

# Sharing Our Knowledge: Best Practices for Supporting English Language Learners in Schools

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NADIA PROKOPCHUK, COLLECTION EDITOR



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# Introduction

NADIA PROKOPCHUK

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To complete the course *ECUR 415.3: Current Issues in EAL*, students are required to submit a final paper that reflects their growing knowledge about English as an Additional Language (EAL). EAL is the term used in Saskatchewan to describe students who speak languages other than English and require adequate levels of English to be successful with the school curriculum.

Most students enrolled in the online course ECUR 415 are practicing teachers who are working toward a *Post-Degree Certificate in EAL Education* (PDCEAL), while continuing to live and work in various locations both within and outside of the province. The certificate program, offered through the College of Education, University of Saskatchewan, is recognized by provincial education authorities as being equivalent to one full year of post-degree study. As such, the certificate equips teachers with the knowledge and expertise to be considered teacher-specialists of EAL Education. The course ECUR 415 also attracts some pre-service teachers who are pursuing a Bachelor of Education degree and have an interest in EAL Education.

At the end of a term, the instructor informs students that their final papers may be considered for inclusion in an OER essay collection. Essay selection has no bearing on student marks as this is done after course completion. Students must give permission for

their papers to be published prior to inclusion in the collection. The overall goal of the OER collection is to provide *PreK-12 educators* (classroom teachers, administrators, EAL coordinators, language consultants, specialists, and others) with a source of current best practices and research. An added advantage is that the collection provides *pre-service teachers* with insights into the cultures and languages represented in schools today, as preparation for their future employment.

All users of this OER collection are reminded that essays are the work of student authors and not academic experts in the field of EAL or second language education.

This online resource carries the Creative Commons License CC-BY. This license allows others to use, modify, or share the work of each author freely. Students who have given permission for their essays to appear in this collection are considered the authors of each piece of writing. Other users are required to give credit to each author as the creator of the work. This kind of open online resource allows educators in Saskatchewan and other locations to adapt the work and align it with local needs.

Each author of an OER essay may add this work to a professional CV and reference it as required to support future academic goals. This contribution is part of a living and growing learning resource that educators anywhere can access and use. Each author also retains the right to request removal of the essay from the collection at any time.

OER makes it possible for the College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan to build and expand the selection of readings available for EAL education. More information about open pedagogy is available at <https://teaching.usask.ca/curriculum/open-educational-practices.php>.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to all student authors who gave permission to have their writing published in this OER collection. It is very rewarding to be able to share not only the enhanced knowledge of the authors, but also the views and

perspectives of different voices in our province: rural and urban, Saskatchewan-born and new Canadians, experienced teachers and recent graduates. It is my hope that as you read the essays, you will gain new insights into current issues in EAL Education.

*Nadia Prokopchuk, B. Ed., M. Ed.*

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*Cover Photo:* Image obtained via <https://www.pexels.com/photo/multicolor-colored-pencils-159836/> under **CCO** license.

# **PART 1: WELCOMING ENVIRONMENTS AND CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS**

# *1 - Impact of Culture on EAL Students' Education*

HASSAN CHATHA

Diversity and multiculturalism are on the rise in Canada. Because of the economic and academic opportunities offered by communities across Canada, the foreign-born population in Canada has increased dramatically during the past few decades. Economic and academic factors are not the only reasons that encourage people to leave their homeland and move to Canada. Thousands of people come to Canada as refugees, seeking asylum against oppressive states.

After overcoming the immigration barrier, the next stop for most newcomers with children is the local school. This is the challenge that newcomers cannot get past by simply signing a few documents. Immigrant and/or refugee students, most of whom have a first language that is not English, must spend years mastering academic English and learning to navigate the Canadian education system. Newcomers to Canada are not the only group of people to face the problem of learning a foreign language in an unfamiliar school setting. Indigenous students, whose numbers in Canadian school are also rising, are faced with a similar problem.

Though diversity ultimately benefits Canadian society in the form of cultural richness, increased genetic pool, and a multitude of skills

and abilities, EAL students must overcome many initial challenges to produce those benefits. Some of the major challenges faced by EAL students stem from cultural differences. Their teachers are also challenged by this cultural diversity. Teachers must develop the skills and abilities to teach students from different cultures.

This paper discusses the impact of cultural rules, norms, and philosophies on EAL students' learning. The paper also provides suggestions for ways that administrators and teachers can help EAL learners to succeed with their academic pursuits, by using cultural diversity as a source of learning.

Culture is often linked to the image of an iceberg. The small visible portion of the iceberg represent the easily noticeable characteristics of a culture, including language, food, art, and clothing. The much bigger and hidden portion of the iceberg represents characteristics that are not visible. These include, but are not limited to, different values and beliefs that govern everything from human interactions to standards of beauty to notions of class and gender equality (Helmer and Eddy, 2012). These virtually hidden characteristics of a culture are difficult to perceive and are the cause of many misunderstandings that might take root in a classroom.

When newcomers first arrive, they are in a honeymoon stage, but this does not last long. According to Helmer and Eddy (2012), once the enjoyment phase of being in a new country is over, the new students are hit with culture shock. "Culture shock encompasses a constellation of feelings and events that occur when we are plunged into an unfamiliar environment" (pg. 16). Culture shock results once the students realize the challenges of adjusting to the new school environment. The unfamiliarity with the cultural values and belief systems of their school prohibits the EAL students from fully expressing their academic skills and abilities.

Language and culture share an intimate and inseparable bond. According to Kuo and Lai (2006), "language stands for the whole culture because language represents culture in the mind of its

speakers. Conversely, culture also symbolizes language and is summed in the economic, religions, and philosophical systems of a country" (pg. 5). Language is used to share thoughts, ideas, and perceptions. These concepts are rooted in the culture of the group and may change as the culture evolves. Thus, as Kuo and Lai (2006) argue, for EAL learners to be experts in the new language they, must first familiarize themselves with the culture that surrounds the language.

Perceptions about the background cultures of EAL learners and their families can be the cause of some discomfort in the classroom. A teacher's preconceived notions about students from a particular culture may have a negative impact on student learning. Cong (2012) comments that many American teachers associate Chinese students with high academic achievement. Though Chinese students score higher on standardized tests, when compared to other minorities, these "immigrant students have limited English proficiency, no parental support at home for school work, and need to make tremendous adjustments emotionally, socially, culturally, and academically in their new lives in America" (Cong, 2012, pg. 172). The Middle Eastern students, on the other hand, are judged harshly because of the negative stereotypes associated with some Middle Eastern cultures. This results in racism and discrimination (Cong, 2012, pg. 172).

Based on common misconceptions, teachers' responses to a student who needs extra academic support may vary, particularly if the teacher mistakenly perceives a student to be gifted because of the teacher's stereotypical thinking. Just as not offering academic support to students perceived as gifted, a system may lose a student because the teachers believe that academic learning is not a part of the student's culture. Thus, the misconceptions that arise because of cultural stereotypes are dangerous as they prohibit the EAL learners from fully reaching their academic potential.

Another common but faulty assumption is that students of the same culture or from the same country should be grouped

together. Students' behaviours, their likes and dislikes, may be influenced by elements of different cultures. Helmer and Eddy (2012) give the example of Matthew, a student of German descent, who is a member of several different cultural groups. Limiting students to a single culture, based on geographical, linguistic, or physical characteristics, is risky as it can limit a student's possibilities for academic achievement. In the case of Matthew, the first impression a teacher might have is that Matthew is from a well-to-do family. As a result of this perception, the teacher may not focus on providing Matthew with access to necessary educational resources, e.g., printing services. In reality, Matthew belongs to the working class, and has limited financial resources (Helmer and Eddy, 2012). Therefore, a teacher's first impression of a student, based mostly on appearance, is not always the complete picture. As evidenced through Matthew's example, a student may belong to several cultural and societal groups.

Moreover, a major aspect of culture is its role in dictating classroom interactions. A student's behaviour is guided by the rules and norms defined by his/her culture. If a student is made to step outside his/her comfort zone, foregoing the cultural rules and norms, he/she may not be able to perform academically. One of the areas where cultural rules play a big part is defining gender roles. Most school divisions across North America promote a gender-free environment where gender equality is the norm. Teachers in these schools do not think of gender as a contributing factor when it comes to classroom interactions (Helmer and Eddy, 2012). Though gender equality is of the utmost importance in Canada and every student, be it boy or girl, must have access to quality education, Helmer and Eddy argue that "in treating all students equally and encouraging them to do likewise with each other, we may be denying a reality that all the students already know as a result of their cultural leaning outside the classroom and in the home" (Helmer and Eddy, 2012, pg. 37).

Teachers in schools are not the only people responsible for a

student's learning. When it comes to cultural teachings, a student's family and community play a big role. Even before a student starts school, he/she begins learning cultural rules and norms by observing his/her parents, elder siblings, and other members of the extended family. The North American culture promotes interactions between students of the opposite gender, but many EAL learners belong to cultures where interactions with the opposite gender are not the standard. When teachers, in pursuit of gender equality, create mixed-gender groups, the EAL students are not able to learn or fully express their academic capabilities because of cultural restrictions.

