that not everything a student does is intended to be an attack against them, they are better able to take control of the situation, instead of feeling threatened.

Lack of Support

Lack of support also generates feelings of frustration and helplessness. The further teachers are from direct supervision, the more apt they are to feel job stress, conflicts, and uncertainty (Wachter et al., 2008). Resource teachers and school counsellors are particularly affected because they hear stories about students' home lives and complaints about teachers. They may feel helpless to make positive changes when they must keep this information confidential, and they may feel isolated from the supportive channels of communication that they think are in place for other staff members.

School leaders can support teachers by building collegial relationships, providing avenues for dialogue among all staff members, and addressing harmful teacher attitudes (Cheung, 2009). Sometimes all it takes is for an administrator to acknowledge a teacher's negative feelings while explaining that the attitudes are not conducive to the school as a whole. Reducing teachers' supervision duties (Brock & Grady, 2008), in order to give them more time to collaborate, will also boost staff morale and make the teachers feel that they are supported.

Changes in Teaching Assignments

Individual teaching assignments change over time. When teachers have a high interest in the new assignment, they feel more in control and are less prone to burnout (Retelsdorf et al., 2009), but when they have little interest in it, they feel less in control and are prone to helplessness (Cenkseven-Onder & Sari, 2009). Depending on the amount of mental energy required, and the degree of input that a teacher has had in the decision to change assignments, the teacher may feel positively challenged or negatively stressed.

If teachers are given an opportunity to provide input into the changed teaching assignments and are not just told that they must teach a new subject area, they feel that they have some control in their professional lives. In many cases, the teachers may be able to suggest a subject that fits better with the school's needs than if they were not brought into the decision-making process. These teachers will feel rewarded, instead of trodden upon, because they are trusted for their professional abilities (Cenkseven-Onder & Sari, 2009).

Low Self-Efficacy

Self-efficacy means feeling competent in meeting goals. When teachers feel inefficient or incapable of accomplishing tasks, they may develop low self-efficacy (Chang, 2009). Similarly, when teachers are unsure of the goals, or feel unrewarded or that the job is too demanding, they are apt to feel uncertain (Tomic & Tomic, 2008). The teachers then become preoccupied with feelings of ineffectiveness (Schlichte et al., 2005), which weakens their self-efficacy. This weakened belief in one's ability can happen at any point in a teacher's career.

Teachers who have higher levels of self-efficacy are less prone to burnout (Coulter & Abney, 2009). Teachers who have higher feelings of existential fulfillment also experience fewer symptoms of burnout (Tomic & Tomic, 2008). When teachers self-reflect and are willing to learn and improve, they gain insight into themselves, and build self-efficacy. Using teacher colleagues who are experiencing similar situations, and being open to other sources of support, teachers can increase their self-efficacy and become more positive employees (Tatar, 2009).

Failure To Team-Build

When I started teaching, teachers would go straight to their classrooms, shut their doors, and not interact with other teachers during the day. Today, however, teachers need to rely on each other (Cheung, 2009), as more of what used to be parental responsibilities are placed on teachers and other school staff. In addition to the ABCs, teachers are responsible for healthy snacks, appropriate relationships, racial and religious tolerance, and numerous other value-based concepts. Positive relationships with students are paramount, but they require emotional attachment by the teacher. When team-building is absent or insufficient, teachers may feel overburdened by the increased workload and emotional toll of the modern classroom.

Principals hold a pivotal position in team-building by nurturing social supports and positive school climates (Weber et al., 2005). Teachers feel less stressed when they can turn to peers, the principal, and counsellors for support, without fear of criticism for their mistakes (within reason). When teachers open their doors and develop relationships with each other, feelings of strength and togetherness develop, which ultimately supports the children who are the purpose of the institution in the first place.

Conclusion

Teachers can be negatively stressed by feelings of little input, lack of support, changes in teaching assignments, low self-efficacy, and failure to team-build. Unless these stressors are addressed, the effects can build to the point of eventual burnout and resignation from the

profession. Principals play a key role in providing opportunities for teachers to make positive changes that will increase their feelings of having input, being supported, determining their teaching assignments, strengthening self-efficacy, and team-building, in order to create a thriving school community.

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Motivating High School Students to Revise

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Abstract

Students often resist revising their writing, and the final copies often look much the same as the first draft. Additionally, the high school environment often quells student revision. Many teachers lack writing training, and therefore struggle to give direction to students. However, as the author of this article discovered, incorporating and teaching revision strategies is manageable. If teachers can start teaching revision strategies, and change the practices that hamper the writing process, student writing can only improve. Learning how to revise is an important and necessary skill for all writers, no matter their level or ability.

“Do I really have to do a good copy? My handwriting is really neat in this one.” How many times do teachers hear similar types of student comments? An even more troubling thought is where the student received the idea that a good copy simply meant more legible handwriting. Students usually understand the necessity for editing because they want to catch their spelling, grammar and capitalization mistakes. However, revision – the adding, subtracting, and reorganizing of ideas – is a difficult concept to teach and the process to which students are often the most resistant.

Many ineffective practices are currently employed in high school classrooms, which actually undermine the writing process. Part of the problem is the need for teachers to record copious marks in high school, and cover a vast curriculum. This need for marks, combined with a lack of training in teaching writing (Kolling, 2002), can result in a hurried or often sparse approach to revision. For effective revision to take place, high school teachers must scrutinize their role in terms of the feedback that they give to students. Teachers must teach students revision strategies. Additionally, peer evaluation plays a fundamental role in the revision process, and teachers need to experiment with different models, even if the implementation can prove challenging. Finally, teachers need to seek out new audiences for their student writers, in order to give them a reason for writing, beyond the threat of grades. In effect, the goal is to create a flexible system that encourages writing as a process delivered by teachers who equip students with strategies to evaluate and improve their own writing.