Establishing classroom gender roles is not the only way through which culture impacts EAL students' learning. Gender roles also limit the parental support available to students. Because of cultural restrictions, mothers of Middle Eastern students may not be able to accompany them to the library (Cong, 2012). Culture defines the roles and responsibilities for parents. Though established for the overall wellbeing of the family, these rules can sometimes be limiting and therefore hinder an EAL student's learning experience.

Culture also dictates the relationship between students and the teacher. In the North American culture, students and teachers have a 'shared responsibility' for learning in schools. While teachers are given the appropriate respect, students are encouraged to speak up and question their teachers. In most other cultures around the world, "it is considered the height of insolence and disrespect to question anything the teacher says or does" (Helmer and Eddy, 2012, pg. 40). These conflicting cultural values result in misunderstandings. Teachers might think of a student's quiet nature as being a behavioural or intellectual disorder. The students on the other hand, face an internal conflict. They are not sure whether to hold on to their cultural rules and keep quiet or take part in classroom discussions. These misunderstandings and confusions impact the EAL learners' educational experience.

Furthermore, culture impacts EAL students' learning experience

by defining educational concepts such as knowledge and literacy. Cong (2012) mentions that in the Chinese culture, the meaning of literacy is “rooted in traditional Chinese philosophy that emphasizes the ability to read classic literature” (pg. 73). In the North American society, literacy, apart from reading and writing, encompasses the skills needed to gain and present information using a multitude of mediums, including written, oral, and technology based (Vacca, Vacca, & Mraz, 2017). These varying definitions of literacy construct barriers for the EAL students. Compared to the modern definition of education, if parents of the EAL students have a different philosophy regarding education and learning, they will not be able to help their children with their studies. These parents may even oppose the teachings of modern school systems. As a result, a culture’s philosophy of education may hinder an EAL student’s academic achievement.

The challenges that result from cultural differences are overwhelming and may force the school administrators and teachers to resist promoting diversity. The diversity is not the problem. The systems and resources used to deal with diversity are flawed. Many educational institutions view diversity as a bandwagon that should be supported, but with a minimal commitment. They understand the advantages of creating diverse learning environments, but do not allocate enough resources to the teachers and the support staff to help the EAL learners. Teachers themselves are not qualified and trained to teach a group of students with diverse educational backgrounds and needs. Yet overwhelming as they may be, the challenges of diversity can be overcome.

Getting through the cultural barriers is a cooperative process that requires the administrators, the teachers and the parents to work together in an effort to enhance the EAL learners’ educational experience. The administrators are responsible for setting up and administering a successful intake process. Apart from assessing the academic abilities, the intake process should include a discussion

of the student's cultural background (Coelho, 2012). The administrators, the teacher, and the parents should all get together to discuss how the cultural differences might affect the EAL learner's education. The parents and the teachers should voice their educational philosophies so that there is no confusion about the purpose of schooling. Cong (2012) advises parents to volunteer in school activities and meet frequently with the teachers. These interaction between the school staff and the parents may help resolve most of the misunderstanding caused by cultural differences. To help the EAL students familiarize themselves with the new school environment, an orientation session should be arranged. It is suggested to use student guides, preferably with the same cultural background, for the orientation (Coelho, 2012).

To combat the classroom interaction issues, teachers must work towards creating an inclusive environment. There are numerous "intercultural projects", as suggested by Coelho (2012), that may be used to raise awareness about different cultures present in the classroom. Students may interview each other about their cultural backgrounds, create heritage boxes with symbols of their cultures, or tell stories about their home countries (Coelho, 2012). These activities will help the students, and the teacher, learn about each others' cultures and traditions.

In conclusion, culture plays a big role in impacting EAL learners' education. Culture and language are intertwined. In order for the newcomers to learn a new language, they must first understand the cultural context surrounding the language. Moreover, cultural stereotypes and misconceptions give rise to unfair expectations. The teachers and the administrators must be aware of the EAL students' cultural norms and traditions to avoid these misunderstandings. The parents must also work towards the academic excellence of their children by regularly meeting with the teaching staff. Being an immigrant, who was once an EAL student, I believe I am well-situated to understand the challenges faced by EAL students. Though not all EAL students are from Pakistan,

and face the same problems, I believe I have a certain advantage when it comes to the cultural issues faced by EAL students. My experience as an EAL student has allowed me to realize the misunderstandings and frustrations, from a student's point of view, that arise because of cultural differences. My learning in ECUR 415 has equipped me with the teaching tools necessary to overcome those barriers.

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## 2 - The Importance of Culturally Responsive Teaching

KIM GUILLET

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) is a term that refers to pedagogy that embraces equality and inclusion. It is based on the understanding that all students learn differently due to a variety of factors including: social-emotional needs, language, culture, and family background. Culture is used as a foundation for learning while expanding intellectual growth in all students. Educators who display a CRT mindset can help build productive, positive relationships with families, engage and motivate students, and value different perspectives in order to create strong communities of learners who will grow linguistically, socially, and academically.

Hammond (2015) has created a *Ready for Rigor* Framework which describes the four practice areas of Culturally Responsive Teaching: Awareness, Learning Partnerships, Information Processing, and Community Building. Based on brain research, each of these areas help to create authentic and relevant learning in our schools and assist students in becoming independent. The priority is to maximize their learning potential and close the achievement gap for culturally and linguistically diverse students.

The first practice area is *Awareness* of three different topics: the nature of culture, acknowledging various constructs that may lead

to bias, and understanding structural racialization. Awareness will help teachers “develop a socio-political consciousness, an understanding that we live in a racialized society that gives unearned privilege to some while others experience unearned disadvantage because of race, gender, class or language” (Hammond, p.18). Culture is not only our ethnicity but it is also our every day practices, and the groups with whom we identify. Helmer and Eddy (2012) stress that we are all the products of a variety of influences and “there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture” (Edward T. Hall, p.90). These principles guide our behavior and our interactions. The culture iceberg analogy developed by Else Hamayan (Helmer and Eddy, p. 89) is a concrete example of how much of what we view as culture is only a small fraction compared to what is hidden under the surface. Most view the tip of the iceberg: literature, dance, and art, as the main aspects of culture, but such examples as handling emotions and the nature of friendships are embedded deep within us and seldom discussed or explored. Hammond (2015) argues that culture “is the way that every brain makes sense of the world and helps us function in our environment” (p.23) and contends there are three levels: surface, shallow, and deep. Surface culture is like the tip of the iceberg including observable elements like food, music, and holidays. Shallow culture, or the water line of the iceberg, deals with interactions, norms, and trust. Deep culture, like the bottom of the iceberg model, is made up of our unconscious cultural values that shape our self- concept and the way we live.

Teachers must have an understanding of cultural differences to successfully immerse EAL learners into their classrooms. Helmer and Eddy (2012) believe that by raising this awareness teachers will become more empathetic and understand where potential communication and cultural breakdowns may occur. Many of these conflicts can arise due to differences in educational and belief systems. Different perceptions of creativity, managing time, use of their first language, emphasis on homework, and promoting

choices in school are some key aspects where some conflicts may occur. Some cultures don't "share knowledge" in the same way, so class participation may look different, as well as how students exhibit motivation. In addition, different instructional strategies may pose a challenge for students. For some, cooperative learning, and partner or group work will not be consistent with the strategies in their previous schooling and may not seem natural at first. As well, many countries prioritize fact based learning so problem solving will need to be explicitly taught, not assumed. Discussing the students' previous school experiences may aid in understanding for both teachers and students alike, and limit miscommunications before they occur. Acknowledging some of the differences newcomers might face when moving into the educational system in an English speaking country is another integral part of assisting our students to navigate successfully between two languages and cultures.

As well, Helmer and Eddy (2012) identify five different constructs that may cause misunderstandings: Assertiveness–Compliance, Dominance–Submission, Disclosure–Privacy, Direct–Indirect Communication, and Flexible Time–Time as a Commodity. In the first construct, how people exhibit the motivation to help themselves is considered. In North American culture, students are encouraged to assert their individualism in comparison with other cultures where people do not eagerly express their opinions. The second encompasses power dimensions related to gender, which may correlate to participation, attendance, and effort in female students. In addition, this can affect student-teacher relationships, as well as teacher-family relationships. We must be aware that some topics are off limits to discuss in many cultures and offense may be taken if families are expected to share private or taboo information. Direct and indirect styles can lead to communication breakdowns between students, student to teacher, and family to teacher. Lastly, in most English speaking countries, time is considered a commodity that should not be wasted. Efficiency is

incredibly important and seen as a necessity. In some cultures, time is seen as more flexible and the pace of living is much slower and relaxed.

By understanding levels of culture and the differences that may contribute to bias and breakdown, teachers are exhibiting their socio-cultural consciousness (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013). Part of this socio-cultural consciousness is acknowledging how these attitudes and stereotypes may be an implicit bias that shapes our thinking and interactions with others. Unfortunately, our society maintains some factors for some groups that perpetuate discrepancies in resources and opportunities, such as housing and health care. This inequity and structural racialization may contribute to dependent learners who are vulnerable and at risk in our schools. Understanding this will help us to better support the social-emotional needs of our students and aid us in strengthening their intellectual capacity (Hammond, 2015).