The Teacher's Role

Writing anxiety's effects upon student achievement are well-documented (Thompson, 1980). Revision can often be the spot where many writers either surrender, hoping to finish the piece as quickly as possible, or become open to the idea of developing a stronger piece. Teachers can be an important variable in this decision. Beginning writers, and even the more experienced, resist revision because they interpret it as meaning they have not done it correctly the first time (Kolling, 2002). Students “like it the way it is” (Kindzierski, 2009) and, as teachers, we must try to remember the frustrations of revision: a lengthy and messy process. Student writers may feel protective of their first draft, and be resistant to any modifications or omissions. If teachers are more sensitive to the messages that they send to students (usually via written feedback), it may ease anxiety, which in turn could produce a stronger piece.

Time is an essential ingredient in the writing process. Teachers, and the high school system, need to allow the space and time for revision to happen. Many teachers are under constraints to get the product finished and move on to the next assignment. Timed essays, which are often a constant in high school classrooms, do not fit well within the structure of the writing process (Worden, 2009). One only needs to scan literature on Writer's Workshop instruction to see that many of the ideas are directed at elementary or middle school (Graves et al., 1998). Perhaps this

middle school focus is because middle school is perceived as having the time and space for the writing process, or perhaps teachers assume that by high school students have mastered writing skills, and the teacher merely needs to give the assignment, determine the due date, and tell students to begin. The reality, as any high school teacher knows, is that large deficiencies exist in many students' writing skills.

The challenge is to encourage revision in a rigid system with students who are unmotivated to make changes because they are either too attached to their first draft or simply want to get the assignment completed. The first step in making that system more accommodating for student writing is recognizing that writing is a process that requires time for all its stages. As any writer knows, writing an original piece of writing can be more difficult on a strict timeline. Writers often need time to discuss their work with fellow writers, as well as with the teacher. Teachers need to encourage on-task behaviour, but also recognize that for some students, on some days, the process may take longer than the teacher had planned.

Changing Teacher Feedback

Teacher feedback, both written and oral, is fundamentally important, but teachers cannot focus on every aspect of the writing; to do so would undermine student confidence (Treglia, 2009), resulting in a weaker product. Teachers often have the feeling that students, particularly weak students, will not revise unless teachers make copious comments on the rough drafts. Then teachers are dismayed when the students hand in the good copy with none of the suggested revisions completed. This practice of marking every mechanical error on a paper can be attributed to the pressure that teachers feel to correct all mistakes, because society has come to believe this is the role of the English teacher (Zemelman & Daniels, 1988). Moreover, teachers cannot focus only on mechanical errors, because students then think that revision is only fixing mechanical errors (Zemelman & Daniels, 1988). Furthermore, by correcting every single mechanical error, often at the expense of ideas and organization, students lose ownership over their work (Atwell, 1987). The question then becomes, who is the real author: teacher or student?

Effective comments, whether written or oral, are those that focus on ideas or organization (Treglia, 2009) in student-friendly language. Specific comments such as "You're off the subject here" and "Now talk about another disadvantage" (Treglia, 2009, p. 80) have been found to be the most effective in resulting in changes. Reviewing the rubric during the revision process will also encourage students to revise for ideas and organization (Dean, 2006). Many times, teachers give the rubric to students, but do not spend time reviewing it with them. Students need to be encouraged to use the rubric, and feedback comments should be in language similar to that of the rubric. There is no point in using terminology such as "vague" or "awkward" if it is meaningless to the student. Comments need to be specific to the writer's work and in language comprehensible to the writer.

Conferencing with students, either during class or after class, can be an extremely effective way to assist students, as well, but teachers need to be aware of their conferencing style. Atwell (1986) encouraged teachers to listen carefully and ask questions about the piece, but to avoid writing on the paper: "Remember the centrality of ownership in students' growth as writers. The piece of writing belongs to the writer" (p. 95). Teachers should guide the students towards revision, rather than telling them what to change (Stemper, 2002).

Fat Drafting and Revising Strategies

Before revision begins, the student needs to have a lengthy enough piece, or there will be little to revise. Bishop (2004) noted that sparse drafts are often the case for student writers and that "drafting generously offers writers more ways to saying it – some of which they'll like and some of which they won't" (p. 14). Bishop called this process of elaborating upon the ideas "fattening up" (p. 17), and used a number of strategies to teach revision. Hyperlinks were one

strategy that involved “drawing in imaginary hyperlinks with markers and then writing the text for these links” (Bishop, p. 19). As a writing teacher at Al Bayan Bilingual School in Kuwait, I asked a grade 10 writing class to take this idea one step further. Students created actual hyperlinks with Microsoft Word for their drafts, and later incorporated the links back into the revision copy. Each hyperlink was evaluated for the expansion of the ideas and the organization of those hyperlinked texts. Some students had difficulty understanding why they were not doing actual hyperlinks to websites, as they had done in other classes. However, the final result was that students did add more detail to their drafts, and the placing of the hyperlinks forced them to think about the organization of the paper, as well. It also resulted in some students doing additional research for their topic when they realized the skeletal structure of their drafts. I would repeat this process, substituting markers for computers.