The second practice area involves building *Learning Partnerships* with students and families. Experts in differentiation and brain research, Sousa and Tomlinson (2011) stress the importance of social relationships on human behaviour. They urge teachers to be empathetic and willing to see the world through the eyes of their students and their parents. This cultivates a mutual respect and builds strong relationships that will set the stage for warm, learner-friendly environments. The teacher must be the leader in this. “We need to consider the issue of affect, that is, how the students feel about the learning process. Students need to feel that the teacher really cares about them; if students feel supported and valued, they are far more likely to be motivated to learn” (Harmer, 2007, p. 20). Therefore, educators need to make it a priority to build positive relationships by connecting to the lives of their students, finding out their interests, and listening to their experiences.

Teachers must see the “whole child”, and not just their English language abilities. Celebrating what makes students special and unique emphasizes student strengths and values their

competencies (Sousa and Tomlinson, 2011). Students gain self-confidence and motivation if they are “truly seen.” Fostering principles of identity and investment (Brown and Lee, 2015) illustrate how their emotions and self-worth are connected to their learning. In addition, knowing their educational history and their background gives a teacher a more complete picture of who they are. It is this deep knowledge of students, and a desire to make a difference, characteristics of a culturally responsive educator’s mindset (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013), that promote respect and collaboration with students and families.

The third area of CRT is *Information Processing* and how the brain uses culture to help interpret the world around us. Hammond (2015) references six core principles or “brain rules” that work together to keep our brains healthy and learning. The first two are integral to being part of a caring school environment: the brain seeks to minimize threats and maximize connections with others, and positive relationships keep our safety detection system in check. The relationship between one’s sense of well-being and feelings of belonging to a social community cannot be underestimated. In addition, how we process information is guided by culture. Many cultures have strong oral traditions where knowledge is passed down through the generations. This helps to build neural pathways, which means that learning will be enhanced using stories, music, and repetition, as well as social interaction. Next, attention drives learning. Each brain is ignited by novelty, relevance, and emotion so active engagement is necessary. All new information “must be coupled with existing funds of knowledge to help make sense of the world” (Hammond, p.49) and is organized based on cultural experiences. Building on students’ background knowledge, and engaging students in meaningful tasks, is critical to learning and retaining information. This requires input, making meaning, and application of this new knowledge. Lastly, the brain stretches and changes through challenges. Intellectual capacity

grows when students are stimulated and pushed beyond their comfort zone to do higher order thinking.

The fourth practice area for CRT is *Community Building*. Learning environments must be built as a safe space where all languages and cultures are valued; we have the opportunity and responsibility to ensure that each student is allowed to share who they are without bias or prejudice. Brown and Lee's (2015) principle of languaculture stresses the connection between language and culture and how the two cannot be separated. As educators, we need to be committed to honoring this, helping students feel proud of who they are, and how their unique backgrounds and talents enrich our schools.

A student's individuality is also very much connected to a first language. "Learning to think, feel, act, and communicate in an L2 is a complex socio-affective process of perceiving yourself as an integral part of a social community. The process involves self-awareness, investment, agency, and a determination, amidst a host of power issues, to form your own identity within the social relationships of a community" (Brown and Lee, p. 78). Coelho (2012) urges schools to incorporate languages to "draw on the linguistic resources of the community" as a component of identity, pride and self-esteem as well as a resource to families, as a tool for learning, and as a resource to the whole community. If English is emphasized as the only language of learning, educators have the potential to produce inequitable learning experiences (Sterzuk & Nelson, 2016).

Research studies about bilingualism illustrate the positive effects on students. Educators must "directly address the dual language and literacy needs of immigrant children, welcome all languages into the classroom, and provide enriching language and literacy experiences for all children" (Chumak-Horbatsch, p.46). Teachers are the bridge that can help strengthen this by providing inclusive practices which continue to strengthen the home- school connection. Parents should be invited into classrooms as partners in their child's learning journey. Some learning opportunities for

families include reading dual language books, sharing about their countries, adding their mother tongue to class bulletin boards, and helping their children with research and vocabulary connections in their first language.

Moreover, there should be a balance among viewpoints and perspectives. Students should see themselves in the curriculum, as the teacher utilizes appropriate materials that are non-biased and from different cultural contexts. "It is necessary to change what we teach, adding diverse cultural perspectives and encouraging students to recognize and speak out against prejudice and discrimination" (Coelho, p.166). We must be reflective and collaborative in our practice, continuing to think deeply about how we choose what is learned, what literature is selected from a variety of cultures and viewpoints, and methods that will be effective for the needs of our students.

Another important aspect of the learner environment is the need to set high standards with all students, including those who are linguistically and culturally diverse. When students are able to reach self-motivated goals, have input in tasks with the opportunities for choice, this fosters agency. "Agency, which lies at the heart of language learning, is the ability of learners to make choices, take control, self-regulate, and thereby pursue their goals as individual within a sociocultural context. Teachers are called on to offer appropriate affective and pedagogical support in their students' struggle for autonomy, development of identities, and journey toward empowerment" (Brown and Lee, 2015, p.84). Self-determination and high intellectual performance helps to build the risk-taking environment where language learning can occur.

Educators should "think of culturally responsive teaching as a mindset, a way of thinking about and organizing instruction to allow for great flexibility in teaching" (Hammond, p.5). As an EAL specialist, I see the relevance of culturally responsive teaching every day, and how it is the foundation of building a safe, and inclusive learning environment for all students. Understanding

your own cultural lens helps you to relate to different perspectives and be more empathetic to families, many of whom are vulnerable and underserved. Each student must be treated with dignity and respect and ensuring fair and equitable opportunities needs to be the basis for all that we do. Culture, as a catalyst for learning, lends accessibility to and expanded possibilities for success with curriculum outcomes. Building on strengths and student interests makes students feel capable and empowered. Culturally responsive teaching encompasses differentiated learning and ensures all students grow linguistically, socially, and academically

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### *3 - Supporting Newcomer EAL Students in the Elementary Classroom: The First Weeks*

PATRICIA HICKS

The increasing number of English as an Additional Language (EAL) students in Saskatchewan schools is just one of the numerous challenges faced by today's teachers, as well as being a potentially exciting new learning opportunity. The number of EAL learners in Saskatchewan schools has been steadily growing since 2008 (University of Saskatchewan, 2017, ECUR 415 Mod.1, p. 1). EAL students must learn not only curricular outcomes but also social and academic language. These students' immediate learning needs create an urgency to begin developing language and academic skills as soon as possible upon arrival at school. Providing appropriate supports for the newcomer student in the first weeks of Saskatchewan schooling will be the focus of this paper.

EAL learners are a diverse student population. Many are Canadian-born learners whose first language is one other than English (University of Saskatchewan, 2017, ECUR 415 Mod.1, p. 10). Another population of EAL learners are students who have come to Canada at a pre-school age. Garnett (2012), refers to these students as generation 1.5. The third group of EAL students are newcomers

to Canada. Newcomer families are most often economic immigrants, family class immigrants, or refugees. Over 3300 landed immigrants and refugees aged 0-14 arrived in Saskatchewan in 2015 (Prokopchuk, 2017). Continuing immigration coupled with a recent influx of Syrian refugees has brought unique challenges to the classroom. Unlike Canadian born EAL students, newcomer arrivals generally experience the “stages of adjustment” (University of Saskatchewan, 2017, ECUR 415 Mod. 1, p. 10), which may include a period of culture shock. Newcomers present many other unique challenges because of “a vast difference in age, time of arrival, country of origin, prior experiences, and educational needs” (University of Saskatchewan, 2017, ECUR 415 Mod.1, p. 8).

Newcomer students face many challenges that can impact their learning. One of the most obvious challenges for newcomer students is communication. Many newcomers must learn not only a new language, but also new print conventions. Different cultural norms challenge newcomer students as well. Often newcomers feel isolated within the school community, especially as they move from the honeymoon stage to the hostility or culture shock phase of adjustment (University of Saskatchewan, 2017, ECUR 415 Mod. 1, p. 10). Students must also learn “to do school” (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 60) as they learn the expectations and teaching/learning styles prevalent in Saskatchewan schools. For refugee students, trauma is a real and serious concern. Many students arrive in the classroom having experienced separation from loved ones, exposure to acts of war and interrupted schooling (Manitoba Education, 2012).

With so many challenges facing the newcomer EAL student, it is imperative that teachers are well prepared to work with the students and their families. One of the first lines of communication with the newcomer family is through the Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS) program. As part of this program, these trained workers provide services in Humboldt, Moose Jaw, Regina, Saskatoon, Swift Current and Prince Albert regions (Regina Open

Door Society, 2017). All teachers can access valuable links, contacts and information at the SWIS web site (SWIS Sask. 2017). If needed, any school in the province can access free OPI (over-the-phone interpretation) services funded by the Ministry of Education (University of Saskatchewan, 2017, ECUR 415 Mod. 2, p. 9).