Once students have developed a draft with stronger ideas, they need strategies to determine how to organize the entire piece, the individual paragraphs, and the sentences within those paragraphs (Dean, 2006). Dean asked students to outline their ideas after the draft, or write a brief summary for each paragraph. If the students are unable to do this task, it may be because there is more than one idea in each paragraph. Local revision is about the effectiveness of sentence fluency and understanding that sentence length is an important tool. I am following Dean’s recommendation by asking my grade 10 class to count the number of words in the sentences of one paragraph to determine lengths. Dean gave her students the following guidelines regarding sentence length: “Short sentences will give the idea some punch. Long sentences are good for background information” (p. 153). Dean also recommended sentence-composing activities, such as those given by Killgallon & Killgallon (2007), as a way of strengthening sentence structure and variety. Organization is a difficult concept for weak writers to grasp, but giving students concrete strategies to follow makes the process much more tangible.

Peer Evaluation

Another important element in revision is peer evaluation. Teacher feedback is not enough; students need their peers. Peer evaluation gives students a larger audience for their work (Dean, 2006). It also gives them an opportunity to discuss their writing. Student discussion is a key component of the process, but it is sadly often discouraged in many writing classrooms (Stemper, 2002). For weaker writers, peer evaluation exposes them to stronger writing, and allows them to reflect upon their own work. Finally, peer evaluation is something students generally enjoy that can also serve to ease writing anxiety (Gokce & Atay, 2007). Thus, peer evaluation, while difficult to manage, should be a staple in all writing classrooms.

However, in order for peer evaluation to work effectively, students must be trained to recognize effective and ineffective peer comments (Dean, 2006). Dean (2006) asked students to rate their partner’s paper on its ability to maintain their interest level, and assigned marks for the task of peer evaluating another’s paper. This rating system dissuades students from marking papers of their classmates as merely “excellent” (Dean, p. 163). Neubert and McNelis (1990) advocated training students to determine, rate, and categorize peer comments as “useful” or “vague” (pp. 52-53). As a result of direct instruction of peer editing, Neubert and McNelis noticed an increased percentage of useful comments, while the number of vague comments dropped. The process of training students can be time-consuming, but hopefully, if done at the beginning of the year, these training techniques will be effective for the remainder of the year.

Peer editing can be done in small groups with everyone reading the same paper, or with partners exchanging papers. However, the least productive type of peer feedback is what Dean (2006) called the “read-a-neighbor’s-paper-and-tell-him-what-you-think kind of peer readings” (p. 163). Teachers need to model how to peer edit. They also need to recognize that this process may not work successfully the first time. Thus, the research supports the idea that perseverance with peer editing pays off and results in stronger revisions (Kindzierski, 2009).

Authentic Purpose and Audience

It is incumbent upon teachers to discover ways to motivate students to revise. Obviously, grades are the ultimate motivating force for getting the writing done, but ironically not motivation to do a strong job. However, when students are aware that someone other than the teacher is reading their work, an authentic reason for writing is created. Even when that audience is a pretend audience, it can still be a motivating force (Dean, 2006). I am currently searching for forums for students to publish their work for a wider audience, and have found a blog to be very helpful as a publishing venue. High school students, who initially complained about the blog, are now commenting on each other's work without being asked to by the teacher. Next semester, I plan to set up Wikispaces for each student for use as a writing portfolio and as a tool for collaborative writing. In another effort to promote purpose in writing, I will give grade 9 students the assignment of writing and sending business letters. This assignment may take the form of a fan club letter, a complaint letter to the school's administration about dress code, or suggestion letter to the makers of a video game. The student will generate the topic, and in generating the topic, take more ownership over the writing. In the past, I asked students to write a letter to S. E. Hinton, author of *The Outsiders*, after studying the novel. These letters were perhaps the strongest piece of writing from the class all year. Even though the class received only a generic response from the publisher, the letter hung on the wall for the entire year.

Conclusion

As a result of writing and researching this topic, I have implemented new revision strategies such as changes in teacher feedback (more individual conferencing, less focus on marking all mechanical errors), the use of fat drafting strategies, and the introduction of peer evaluation. Will these changes produce stronger writing? While that remains to be seen, it is apparent that the status quo is not working with many students. Thus, if student writing is going to improve, it will not happen if teachers view writing as a product simply to be graded, given back, and forgotten. Student writing will, however, improve if teachers see the value in revision and understand that it needs to be taught as a series of strategies with the goal of empowering students in high school and beyond.

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The School Counsellor and Divorce: A Child's Perspective

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Abstract

In Manitoba, more than half of marriages end with divorce. Many of these families include children. This article addresses the need for school counsellors to understand the impact that divorce has on children's lives. Children require a method to deal with unresolved feelings related to divorce. A school counsellor can support children through the separation process by examining how divorcing parents' decisions disrupt the family system, understanding how children progress through the post-divorce developmental tasks, and exploring possible therapeutic approaches.

Separation and divorce affect many children. The children experiencing their parents' separation or divorce may feel depressed, confused, guilty, and stressed (Pehrsson et al., 2007). Parents also feel stressed during separation and divorce, and are often unable to recognize how their behaviour is affecting their children. It is important for guidance counsellors to have knowledge regarding divorce, in order to help the children of divorce create coping strategies. This article examines how divorcing parents' decisions disrupt the family system and how school guidance counsellors can support children through the separation process.

The Parents

When parents divorce, they typically have been through a series of events that have led them to the decision to separate. An actual divorce or separation indicates that marital conflict, unhappiness, or dissatisfaction has reached a critical level for a given couple (Acs, 2007). There may be many reasons for divorce; however, the job of being a parent continues (Strohschein, 2007). Family interactions, such as family dysfunction and parental conflict, not only predict and precede marital dissolution, but also take a toll on children's mental health. Therefore, it is important for parents to rear their children in a positive, supportive manner rather than in a negative, hostile manner.