Once the family has completed the initial intake procedures in terms of school registration and placement, an assessment of the student will take place. Like most school divisions, the Saskatoon Public School Division has a two part interview and assessment process. First, background information is gathered. An interpreter is used if required. Next, a language assessment of the learner is performed (Anderson & Tilbury, 2014). Common procedures for reception, intake and assessment are established throughout Saskatchewan school divisions (University of Saskatchewan, Mod. 1, p. 8). All of this information is accessible to the classroom teacher and provides a well-rounded look at the newcomer student.

An important indicator of the newcomer student's language abilities is the score on the Common Framework of Reference (CFR). This assessment tool is "a well-established language framework that identifies ways in which learners at various levels of proficiency use language to perform meaningful, authentic tasks" (Government of Saskatchewan, 2013). This "can do" scale (Government of Saskatchewan, 2013) rates language learners on what they are able to accomplish in the areas of listening, spoken interaction, spoken production, reading and writing. Saskatchewan schools focus on the first three proficiency levels of the CFR, breaking them down further to A1.1, A1.2, A2.1, A2.2, B1.1 and B1.2. The descriptors allow the teacher, students and parents to see a detailed description of where the student is at and to track progress over time.

By examining all the data gathered from the initial intake and assessment, a learner profile can be created and goals set. Data collected early on will be important to keep. This data provides

evidence of growth which is important for EAL students to see as they progress. The goals that are set will be dependent on the student's present level of English communication and previous schooling experiences. For students who have no English language skills, "their immediate need is to learn the language of everyday interaction as well as some basic academic terms" (Coelho, 2012, p. 84).

The first experiences in the classroom should be designed to make the newcomer student feel welcome and at ease. The way that the student is introduced to the class can help create a welcoming climate. Coelho (2012, p. 156) suggests that the teacher introduces new students by telling the class about where they come from, what language they speak, pronouncing names correctly, and enlisting support from the entire class. Sometimes new names can be difficult for English speakers to pronounce. Amber Prentice from Colorin Colorado (2012) advises not to anglicize student names, but to be respectful of their given names. By practicing as many times as needed, teachers can learn to pronounce new names correctly. Always confirm which name is used as the everyday first name and how official names on documents should appear as these vary culturally (Coelho, 2012).

One of the first supports a classroom teacher can offer the new student is a buddy (Helmer & Eddy, 2012). Preferably this buddy would be another student who is the same age or slightly older who speaks the same language as the newcomer student. However, "it is more important to select students of any language background who are kind, patient, and empathetic" (Coelho, 2012, p. 36). Training sessions for potential buddies are a good way to emphasize the need to be empathetic as well as informative. A well trained buddy can assist the new student with familiarization of the school and provide introductions. Also, recess or class change bells, fire drills and lockdown drills should be explained in advance to reduce any stress that these may cause the new student.

Helmer and Eddy (2012) remind teachers to be aware of cultural

considerations that may impact student relationships when assigning buddies. It is important to keep in mind that circumstances, such as socio-economic status, religion and gender, can affect relationships. Despite a similarity in first language, students “could, in fact, come from areas that have been sworn enemies for centuries” (Helmer & Eddy, 2012). By accessing newcomer background information and educating oneself about world cultures, the classroom teacher may be able to avoid cultural conflicts, or recognize difficulties as they arise.

Newcomer students can arrive at any time in the school year. Simple preparations can speed the transition process for the student. Having certain items ready ahead of time for potential new students can reduce stress on the first days for everyone. A welcome package containing essential classroom items such as pencils, erasers, crayons, notebooks, and other items appropriate to the classroom and grade is easy to have ready and will make the newcomer student feel welcomed and prepared (University of Saskatchewan, 2017, ECUR 415 Mod. 2, p. 9).

It is important to remember that EAL students and their families are capable of successful communication in their first language or languages. “Research has shown that children who maintain and continue to develop in their own language reach higher levels of literacy and academic achievement than children who begin to lose their first language once they start school” (Coelho, 2012).

Providing a print rich environment that includes the community languages represented in the school population is one way to include and encourage use of students’ first languages. It is affirming for newcomers to see signs, posters, and books in their first language. By learning some key phrases in the school’s community languages, the teacher can make the newcomer student and parents feel more welcomed (Colorin Colorado, 2012). Various examples of multilingual school information for parents is available on the SWIS web site (SWIS Sask. 2017).

Some newcomer students will experience a silent period. This

period is normal for many beginning language learners (Coelho, 2012, p. 230). While students are first exposed to the new language they may not be speaking but are learning. The student needs support as they “take in” the language. The student will become verbal once they are ready. This may take up to six months and should not be considered abnormal as long as the student is listening and participating in other ways in the classroom (RALLI Campaign, 2013).

The newcomer student requires many supports in the first weeks, months and years of schooling. Supports provided to assist student learning are referred to as scaffolding. Numerous scaffolds are vital in the first weeks of instruction. Language presentation can be scaffolded to support learning. Providing “comprehensible input” (Coelho, p. 233) requires the teacher to present language that is just slightly beyond the student’s current level. To make the language more comprehensible for newcomer students, Hill (2008) suggests using simple authentic language at a slightly slower rate with a clear voice. He also suggests using manipulatives, visuals, gestures, pantomime, and facial expressions. With the use of computers, tablets and Smartboards, it is easy to provide the learner with visuals that support just about any topic.

Using culturally responsive teaching methods is an excellent way to incorporate the newcomer’s background into the classroom while developing language skills. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013) Newcomer students feel more engaged when the teacher provides projects that incorporate their cultural background (Coelho, 2012, p. 161). One of the examples of an intercultural project offered by Coelho (2012) is *The World in our Classroom* activity. A world map is hung in the classroom and all students and teachers hang a picture of themselves to indicate their country of origin or ancestry. As newcomers arrive they can add their picture to the map. Later, when the newcomer student’s English language skills permit, this student can make a presentation to the class

about his or her own country of origin. Several other intercultural project ideas are outlined in Coelho (2012, Ch. 6) and Muniz (2008).

The information researched for this paper will be extremely useful to me in the upcoming school year. Applying the appropriate supports is key to successful transitions for newcomer students. In my class journal (University of Saskatchewan, 2017, Journal 2-4) I identified a need for more multilingual resources in my school. By engaging the local community, new resources can be created that are representative of the heritage languages in our community. Creating multilingual welcome signage will be a great way to begin building relationships and exploring the diversity of languages in our community.

I will begin the school year presenting this subject matter to colleagues in a half- day workshop. Each newcomer student in my school division will face his or her own unique challenges. I hope that by welcoming them with an encouraging smile, setting appropriate goals, learning names correctly, assigning a peer buddy, embracing culture in the classroom, and seeking appropriate supports, each newcomer student will be provided with the best possible start to a successful Saskatchewan education.

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## *4 - Teaching EAL Students: Children of Two Language Worlds*

KARUN MANN

Canada's vibrant diversity, often recognized as its intrinsic wealth, comprises Indigenous Peoples, settler communities, and newcomer populations. Globalization, an increased diversity in immigration, and a large inflow of refugees have significantly contributed to the existing pluralism of local populations. This, in turn, has resulted in a noticeable change in the student demography of Canadian classrooms — making them quite heterogeneous. For newcomer students, learning a new language (English) is generally a requirement for communicating and integrating into the Canadian educational system. However, in their efforts to learn English in schools, these children suffer a loss of their heritage language(s), resulting in consequences such as a language gap between them and their families.

As an immigrant, a parent of two EAL (English as an Additional Language) children, and a future educator in Canada, I believe that schools should formulate policies to nurture the linguistic advantages of EAL students. To facilitate the integration of EAL learners into a new culture, educational institutes should promote

cross-cultural orientation by appreciating the linguistic and cultural differences. This approach can also benefit many Canadian-born students belonging to a non-English speaking background, such as Indigenous and Hutterite students. Educators must step up for EAL students by supporting English for academic success and recognizing their bilingual potential. This can be achieved by restructuring teacher education programs to better prepare educators for teaching a diverse student body population, increasing diversity in the teaching staff, adopting culturally responsive pedagogy, and implementing linguistically and educationally appropriate teaching practices.

Teaching EAL learners who are in the process of adding English to their language repertoire is considered one of the biggest challenges by mainstream teachers. Bruce Garnett (2012) attributes this to the teachers' "inadequate training" (p. 18) and "belief that ESL students are not their responsibility" (p. 18). Nina Webster and Angela Valeo (2011) also stress the importance of teacher preparedness in teaching EAL students. In their article *Teacher Preparedness for a Changing Demographic of Language Learners*, they emphasize that "well-intentioned teachers lack the competence necessary for effective classroom practice" (Webster & Valeo, 2011, p. 105). Through this article, the authors confirm that current education programs are increasing teachers' awareness about EAL learners and inclusive mindsets, yet much more needs to be done to prepare educators to teach in classes flourishing with diversity.