Parents become divorced for many reasons. At the beginning of a relationship, individuals are aware of their partner's deficiencies (Kluwer & Johnson, 2007). Relationship distress starts with problems that existed in the beginning of the relationship, such as incompatibility in personality and high levels of conflict. However, the frequency of conflict may not be the only cause of lower relationship quality. Relationships end through divorce for several other reasons. One reason is financial (Osborne et al., 2007). Schilling (2000) also discussed three additional reasons: people change, infidelity, and illness. Regardless of the situation, anything that diminishes the real or perceived gains to marriage constitutes a risk factor for marital disruption (Teachman, 2002). Divorce may be a sobering alternative to personal unhappiness, financial instability, and emotional liability (Pehrsson et al., 2007). Inevitably, it will end the relationship between the parents; however, the relationship between parent and child will continue.

The behaviour of parents greatly influences how children adjust emotionally after the separation (Manitoba Family Services and Housing, n.d.). It is sobering for parents to hear that it is not necessarily the divorce, but their behaviour and quality of their co-parenting that continues to echo throughout the family system (Ahrons, 2006b). If parents have a good relationship with their children and the children feel the parents' love and acceptance, the children can tolerate parenting imperfections (Manitoba Family Services and Housing). However, some imperfections are not easily tolerated by children: unpredictability, parental conflict, and parentification.

An important challenge for parents is avoiding unpredictability. Inconsistent parenting is likely an important aspect of unhealthy family functioning in general (Thomson Ross & McDuff,

2007). Although flexibility is necessary, so is dependability (Manitoba Family Services and Housing, n.d.). Children of divorced parents need to know that they can count on their parents.

Parents can be more predictable by following a parenting plan. A parenting plan includes decisions that are based on the children's developmental stages (Sanders, 2007). The plan includes various strategies for topics such as parent time schedules, transitions, communication, decision-making responsibilities, and tools and resources for post-divorce parenting. To help children cope with changes, parents can prepare them for transitions, provide explanations that make sense but do not place blame, and dispel myths about their new family arrangements in order to increase the probability of understanding their new life (Bernstein, 2006). Providing stability will give children a routine and the security that is needed to succeed.

A second parenting challenge is avoiding parental conflict in front of the children. High parental conflict is a powerful predictor of the negative effects of divorce for both children (Portnoy, 2008) and adults (Lebow & Newcomb, 2006). Discordant parenting is linked to elevated levels of psychological distress when the children become young adults (Amato, 2000). Children need to know that they will continue to see both parents and that the separation is not their fault (Family Conciliation, 2007). Although hiding animosity between parents can be difficult, it is necessary for children's welfare.

In order to reduce conflict, the central goal of the parent plan is to reduce the most damaging aspects of custody disputes (Lebow & Newcomb, 2006). Since the transition from one parent to another is a convenient time for arguments between parents, a plan must be in place to avoid tension. For example, transfers may occur in the absence of one parent or take place in a public area. Controlling the amount of hostility that the children witness can improve transitions and overall adjustment.

A final challenge for parents is avoiding parentification, which refers to role reversal in the parent-child relationship, wherein parents rely on their children for emotional support (Peris & Emery, 2005). Children are not emotionally capable of being a parent's friend or counsellor (Family Conciliation, 2007), and if these children are faced with task demands that exceed their developmental capabilities, they are likely to experience stress and frustration (Peris & Emery, 2005). Parents must remember that children are not mature enough to handle adult problems.

To prevent using the children as emotional support, parents need to find resources to allow themselves to work through their issues without the direct involvement of their children. Separation and divorce are times when adults experience a high degree of change and a need for information and support. Some parents may benefit from talking individually with extended family members or counsellors. Other parents might prefer reading information on websites or in books. A support group may provide a sense of "normality" because there are other parents dealing with the same issues. These examples are just a few of the resources that are available to parents who are separated or divorced. Regardless of which resource a parent chooses, children should not be used as confidantes for their parents.

Divorce is often viewed as unavoidably destructive, and people with failed marriages are often assumed to lack the qualities to be good parents (Strohschein, 2007). Furthermore, divorcing couples are increasingly at risk of being labeled as deviant and morally deficient (Adams & Coltrane, 2006). In truth, these beliefs are not necessarily true. If parents can set aside their resentments and parent together, their children can have healthy relationships with their parents, grandparents, stepparents, and siblings (Ahrons, 2006b). Parenting practices clearly have an effect on child mental health and well-being (Stroschein, 2007); therefore, in many cases, parents should make their decisions together in joint custody (Kelly, 2006). However, there is no single model of post-separating parenting that is perfect for all children (Gilmour, 2004). Regardless of the parenting strategy selected, parents can rise above society's stereotypes and parent well from two homes.

Joint custody is characterized by cooperative parenting whereby both parents plan for their children, coordinate schedules, and offer support to each other (Kelly, 2006). This type of custody promotes resiliency in children and increases parents' ability to resolve differences on

their own, or with mediators and therapists as required. Divorce issues can harm relationships (Pehrsson et al., 2007). However, consistent and appropriate parental monitoring and positive discipline influence the children's post-divorce adjustment (Strohschein, 2007). In addition, adolescents can adjust reasonably well to divorce when parents set clear boundaries, explain their conflict briefly, and avoid hostility in front of their children (Amato & Afifi, 2006). Regardless of the reasons to separate and the obstacles that can hinder positive parenting, separated or divorced parents can raise children who are well adjusted and successful.