Due to a lack of emphasis on EAL-specific content in the training process, it is not surprising that most pre-service (PT) and in-service teachers feel unequipped to handle classroom diversity. In addition to the scarcity of teachers prepared to respond to the needs of EAL students, a lack of professional training leads to creating biases towards students whose cultural and life experiences are different from those of their teachers. Sheryl Taylor and Donna Sobel (2011) discuss these biases and claim that most PTs regard diversity as

a problem rather than an advantage. The underprepared teachers believe that students of color are deficient, low in ability, and have limited potential for success (Sobel & Taylor, 2011, p. 15). The misconceptions regarding EAL students and the constant misinterpretation of their abilities and behavior adversely affects their personal, linguistic, and academic growth. An increase in EAL content and field experience in education programs can enhance teacher confidence and competence towards teaching EAL students, and diminish biases.

In addition to voicing the need for effective teacher training, Elizabeth Coelho (2012) in her book *Language and Learning in Multilingual Classrooms: A Practical Approach*, calls to attention the benefits of increasing teacher diversity in multicultural classroom settings. She identifies a lack of diversity in the teaching faculty and points it to be significantly lesser than student diversity (Coelho, 2012, p. 141). Coelho (2012) recommends that while recruiting staff members, teachers who speak community languages and share a similar cultural background with students should be considered as an asset (pp. 204-205). A lack of diversity in the teaching faculty results in a cultural mismatch between teachers and students. Taylor and Sobel (2011) assert that in order to teach students from diverse backgrounds effectively, schools require teachers who “understand the impact of students’ home and community cultures on their educational experience and who have the skills to interact with students from a range of backgrounds” (p. 5).

It is undeniable that the teachers’ approach to classroom management and instruction is highly influenced by their cultural perspectives. A lack of knowledge about the students’ cultural beliefs can affect the teachers’ selection of course material, examples, and analogies that are relevant to the students’ experience. Ana Villegas and Jacqueline Irvine (2010) provide research-based rationales for diversifying the teaching force. Their findings suggest that minority students benefit from pairing with teachers from the same ethnic backgrounds and from attending

schools where teachers of “minority groups are equitably represented” (Villegas & Irvine, 2010, p. 187). Increasing teacher diversity can promote a “color-blind approach to instruction” (Sobel & Taylor, 2011, p. 18) and help in reducing prevalent cultural biases and misperceptions. More teacher diversity improves cross-cultural interaction amongst academic faculty which, in turn, can facilitate the development of strong teaching strategies for anti-racist and anti-oppressive education.

Another significant contributor to the overall academic and linguistic success of EAL students is a culturally responsive pedagogy. Rooting from Lev Vygotsky’s theory of *sociocultural learning* — which highlights the influence of culture on learning and behavior, culturally responsive teaching appreciates the cultural knowledge and skills that learners from diverse ethnic backgrounds bring into schools. The current dominant educational practices, based heavily on the Eurocentric frameworks, do not pertain to all students due to “cultural blindness” (Gay, 2000, p. 21). Geneva Gay (2010) defines culturally responsive teaching as “using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of culturally diverse students” (p. 31) in order to construct effective learning and teaching strategies. In simple words — classroom instruction should incorporate diverse cultural values and aspects in texts, assignments, tasks, and activities. Such an approach provides EAL students with a sense of belonging and a feeling of being valued in their classrooms.

Culturally responsive teaching enhances the linguistic skills of EAL students by stimulating their interests to actively participate in classrooms. Sylvia Helmer and Catherine Eddy in their book, *Look at Me When I Talk to You*, recommend various ways of encouraging participation of EAL learners in classrooms. Through these interactions, teachers can learn about a “student’s language capabilities” and “monitor [their] capacity and growth over time” (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 63). Moreover, by promoting cross-cultural knowledge, culturally responsive teaching eventually

benefits the whole student body population and not just the EAL students. With increased globalization and an emergence of multicultural societies, culturally responsive pedagogy fits best with the multicultural education. Students' intercultural understandings are becoming vital for current and future job markets, building a strong and viable economy, democratic decision making, and working towards social equality.

As globalization is creating a high demand for bilingual/multilingual individuals, assimilative and supportive teaching practices with monolingual focus are becoming "erroneous and outdated" (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012, p. 43) in rapidly transforming multilingual work and trade environments. Unlike the assimilative practices, supportive practices acknowledge the importance of home language but still, treat the classroom language learning as a priority. Inclusive teaching practices which aim at the "promotion of bilingualism are in line" (p. 43) with the linguistically and educationally appropriate practices. By including students' home languages in the curriculum (p. 39), inclusive methods aim to promote "dynamic bilingualism" (p. 53) in EAL learners.

Linguistically appropriate practice (LAP), an approach developed by early childhood specialist R. Chumak-Horbatsch, operates through the research established language acquisition principles. LAP recognizes "bilingualism as a positive force in children's cognitive and linguistic development" (p. xi) and claims that "conceptual and academic skills transfer across languages" (p. xi). It dispels those myths which consider home language to be confusing and interfering with the acquisition of a new language. Instead, LAP's research-based philosophy believes that each language supports the other and that there is a positive correlation between "home language promotion within the school and development of academic skills in the majority language" (p. xi).

Teachers who practice LAP neither consider an EAL learners' lack of understanding of the English language as a disadvantage, nor profess the superiority of the classroom language over home

languages. Instead, these teachers treat EALs as the literates of other languages and value their literacy skills in those languages. Such educators acknowledge that learning a second language is not an easy process and that it requires acquiring new linguistic skills on social as well as academic levels. LAP considers “language mixing of bilinguals” (p. 29) or translanguaging and code-switching as a normal part of dual language learning process. Translanguaging is an even more complex skill than code-switching as it involves crossing linguistic borders during the course of conversation (Lasagabaster & Garcia, 2014, p. 558). Code-switching, on the other hand, refers to the use of “two languages as two separate monolingual codes” (p. 558) by a bilingual speaker. Elizabeth Coelho (2012) considers “bilingual instruction” (p. 201) to be the most appropriate strategy for teaching bilingual EAL students.

The success of linguistic and educationally appropriate practices is based on adapting instruction and assessments to meet the needs of new language learners while achieving curricular outcomes. Nadia Prokopchuk (2014) discusses the usefulness of “differentiating instruction” (p. 83) and “assessment using strategies that are most effective with learners of EAL” (p. 83) in inclusive classrooms. Assessment of the progress of language learners is essential for adapting instruction and planning language support. Using the curricular outcomes and assessment tools specifically developed for the native speakers of English is not only unfair and inappropriate for EAL students but can also be misleading. Use of a developmental continuum such as the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) reveals the stages in a student’s gradual progress with second language acquisition. Teachers can also adapt the CEFR according to the age of the EAL students. EAL students may also require “revised alternative outcomes” (Coelho, 2016, p. 295) until they have developed language proficiency to achieve grade-level outcomes. The assessment strategies which are adapted by reducing the

language demand enable the EAL learners to demonstrate their content learning in an effective way.

Similar to Jim Cummins and Margaret Early (2015), I believe that a “home-school language switch becomes an educational disadvantage only when the school fails to support students effectively in learning the school language” (p. 26). Cummins and Early (2015) believe that the home language can be used as an advantage by “[activating] students’ pre-existing knowledge so that they can relate new information to what they already know” (p. 27). There is no dearth of research findings which corroborate that home language does not impede but rather supports the acquisition of more languages. Alongside, more and more research is indicating the benefits of bilingualism, such as the “increased cognitive abilities, flexibility, and [a] more advanced metalinguistic understanding” (Hoy et al., 2016, p. 164). In the past two decades, there is a noticeable growth in literature stressing the need to reduce the “cultural split” (Iloga, 1995, p. 107) by validating the heritage languages and cultural diversity in schools. Hence, educational institutes are moving towards a paradigm shift from ‘English-only’ to ‘English-plus’. As a mother of two EAL children, I view them and other EAL students as *“emergent bilinguals”* (Chumak-Horbatsch, 2012, p. 23). I believe in teaching my bilingual EAL students with the perspective that they can successfully navigate in two languages.

In conclusion, teacher preparedness is essential for developing confidence, skills, and the mindset to teach in classroom settings enriched by diversity. With a desire to become a future EAL educator, I chose ECUR 415 as an elective course to enhance my knowledge on the issues regarding EAL teaching and learning. Additionally, the course content enabled me to see myself, a teacher of color, as a contributor to teacher diversity. I now consider myself to be a teacher that numerous EAL learners can depend on and relate to in terms of ethnic background, language, and cultural experiences. I feel better equipped to make efforts

to bridge the gap between the “two worlds of home and school” (Ashworth, 1988, p. 131) in the lives of EAL learners through culturally responsive pedagogy. I can creatively design and effectively implement various linguistically and educationally appropriate teaching practices in my classrooms. Furthermore, I can adapt my instruction and assessment methods to maximize the bilingual potential of the EAL students. As a future teacher in Saskatchewan, I hope to make my classroom a safe learning place where cultural and linguistic diversity is welcomed, and every student feels valued.