The Children

Studies of children who are experiencing family breakup show that different reactions occur, depending on the age of the child at the time of separation (Sanders, 2007; Schilling, 2000). Children's understanding of parental divorce depends on their developmental stages. It is important to know what thoughts and feelings children of different ages may be having, so that parents can modify their own behaviours to help children adjust to divorce.

When parents are explaining the separation, children need a "no blame explanation" (Family Conciliation, 2007). The children need to know that both parents love them, that they will continue to see both parents, and that the separation is not their fault. Children require the parents' permission to love both parents and their families. Children may become insecure if marital conflicts disrupt the parent-child relationship (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2007). A no-blame explanation will help children to understand the circumstances that are affecting their family.

Children's lives are changed radically in a short time when their parents divorce (Portnoy, 2008). To cope with the changes in their family, children must undertake developmental tasks in order to carry on with their lives (Symons, n.d.). It is important for children to have a post-divorce environment to accomplish these developmental tasks (Sanders, 2007). Accepting the reality of divorce is one of the tasks children must resolve (Symons, n.d.). Twenty-five years after the divorce, children still recall the shock and bewilderment of the beginning of their family restructure. Children may feel that they have little control over what happens (Schilling, 2000). However, the reality is that divorce is an adult decision and their family will change as a result.

Another necessary task is to separate themselves from their parents' conflict (Symons, n.d.). Children with parents in high-conflict marriages are more likely than other children to feel caught between parents (Amato & Afifi, 2006). These feelings are associated with lower subjective well-being and poorer quality parent-child relationships. The act of separating themselves from the conflict may help children to avoid interpersonal problems (Jacquet & Surra, 2001). If conflict does occur, children must realize that the hostility is between their parents and is not directed at them. Older children may ask parents to have arguments or heated discussions in private, in order to avoid involving them. The level and type of interactions that children have with their parents also influence their well-being (Acs, 2007); therefore, if children can separate themselves from their parents' conflict, they can have a better relationship with both of their parents.

Another essential task for children is to resolve their feelings of loss (Symons, n.d.). Because the children's family is changing, children may require a grieving process. The loss of the nuclear family will bring permanent changes in the children's lives. Children need to realize that they are not alone and that children and parents alike will need time to adjust to the changes. To cope with feelings of loss, children need to know that there is no definite formula for dealing with these feelings; however, hurrying the process or using substances such as alcohol is not a healthy way to work through the loss. Fathers who are unable to see their children on a daily basis are able to distract themselves with activities such as work (Hallman et al., 2007). Children can also distract themselves by participating in activities, hobbies, and exercise. Children who draw on a support system, such as extended family and friends, may preoccupy their minds and avoid feeling alone and depressed.

A significant task for children is to resolve feelings of anger and feelings that they are to blame in some way for the divorce (Symons, n.d.). A divorce occurs because of something that

happens between the adults who are getting the divorce; nevertheless, children may think of the times that their behaviour caused strain on the family. These instances may turn into a self-dialogue that starts the child as the problem (Bernstein, 2006). Parents need to express their reasons for the divorce to their children, so that the children will not blame themselves.

A further task for children is to accept the fact that divorce is permanent. Children sometimes believe that if they are well behaved, their parents will stop fighting and get back together. The children's behaviours will not influence their parents' decision. Although many things will change, there will be many that stay the same. For example, although parents will not love each other, they will continue to love their children. Most children whose parents divorce will be in stepfamilies at some point of their growing-up years (Stoll et al., 2005); children can still see the other parent.

A final task for children is to begin to plan for their own lives by making goals (Symons, n.d.). Children with active coping skills such as problem solving are less likely to feel passively impacted (Portnoy, 2008). When children are able to make their own informed decisions, they feel confident. If children have high self-concepts, they are less likely to suffer from psychological disorders such as depression, use drugs and alcohol, or be under-achievers at school or work (Gilmour, 2004). When children feel that they have control over their lives, they are more apt to make goals.

As time passes and children recover, the signs of stress should become less apparent (Strohschein, 2005). Children will require time to work through their developmental tasks with support from their parents. Most children with divorced parents develop into well-adjusted adults (Amato & Cheadle, 2005). However, in order to accomplish these developmental tasks and acquire appropriate coping skills, children may be assisted significantly by trained school guidance counsellors.

The School Guidance Counsellor

The school counsellor is a resource that can be a part of the support system for children experiencing the separation process. Helping children after separation or divorce is a complicated therapeutic process of family reorganizing (Ahrons, 2006a); therefore, guidance counsellors need to be familiar with the many different types of therapeutic interventions that are advocated for children of divorced parents (McConnell & Sim, 2000).

Therapeutic approaches must emphasize trust between the counsellor and the child (Lowenstein, 2006). McConnell and Sim (2000) noted that two main concerns for children in counselling were the interrogative nature of the counselling and the issue of confidentiality. Both of these issues can cause a communication barrier between the guidance counsellor and the child (Young, 2005). If the counsellor maintains a nonjudgmental manner, children will communicate their concerns. If the children perceive that the counsellor genuinely cares, they will be more willing to share information about what is happening in their lives. If a trusting relationship cannot be formed, the problems that children experience when dealing with separation and divorce can be left unresolved and undetected. Once a trusting relationship is achieved, then the child can begin to explore deep-rooted feelings. Children are often referred to the guidance counsellor to help them adjust to the changes in their family (Lowenstein, 2006). The children of separation and divorce may feel anxious about participating in therapy; therefore, they may be hesitant to talk candidly about their family and the divorce. The guidance counsellor must possess skills to allow children to feel comfortable to express their thoughts and feelings (Kottler, 2001). If the children of separation and divorce are able to expose their stories in a truthful and open manner, therapy can begin.