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# *5 - Culturally Responsive Pedagogy*

JAYDEN SMITH

## **Introduction**

In 1971, Canada adopted multiculturalism as an official policy (Prokopchuk, ECUR 415, Module 3, 2017). This policy was created to be inclusive of all people of various cultural backgrounds living in Canada. According to the SaskCulture website, culture is dynamic; it is more than ethnicity and religion and includes all “symbolic forms and the everyday practices through which people express and experience meaning” (ECUR 415, Module 3).

Saskatchewan has been growing in diversity since 2008 due to a dramatic increase in immigration (ECUR 415, Module 2). In order to maintain and grow the population of the province, Saskatchewan sponsors skilled immigrant workers to move to Canada and become citizens through the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (ECUR 415, Module 2; Anderson & Tilbury, 2014, p. 88). In response to rapid growth of diverse languages and cultures in Canada, there is an increased need for teaching practices that are culturally responsive. Culturally responsive pedagogy is defined as “teaching that integrates a student’s background knowledge and prior home and community experiences into the curriculum and

the teaching and learning experiences that take place in the classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 2).

I believe that culturally responsive pedagogy is an approach to instruction that is essential for teachers to adopt all over Canada because not only is cultural inclusiveness a part of the Canadian identity, but the rapid growth of diversity in Canada means that soon every school in the country will have students from multiple cultural or language backgrounds. Having attended a small rural school, I failed to recognize the obligation that schools have to ensure that all students feel safe, included, and accepting of diversity. This paper argues that schools and teachers need to use culturally responsive pedagogy to create welcoming classrooms, dispel cultural assumptions, embrace linguistic diversity, and support diverse strategies.

### **Welcome Procedures**

The school is often the first public building a new family visits and is the first impression newcomer families have of their new community (ECUR 415 Module 2). The first step to culturally responsive pedagogy is to create an inclusive environment. The reception of new students and families is a crucial step for implementing culturally responsive pedagogy to help newcomer families feel welcome. The reception process begins when a new family comes to the school or established welcome center for an initial assessment (ECUR 415, Module 2). To help make new families feel welcome, schools and welcome centers can anticipate language needs by having EAL specialists and counselors either on staff or available. Schools and school divisions should also have translated material and interpreters available to help bridge the language divide (ECUR 415, Module 2).

In her book *Language and Learning in Multilingual Classrooms: A Practical Approach*, Elizabeth Coelho (2012) recommends that at the outset of initial assessment, students be asked specifically how they want their name to appear on class lists and official school records, and what name they would be liked to be called in class

(p. 23). Schools cannot ask for only a first and last name since there are different cultural practices for names around the world (p. 23). Discussing with the family their name preferences helps the family feel welcome and respected. When conducting the initial assessment, student's diverse knowledge background should also be included. Schools should ask students about all the subjects taught in their previous school and not assume that the only subjects taught are the ones taught in North American schools (p. 28). Coelho stresses that schools should not privilege their system and knowledge over other types of knowledge that students have experienced in their prior schooling (p. 28). Welcoming students and families by presenting the school as a diverse learning environment is an important part of culturally responsive pedagogy. Coelho also recommends that schools have bulletin boards and posters in an array of languages (p. 21). By creating such an environment, students see that diverse languages are valued.

### **Cultural Assumptions**

In the book *Look at Me when I Talk to You* by Helmer and Eddy (2012), the authors describe culture using Jim Cummins' iceberg model, which is also known as the Common Underlying Proficiency or CUP Theory (p. 33; ECUR 415, Module 3). There are many elements to culture and each person identifies with several different cultures at once. The top of the iceberg represents the visible aspects such as preference in music, dress, and food (p. 89). The bottom and much larger part of the iceberg represents the invisible aspects of cultural such as status designations, communication patterns, and body language (p. 89). Helmer and Eddy bring attention to the fact that so little of someone's culture is visible and therefore assumptions should not be made based on their language practices (p. 89). They also indicate that teachers must be aware of possible cultural differences that may affect students and their attempts to create a communicative relationship in the classroom (p. 35).

Using culturally responsive pedagogy, teachers can critically examine cultural differences and plan ways to deliver effective instruction. For example, believing two students will work well together because they share a home language is problematic (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 35) These students could be from two different areas of a country that share vastly different views, or the students could be of different gender and feel uncomfortable working together (p. 35-37).

In addition, assumption can hinder students' understanding of their schoolwork. Coelho (2012) notes that a student with excellent math skills and a basic understanding of math concepts can still do poorly on an assignment, if the questions assume that the student is familiar with its cultural context. For example, a new student from Syria may not be familiar with hockey and will struggle to answer a question that depends on knowledge of the sport. Such cultural assumptions can cause the student to feel confused and alienated by the subject matter (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 35).

Assumptions can be made, not just by students, but by parents as well. The North American school system is not identical to other school systems in the world. Helmer and Eddy (2012) note that newcomer students may not be receptive to the level of group discussion expected Canadian schools (p. 61) Through group discussions, students are invited to engage in learning and critique ideas. However, newcomer students and their parents might perceive this as laziness on the part of the teacher (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 61). Also, group projects may feel academically dishonest to some students who are used to classrooms where they only work individually. There are often varying views on the amounts of homework students should receive as well (p. 66) Students in North America receive less than the desired amount compared to Asian countries where students are expected to have between three to five hours of homework every night (p. 67). This difference in views can lead parents and students to assume that the education their children are receiving is inferior (p. 67). Helmer and Eddy (2012)

suggest that teachers tackle assumptions by building bridges (p.69), starting with the similarities between the teacher and the newcomer family, and building a relationship from there. Limiting assumptions about a student's culture, assumptions on what students know, and accommodating student's and their family's assumptions of education are ways to teach with culturally responsive pedagogy.

### **Linguistic Diversity**

In the past, students coming to Canada were encouraged to stop using their first language completely, when they started school (Coelho, 2012, p. 195). It was believed that dropping the first language and focusing on English was the best way for students to catch up to their English-speaking peers (p. 195). Canadian researcher Jim Cummins referred to this idea as the monolingual principle (ECUR 415, Module 3). Today's research proves that linguistic diversity is an asset to students (Coelho, 2012, p. 195). Bilingualism enhances students' cognitive abilities as well as offers them more economic opportunities in the future (p. 195). Linguistically diverse schools that encourage and embrace EAL students' multiple languages can also teach students to appreciate diversity and embrace different cultures (p. 195). Part of culturally responsive pedagogy involves encouraging students to build on their L1 as well as their English. Creating an environment where students feel like their linguistic diversity is respected and encouraged will benefit all students greatly by teaching them to value bilingualism. Students can suffer negative effects to their learning and self-confidence if they feel like their L1 is a negative quality (p. 196). The student's L1 is not only a component of their identity and source of pride but is also necessary for growing their English abilities (p. 196-197). Experts have warned that students who drop their L1 while learning an additional language may not be efficient enough in either language to accomplish tasks (p. 198). For schools today to adopt culturally responsive pedagogy, students

should not only be using their first language at home but also using their L1 to build their English in school.

The monolingual principle still influences Saskatchewan schools today. English is encouraged in schools and students are instructed to use it as the language of learning (Sterzuk & Nelson, 2016, p. 379). Sterzuk and Nelson (2016) argue in their article *"Nobody Told Me They Didn't Speak English!" Teach Language Views and Student Linguistic Repertoires in Hutterite Colony Schools in Canada* that "the goals [of the monolingual principle] are to keep student's languages separate and to develop fluency in English" (p. 379). Even though students are no longer being pushed to drop their L1 students are still encouraged to stop using it while they are at school to develop their English. According to Sterzuk and Nelson, this concept ignores "students' potential to become bilingual or multilingual, teachers miss the opportunity to build on the home languages and the cultural practices of the student as strengths" (p. 379). An example of this situation is in Saskatchewan Hutterite schools. Hutterite children receive an English only education despite being multilingual (p. 379). Despite the difficulty of balancing a vast array of different language in mainstream classrooms, schools can begin to limit the effect of the monolingual principle by bringing in different languages and cultures into their classroom to reflect the diversity of the school. Culturally responsive pedagogy encourages teachers to adapt and include the diversity of their students to the classroom environment. It not only has a positive effect on the EAL students of the school but on the English-speakers as well.

### **Support Strategies**

Researchers Jim Cummins and Elizabeth Coelho state that a student learning an additional language may need between five and seven years to catch up to the level of their peers (Prokopchuk, 2014, 82). In the article *Supporting Strategies for English as an Additional Language (EAL) in PreK-12 Education*, Prokopchuk (2014) states that for EAL learners to catch up they need "to move beyond

conversational language toward academic language and this transition requires strategic, targeted support over time” (p. 82). Culturally responsive pedagogy has adapted to include support strategies for EAL students to continue to develop their L1. Prokopchuk also states that “languages are supported through ministry funding to heritage language schools, ministry-approved high school credit courses in various languages, and the availability of multilingual resources in the Saskatchewan Public Library System (p. 86). Coelho (2012) also recommends that schools create language and culture clubs that allow students to showcase and develop their cultural identities (p. 41). Culturally responsive pedagogy nurtures each student’s language and identity by creating support communities that represent diverse learners.

### **Conclusion**

Culturally responsive pedagogy was designed to “move beyond the heroes and holidays approach” which schools previously used to celebrate diversity (ECUR 415, Module 3). Schools would hold an event that focused on one aspect of a culture’s identity such as food or clothing and celebrate for one day of the whole year (ECUR 415, Module 3). Culturally responsive pedagogy emerged out of a need to properly embrace and work alongside various cultures within one school. Today, culturally responsive pedagogy is needed more than ever with the vast growing diversity in Canada, including Saskatchewan. As members of the school, teachers have an obligation to help students develop their abilities and help EAL students find their identity as bilingual, which is a part of culturally responsive pedagogy. EAL students specifically need to feel that their linguistic and cultural diversity are assets. With the increase of diversity, our schools could help foster students to be accepting of different cultures and world views which I believe is a necessity as globalization continues. The future will see more mingling of cultures than ever before and schools have the responsibility to teach students with culturally responsive pedagogy so that students navigate the world with their own culturally responsive

beliefs and respect for the beliefs of others. I aspire to develop in my own teaching many aspects of culturally responsive pedagogy including the following: welcome procedures, cultural assumptions, linguistic diversity, and support strategies. I want to instill respect and acceptance of diversity in my students no matter the cultural makeup in the school or my classroom. Even in the increasingly rare classroom that contains only English speakers from one background, like the one I grew up in, students are still different. Jim Cummins' iceberg model illustrates that there is so much more to a student than what appears on the surface, so I believe that every student should be treated without assumptions and with a culturally responsive pedagogy (ECUR 415, Module 3). Using materials, ideas, and perspectives within the classroom that are diverse is the best way to prepare students for life after high school and the globalization of the world. That is why I plan to teach in my own classroom with a culturally responsive pedagogy and help the school I am employed in embrace diversity through school welcome procedures and support strategies that build on the languages and cultures of students in the classroom.

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## *6 - Intercultural Competence and the Inclusive Classroom*

SHAWN WALKER

English language learners (ELL) come from varying backgrounds, with their own unique reasons for learning English as an Additional Language (EAL). As new immigrant students arrive in Canada, classroom demographics are changing and becoming increasingly diversified. In order to welcome and effectively support ELLs, teachers must strive to understand their students as individuals and foster an inclusive learning environment within the classroom and the school community.

### **Understanding Culture**

The metaphor of an iceberg is frequently used by theorists to represent and understand culture. Helmer and Eddy (2012) indicate that the small portion of the iceberg above the waterline represents aspects of culture that are the most visible, such as “physical characteristics, distinctive styles of clothing, food, art and, of course, language” (p. 33). While these are undoubtedly important aspects of culture, they aren’t the entire picture of an individual’s identity. Below the metaphorical waterline sits the “less visible, often nonverbal, aspects of culture that, to a large extent, define our behaviour toward and the ways we communicate with others” (p.33). These aspects are rooted in moral values and social beliefs

that an individual holds, based on cultural upbringing. For teachers, recognizing and understanding these underlying values and beliefs is important because they are what guide their students' approach to daily life (p.91). However, "it is often hardest to step outside oneself and reach out to others because, in attempting to do this, we are trying to override the mostly unconscious patterns that regulate how we live our lives" (p.91). A responsible educator will not shrink away from this challenge, but will meet their students with an open mind, being sure to emphasize that "no culture is "better" than another, but that cross-cultural understanding is an important facet of learning a language" (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 82).

At the forefront of understanding the various cultures in the classroom is the concept of intercultural competence. A teacher with intercultural competence has the "ability to understand, empathize with, and/or function in a culture or cultures other than one's L1 culture" (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 634). In a general classroom that includes ELLs, or a designated EAL classroom comprised only of ELLs, the teacher must treat each student as an individual and take into account that "[s]tudents may view the process of education and each other in very different ways from what we may be tempted to assume; yet they may...look to us to help them find their way in the new culture and language in which they find themselves suddenly immersed" (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 41). By acknowledging that students are individuals with unique cultural backgrounds and motivations, teachers can begin to adjust their instructional strategies, planning, and assessment to meet the needs of their students. This awareness prevents educators from making assumptions based on superficial observations, which has the adverse effect of alienating students and compromising meaningful student-teacher relationships.

### **Promoting Culture in the School and Classroom**

An interculturally competent teacher who promotes an inclusive classroom environment through cultural awareness and respect from the first day of school provides a positive example for their

students. It is often the simplest forms of respect that can have positive or negative implications, depending on how students are approached. An example of this is addressing a student by their proper name and form. This may seem obvious, but often times names that are perceived as foreign or unfamiliar can intimidate the teacher. Coelho (2012) notes that “names are an important part of our identity and must be respected” (p. 156). This is where a teacher must lead by example by making an effort to learn each students’ name, just as they would learn those of their English-speaking students. It is best to avoid nicknames, or short forms, since it can signal an unwillingness to learn on the teacher’s part. Students who see their teacher making an effort will be encouraged to do the same. This is also incredibly important when it is time to meet parents, as some cultures, such as in South Korea, lead with their surnames, followed by their given names. Showing this cultural understanding helps foster positive relationships between parents, students, and the teacher.

Ultimately, the goal of the interculturally competent educator is to create interculturally competent learners. After all, the teacher is only one individual in the room. Utilizing peer supports for those second language learners (L2L) helps build community in the classroom and integrate those L2Ls into the social dynamic of the classroom. Coelho (2012) states, “[y]our positive attitude may not only establish a climate of support, but also enable students of the dominant language group to see language learning in a positive light” (p.158). The effects from this benefit not only the L2Ls, but also the native English speakers of the group.

The classroom is but one room in an entire building. Coelho (2012) discusses how, ideally, the school will take a multilingual approach that “raises language awareness, celebrates linguistic diversity, and helps students and families view their own languages as assets just as valuable as the language of the school” (p. 202). Coelho also discusses the idea of community languages, meaning recognizing all of the languages that are present within a school’s

population. Through open communication with parents, the school can encourage parents to maintain the first language (L1) as it “provides a necessary foundation for learning the school language” (p. 202). The school’s goal should be to make the community languages visible, so students see themselves reflected in the school. Simple solutions such as printing signs, notices, and posters in the community languages provide opportunities for visibility. It also encourages parental involvement as it “enables [parents] to contribute to the school rather than feel excluded” because of a lack of ability in the school language (p. 203). Supporting community languages shows that a school holds a positive language policy toward the L1s of its students, demonstrating additive bilingualism, “where a language is held in prestige by the community” (Brown & Lee, 2015, p. 169).

### **Benefits of an Inclusive Learning Environment**

One main variable in ELL success is motivation. Referring back to the idea of language policy mentioned above, it is important for students to feel as though they are welcome in a new country, and more directly, in their new school. Paraphrasing the work of Lo Bianco, Brown and Lee (2015), we might ask, “How does this policy or status affect the motivation and purpose of your students?” and note that having a language policy in place that celebrates the L1s of ELLs is “extremely important because it has direct and substantial consequences for society, economics, education, and culture” (p.168). A learner’s L1 is a major component of identity and a “source of cultural pride and self-esteem” (Coelho, 2012, p. 196). A student who feels that their culture is accepted by the dominant culture will be motivated to engage in language learning. Stephen Krashen’s *Affective Filter Hypothesis* proposes that there is a “mechanism that allows or restricts the processing of input” based on a number of factors, such as the learning environment, peer and teacher interactions, as well as personal factors such as anxiety (Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017, p. 214). The Ontario *Capacity Building Series* on culturally responsive pedagogy states that “[i]n order to

ensure that all students feel safe, welcomed and accepted, and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning, schools and classrooms must be responsive to culture” (Culturally responsive pedagogy, p. 2). The goal of the inclusive classroom is to provide a welcoming environment that reduces anxiety and creates positive relationships between peers where students can be themselves and feel comfortable taking risks with language.

There are also cognitive advantages to encouraging the continued development of ELLs first languages. Citing the work of Genesee, Coelho (2012) notes that multilingual children are better at problem solving, more creative, and express more tolerant attitudes toward others than those children who are fluent in only one language (p. 199). Coelho also points out that “students who can think in more than one language appear to be more flexible thinkers and develop cognitive skills that have a positive effect on their overall cognitive abilities” (p. 198). A supportive learning environment where students are encouraged to take pride in their culture helps to accelerate the learning of the L2. Promoting multilingualism does not just benefit L2 learners, however. Coelho asserts that valuing the cultural and language backgrounds of all students and promoting bilingualism as a “worthy and attainable goal... [the] speakers of the dominant language or school language may be encouraged to learn additional languages” (p. 202).

The ultimate goal of the classroom teacher should be to “make language [and cultural] diversity normal rather than unusual, exotic, or problematic” (Coelho, 2012, p. 204). A heightened level of awareness is needed to be an interculturally competent educator. As educators “we must probe and question, and never assume anything, as we work to increase our understanding of the various backgrounds the students bring to our classrooms” (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 69).