Although they may not have the vocabulary to describe their emotions, children continue to experience and interpret their surroundings. To resolve feelings associated with separation and divorce, guidance counsellors need to explore the children's self-narratives that attempt to explain past memories, validate current behaviours, and predict future behaviours (Bernstein,

2006). The script of the children's self-talk is not necessarily right or wrong, but can interpret the way the children think about how they fit into the family's changes. Children may not be able use words to describe how they are feeling. Therefore, guidance counsellors may use various expressive therapies to enable children to explore the emotions related to their experiences with separation and divorce.

Expressive therapies, such as bibliotherapy, play therapy, and art therapy, may be perceived as less intimidating than many traditional therapeutic strategies (Kahn, 1999). These strategies can help clients reach deep into their unconscious and release emotions and conflicts that are not necessarily acknowledged by their conscious minds. Many children of separation and divorce need to work with a guidance counsellor to be able to understand, explore, and express feelings about divorce (Lowenstein, 2006). By using expressive therapies, guidance counsellors can encourage children to communicate and understand their emotions that are related to their parents' separation or divorce.

Bibliotherapy involves using books, literature, pamphlets, play scripts, narratives, journals, songs, and stories adapted from movies and television for the purpose of specific therapeutic goals (Pehrsson et al., 2007). Bibliotherapy is a useful strategy for looking at someone else's situation by taking an observer's stance and empathizing with the character that is experiencing similar problems. By means of story characters, children can avoid feeling isolated and alone by identifying with the characters and realizing that others have similar concerns. This method allows children to discuss the characters' actions as well as to examine coping strategies and various choices that the children could also pursue.

Bibliotherapy allows children of separation and divorce to experience the issues associated with family restructuring. After reading about other children experiencing similar circumstances, the counsellor could ask questions about the characters in the story. For example, if a child in counselling read a story in which the child blames himself for his parents' divorce, the counsellor could ask questions about how the character felt as well as the similarities and differences between the character and the child (Lowenstein, 2006). This technique could lead to a discussion that explores the children's feelings rather than the feelings of the fictitious family. Bibliotherapy can enhance communication by providing a strategy that allows children to take a less direct approach when exploring their emotions about separation and divorce.

Play therapy is another strategy that encourages children to explore their thoughts and feelings regarding separation and divorce. This strategy uses play as a primary means of communication because, unlike adults, children have less developed verbal ability to express their thoughts and emotions (Wittenborn et al., 2006). Play therapy allows children to express their thoughts and feelings both verbally and by manipulating objects or toys. By acting out various scenarios, children can deal with similar circumstances in their daily lives.

Play therapy is a natural way for children to develop coping strategies, practise problem solving, and release underlying emotions associated with separation and divorce. Children may find play therapy calming because the technique does not rely on verbal communication between child and counsellor (Carmichael, 1994). When a child has many characters to play with, the child is able to find objects to resemble his or her family members and home. The counsellor allows the child to build a miniature world to mimic his or her life. Afterwards, the counsellor observes how the child makes the toys interact with each other. For example, if the child pretended that the toy family members were arguing, the counsellor could ask the child how each character was feeling. A conversation could take place between counsellor and child that would perhaps lead into how the child was feeling. Play therapy is a strategy that opens communication between the guidance counsellor and children of separation and divorce.

Art therapy is a form of expressive therapy that uses art media such as drawing, painting, sculpturing, and photography. When children participate in art therapy, they are able to explore and express feelings that they cannot verbalize (Waller, 2006). Children who have been exposed to cumulative traumatic events such as conflicted, violent, and unresolved parental separation, which has resulted in symptoms of post-traumatic stress, may have difficulties discussing

stressful events or family concerns (Kozłowska & Hanney, 2001). These repressed feelings can be externalized by using art therapy.

Children may experience many emotions after their parents' separation or divorce. For instance, they may feel angry. To release this anger, children can scribble on a piece of paper. The art activity allows children to release their anger in an appropriate way. Art therapy is less direct, allows for desensitization of anxiety, and helps children to tell their stories through physical manipulation of art supplies. By using art, the counsellor can bring the children's emotions to the surface and discuss various coping strategies that will help the children deal with the changes in their family.

Children experiencing separation and divorce require a method to deal with any unresolved feelings, in order to ensure mental health. Although marital disruption does not consistently harm all children (Amato & Cheadle, 2005), most children will need some guidance to develop into well-adjusted adults.

Conclusion

Children and parents alike are under stress due to family changes after separation and divorce. To reduce perceived negative characteristics of divorce, it is important for parents to provide an environment that supports the children's developmental stage. Due to stress, parents may not be conscious of their own behaviours and may not be able to support open communication with their children. The way that children interpret these family changes is essential for proper emotional maturity. Guidance counsellors can aid families during this time of change by helping children to work through the developmental tasks associated with separation and divorce.

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Western Literacy and First Nations Education

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Abstract

Many First Nations people in Canada struggle in the acquisition of the skills associated with western literacy, that is, with the skills necessary to communicate through reading, writing, and numeracy in either English or French. Rooted in the history of colonial education, this problem continues to have a negative impact on the lives of individuals and communities. Its solution requires a change of attitudes, respect for Aboriginal knowledge and teachings, recognition of the importance of lifelong learning opportunities, academic research, political will and, most importantly, the real and continuing participation of all stakeholders.

Western literacy in Canada is primarily concerned with the skills necessary to communicate through reading, writing, and numeracy in either of the two official languages, English and French. For many First Nations people, the acquisition of these skills is a persistent problem. Students and adults often demonstrate lower literacy levels than other groups in the general population, with long-term consequences for the quality of individual lives and the community as a whole. Low skill levels in western literacy continue to affect the lives of many First Nations people in Canada for a variety of reasons and, while some solutions have been suggested, the problem has not yet been effectively addressed.

The effects of low literacy levels and low educational achievement can persist throughout life, affecting personal well-being as well as the well-being of the community, and ultimately the country. Poor education impacts negatively on self-esteem and employment opportunities, which can lead to apathy and welfare dependence (Helin, 2008). A low income can often mean poorer nutrition and relegation to sub-standard housing, which in turn can cause or exacerbate health problems. Poverty can lead to illegal ways of making money and, while this behaviour is obviously a choice, incarceration rates decline as education and employment situations improve (Statistics Canada, 2009). Childhood poverty, which was supposed to have been eradicated in Canada by 2000, is actually increasing and is linked to low levels of parental literacy skills (Antone et al., 2003). Parents with literacy challenges cannot help their children with schoolwork and may be reluctant to be involved in their schooling, priming the cycle to repeat itself. Given the cost of low literacy levels to the individual and to society in general, it is very surprising that more government attention is not given to this issue.

The causes of low literacy levels are deep rooted and complex, and have their origins in Canada's colonial past. Residential schools are gone now, but the full intergenerational impact of their legacy is frequently misunderstood. The purpose of the schools was to eradicate the Aboriginal identity of the students, and to create a permanent underclass of labourers and servants without equality or genuine education, and without cultural identity (Sabourin & Sabourin, 2004). If an underclass can be characterized by persistent poverty, unemployment, low education levels, poor health, high incarceration rates, addictions, and violence, situations that plague many Aboriginal people today, then the pernicious influence of residential schools persists into the present. Living with any or all of the factors listed above can jeopardize a child's chances of educational success. Serious family dysfunction, fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, and fetal drug effects can make successful learning all but impossible (Fournier & Crey, 1997). Although these situations stem from behaviours that involve choices on the part of the parents, they also have their roots in the intergenerational effects of residential schools and the subsequent normalization of dysfunctional behaviour (Tait, 2003). Even if a student does not suffer personally from any of these effects, the behaviour of his or her classmates who do will hinder his or her success in school. Canada's past colonial policies continue to cast a long shadow over the present.

Another cause of school failure to teach literacy skills is that Aboriginal youth find school itself to be irrelevant, and disconnected from their experience and culture (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008). In my experience, Canadian society in general often seems very reluctant to be honest with regard to its historical treatment of Aboriginal people. Perhaps this reluctance is because the lie goes to the very heart of the nation, its view of itself, and its prosperity. Land was taken under false pretences, using treaties that were not honoured, and claims issues continue to be largely ignored ("The Battle," 2009). Government policy with regard to residential schools was designed to eradicate Aboriginal people, culturally and politically, and those who survived were not given an equitable chance as farmers or as participants in the Canadian economy (Miller, n.d.). These truths and many more seem to have been conveniently erased from the collective memory of Canada, replaced by stereotypes that make blaming the victim easier. Until recently, this denial has been reflected in school curricula, allowing Canada's memory lapses to pass from one generation to the next (Battiste, n.d.). This lack of a "true history," and the consequent excluding and dishonouring of Aboriginal culture and experience, to say nothing of pervading colonial attitudes, may be part of the reason why school was, and still is, often seen by Aboriginal youth as irrelevant, unwelcoming, and alien.

There are several other possible reasons for low literacy levels and lack of school success. Getting an education may be seen as pointless, as in the past many doors have been firmly closed to Aboriginal people, resulting in a severe shortage of appropriate role models (Lindsay, 2003). Peer pressure and the perception of school as being a "White" institution, and therefore something to be resisted, is also a significant factor. I have heard the terms *apple* and *potato* used derogatively to describe students who are seen as "un-Indian" – red on the outside and white on the inside – because they are striving for success on the White man's terms by succeeding in school. In addition, political will seems severely lacking in the area of improving Aboriginal education results. Lifelong learning initiatives such as pre-school programs, family literacy, and adult education are given only intermittent support, and the increasing inequity of teacher pay is causing a two-tier education system to develop in Manitoba, as many band-operated schools fall further and further behind the pay scales of school divisions (Assembly of First Nations, 2005). Some schools with high numbers of special needs students, including students with literacy challenges, have great difficulty in providing adequate services due to funding shortfalls. In my experience, services to Aboriginal students are seriously lacking, which has had a very negative impact on their chances of developing the literacy skills required to be successful in school.

Clearly, some major changes are necessary to support successful literacy development for First Nations people. In theory, there appears to be widespread general agreement with the belief that school curricula must change and become more inclusive and honouring of First Nations historical experience, culture, and values, if Aboriginal students are to become more successful (Reeves, 2009). Some writers go much further, advocating for the distinct concept of Aboriginal literacy, defined as a holistic idea that is much more than reading, writing, and numeracy (Antone et al., 2003). Aboriginal literacy focuses on the learner as a whole person, and involves many different traditional ways of knowing: cultural knowledge, Aboriginal language, oral literacy, communicating through art and music, conventional western literacy, technological skills, and spiritual knowledge (Woman, 2005). It is not so much a skill set as a way of life. These holistic values have been applied with marked success in adult literacy programs (Woman), and have been argued as essential to the success and applicability of Aboriginal-specific early childhood education (Greenwood et al., 2007). They have also played a significant role in successful family literacy programs designed for Aboriginal communities (Timmons et al., 2008). Aboriginal literacy programs combine western literacy skill sets with First Nations teachings, and they therefore require the involvement of the First Nations community.

Not all of those involved in teaching Aboriginal children agree with the concept of a culturally appropriate curriculum for Aboriginal students, particularly if this programming involves segregation of the students, which it often does in the mainstream school system (Helin, 2008).

The Grandview/Uuquinak'uu Elementary School in East Vancouver, British Columbia, radically improved the performance of all of its students, 50% of whom were Aboriginal, by desegregating classes, focusing on academics, and insisting on high expectations for every student (Helin, 2008). Subsequently, the school's ranking in the province-wide Foundation Skills Assessment went from the bottom to the top. The COGENT program is another example of marked improvement in literacy skills due to strong, focused, instructional strategies (Hayward, et al., 2007). The COGENT program proved successful in improving the reading skills of remedial Aboriginal students, by integrating cognitive processing strategies with direct instruction in prerequisite reading skills. It is my own experience that the guided reading method of reading instruction, if practised every day in small supervised groups, is a very effective way to improve literacy skills. Investigation into whether Aboriginal children have a distinct cognitive style seems to suggest that this is not the case (Das et al., 2007). There may be no reason that focused literacy instruction methods that work in other settings cannot be successfully used with Aboriginal students, and no justification for segregating students into Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal groups.

Government also needs to recognize the crucial importance, and the social and financial significance, of proactive funding and support of literacy initiatives. Children with special needs of all kinds require access to appropriate educational supports that will help them to fulfil their potential. Lifelong learning support systems, such as early childhood education, family literacy programs, and adult education facilities, must be recognized as having a very important role to play in improving literacy levels, and be funded accordingly. The fundamental solution to poverty is education (Helin, 2008), and proactive problem solving on the part of government may ultimately save much of the money currently spent on welfare, corrections, and health care.

Putting theories into viable practice is the hardest part of real change, and will not happen without the meaningful and consistent involvement of all stakeholders (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008). Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (2005) has taken definite steps towards the goal of making the curriculum more inclusive and honouring of First Nations, particularly in the development of its new social studies curriculum. It is to be hoped that this type of leadership will continue, leading to greater understanding and eventually changing the attitudes of future generations. Another way to encourage inclusion and relevance is to continue to train and hire Aboriginal teachers, and to ensure that their training equips them to work in mainstream as well as band-operated schools. The presence of Aboriginal teachers will give positive role models of Aboriginal people to both mainstream and Aboriginal students, and it will increase the comfort level of Aboriginal students and their parents within the public school system. The concept of Aboriginal literacy will not be easy to apply to the existing school system, though perhaps, as Western values continue to move slowly towards Aboriginal teachings, it may one day become a reality. Some aspects of a holistic vision for education, however, are already familiar in mainstream schools, for example, the recognition of different learning styles (Woman, 2005). Other holistic practices that are recognized as being preferred by Aboriginal students are collaborative group work, a visual style of representing information, and a more reflective style in processing information (Das et al., 2007). All of these represent current best teaching practices in mainstream schools, so perhaps the concept of holistic literacy is not as far away as it seems, and these existing practices can be built on and developed with the leadership and involvement of all stakeholders, particularly the Aboriginal community.

Because of their degree of autonomy, and because they are usually situated within Aboriginal communities, band-operated schools may be considered to have more opportunity to develop holistic and culturally appropriate programming. However, deficits in funding, the difficulties inherent in producing appropriate community or culturally based materials, and the requirements of the regular curricula make these initiatives more complicated than they may at first appear. Nevertheless, band-operated schools have significant opportunities to encourage student and community involvement, and to provide positive role models within the community, and some do develop their own unique programs. For example, Peguis Central School in

Manitoba offers a required course in either Aboriginal Law or Aboriginal Studies, and one of the community's goals for the school is that senior students should understand and defend Aboriginal rights (Simard & Anderson, 2004). Band-operated schools play a major role in giving Aboriginal people control over the education of their children.

The First Nations students who went to the very first residential schools to learn the skills of Western literacy were secure in their own language and culture. The first schools did not outlaw native languages, and the first students went to residential schools with the blessing of their families, in order to supplement their existing skills with the new skills necessary for survival alongside Europeans (Pelletier, 2001). Wasacase (2004) reported that the residential school students did so well that their success was regarded as a problem by the bureaucrats in Ottawa, who did not intend to have Aboriginal people who were better educated than the Euro-Canadians. Ottawa then introduced the half-day system, whereby students worked half of each day to make the schools less reliant on government funding. Clearly, there is nothing so inherently difficult about Western literacy that Aboriginal people cannot master it; they have not failed, but the system has failed them (Woman, 2005). Fixing our current Canadian system requires a radical change in attitudes that will engender different curricula based on truth, on inclusive and respectful attitudes, and on respect for the value of holistic teaching and Aboriginal knowledge. It requires effective, researched, literacy programs that have high expectations and result in academic achievement. It demands the attention and meaningful support of the government, the real involvement of all stakeholders, including Aboriginal community members and educators, and the funding of early childhood education, family literacy programs, and adult education facilities. Western literacy has become an essential skill in today's society, and First Nations children cannot grow into their full potential or take their true place in society without it.

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