### **Rationale and Reflection**

I chose to write about intercultural competence and an inclusive classroom environment for a variety of reasons. After taking ECUR

291 and reading through the section on language policy in *Teaching by Principles* by H. Douglas Brown and Heekyeong Lee, I was struck by the use of the example of the United States and the general “English only” policy that most people hold there. Being from the US, this put into academic language something that I always knew existed. It helped me understand the major difference between the way the US and Canada view second languages. I never shared the view of “English only” while I grew up in the US. I always figured people were just trying to get by and do their best in a new country with a new language. This course (and the EAL program in general) has taught me that there is a huge correlation between ability in the L1 and successful acquisition of the L2. It has also helped me understand the need to be reflective of my own views since I am looking at the world through my own unique lens that is not universal. In a way I always knew that, but understanding the implications on the success of students learning a L2 has really helped drive that point home for me.

In practice, I believe that intercultural competence and inclusive classrooms are important concepts in education. The reality here in Canada is that teachers will be faced with classrooms full of students from diverse backgrounds. Even if those students are English speakers, there is still a need to be aware of cultural differences and commonalities. That is part of being an empathetic teacher that is approachable. It is important to not be discouraged by differences and to find common ground in order to better understand your students and their motivations. Living and teaching in a predominantly English-speaking Métis community in northern Saskatchewan has shown me how important it is to understand the culture of my students. Even in a rural village of 1,500 people, there is still diversity, although perhaps not to the extent that can be seen in a city school. Of my 25 students last year, 23 were Métis, one was Irish, and one was from India. My Métis students were always interested to hear how things were different in Ireland or India during lessons. During a Language Arts lesson

on sports, we talked about how Canada's major sport is ice hockey, while places like Ireland and India, where there isn't much snow, enjoy rugby and cricket. We watched videos of all three sports on YouTube and compared them using a Venn diagram. It was such a simple lesson, but one they all remembered on the last day of school.

In my future practice as an EAL teacher I will strive to "build bridges" as Helmer and Eddy (2012) point out in their text *Look at Me When I Talk to You*. From the earliest days of my Bachelor of Education program, I was always told to build rapport and cultural understanding with students and parents. Helmer and Eddy's text helped clearly illustrate the importance of this concept. Now to immediately contradict what I just said, I could appreciate the note on page 68 where Helmer and Eddy note that in some cultures parents only interact with the teacher when there is a problem. Aside from behavioural issues, the parents put the full trust in the teacher to do their job. It is easy to see that teacher education programs have the best intentions when saying to have parental contact, but it isn't as simple as just calling up the parents. A teacher needs to be aware of their students' cultural norms surrounding the relationship between school and home before making any assumptions!

The concept of intercultural competence will make me become a more reflective practitioner when it comes to cultural awareness with my ELLs. My goal going forward is to develop my instructional strategies to support all language learners and continue to learn more about the diverse cultures with which I will work.

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## **PART 2: CLASSROOM SUPPORT FOR EAL LEARNERS**

## *7- Instructional Strategies to Support EAL Learners at Various Stages of the CFR*

JANA BLECHINGER

Within recent years, the number of newcomer students welcomed by Saskatoon schools has risen significantly, and this trend will likely continue. In September 2013, Saskatoon Public Schools alone had an EAL population of just under twenty percent of its total school enrolment (Anderson & Tilbury, 2014). Most of these students face the dual challenge of learning English in addition to learning content. Canadian-born students who speak a language other than English in the home may also require help to achieve academic proficiency in English. In order to support all of these students, who enter our schools at various ages and varying levels of English proficiency, classroom teachers need to develop an awareness of instructional strategies that best support English language learners (ELLs) at each level of the Common Framework of Reference (CFR). This essay will provide teachers with strategies that support elementary-aged students at CFR levels A1, A2, and B1, and will foster greater understanding among classroom teachers of the capabilities and needs of their English language learners.

### **Background on the CFR**

The CFR, which is based on the reliable and reputable Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) developed in 2001, was introduced in Saskatchewan in spring of 2012. It is a language reference scale for assessing the language proficiency of ELLs and for monitoring their progress over time (Prokopchuk, 2014). Students at CFR levels A1 and A2 on the scale are considered *basic users* of the language. These levels are further sub-divided into A1.1, A1.2, A2.1, and A2.2. Students at level B1, which is subdivided into B1.1 and B1.2, are considered to be *independent users* of the language. When students have exited level B1.2, they “will have reached a level of proficiency that allows them to work more independently on improving language proficiency within the context of language instruction” (CFR, 2013, p. 3), and formal EAL support for these students is no longer provided. The CFR document indicates that “learners benefit from differentiated instruction strategies and classroom adaptations while working alongside classroom English-speaking peers who also have diverse skills and abilities” (CFR, 2013, p. 3). Providing elementary classroom teachers with ideas for such strategies and adaptations is the focus of the remainder of this essay.

### **The Scaffolding Approach**

In her book *Language and Learning in Multilingual Classrooms: A Practical Approach* (2012), Elizabeth Coelho provides a scaffolding-based framework which indicates ways that teachers can adjust their instruction so that strategies are aligned with ELLs’ language abilities and success is made attainable. Her framework is based on a model created by well-known researcher Dr. Jim Cummins, whose distinction between BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills) and CALP (cognitive academic language proficiency) underlie his model’s four quadrants, which are intersected by continua of contextual supports provided i.e., scaffolding) and cognitive demands placed on the learner (Coelho,

2012). Coelho's scaffolding framework will be used as a reference for the strategies that follow.

### **The A1 Learner**

According to the CFR snapshot of language ability, students at CFR level A1 can understand and use simple, familiar words and very basic phrases to meet their needs. They can introduce themselves in a simple way and answer basic questions about personal information or personal items. Simple interaction is possible provided that the other person speaks slowly and provides support. Students at level A1 have limited ability to use simple grammatical structures (CFR, 2013).

In the beginning, A1 learners are primarily working on the development of BICS. Their instruction, therefore, should be designed in Quadrant A of Coelho's scaffolding framework. In this quadrant, ELLs are provided with "maximum support or scaffolding for tasks that are engaging but not academically challenging, especially at the very beginning [and] instruction is focused on the development of everyday language plus essential academic vocabulary in various subject areas" (Coelho, 2012, p. 106). Content should be related to their own lives and immediate needs. These students, in the beginning, may not be able to attain regular curriculum outcomes. Teachers will need to modify or replace the outcomes with alternate outcomes in order for students to focus on the development of BICS (Coelho, 2012).

One of the most essential instructional strategies for A1 students in Quadrant A is to provide them with comprehensible input, which means that "the language being used for instruction (input) is at a level that is understood by learners (comprehensible), although it is slightly above the learner's proficiency level. This approach promotes language growth" (Prokopchuk, ECUR 415.3, 2017). Teachers can reduce the language barrier by modifying their speech and language, and by providing additional contextual support through the use of visuals. Coelho (2012) explains that teachers can help learners infer meaning by facing students when

talking to them, articulating clearly with a slight increase in volume, emphasizing key words, pausing slightly between phrases, simplifying vocabulary and sentence structure, and using gestures along with facial expression and mime. Visuals such as “models, toys, manipulatives, pictures, charts, flashcards, vocabulary lists, posters, and banners, as well as demonstrations and hands-on activities” (Coelho, 2012, p. 236) will help ELLs at this level to infer meaning from language and learn concepts. In Quadrant A, it is also beneficial to use L1 as scaffolding for L2 tasks. Allowing students to initially develop ideas in their first language enables them to produce more thoughtful and developed work than if they are confined to using their limited abilities in L2. Examples for the classroom include allowing students to write notes, first drafts, journal entries, and insert unknown words using their first language (Coelho, 2012, p. 212). The use of these instructional strategies will enable A1 learners to make connections to their prior knowledge and experiences which is key to helping them learn.

For A1 learners who are young children and also for those who are older beginners, Coelho explains that:

...some of the strategies commonly used with young children in the early stages of literacy development are equally effective with students of all ages who are just beginning to learn the language of instruction and who may or may not have well-developed literacy skills in their own language (2012, p. 266).

When using these strategies with older A1 students, it is important that the content and resources provided are age-appropriate. A print-rich environment is important in developing reading and writing skills. Labelling in multiple languages the classroom and places in the school, surrounding learners with environmental print, and providing reading material matched to students’ ability and present level of comprehension are examples of instructional strategies that are helpful to these learners. Creating language experience stories based on personal or shared experiences, allowing students to listen to audio recordings while

following text, and providing shared reading experiences with age-appropriate texts are also strategies that provide A1 learners with the scaffolding necessary to develop literacy skills (Coelho, 2012).

Cooperative learning is another Quadrant A strategy that scaffolds beginning ELLs in the development of oral language, and small group interaction also helps them learn social skills and understand the value of collaboration. The Ontario Ministry document *ELL Voices in the Classroom* (2009) explains that cooperative learning strategies provide increased opportunities for talk, which are especially beneficial for ELLs. Working in small groups with more proficient English speakers provides ELLs with language models and essential feedback, and occasionally grouping beginner ELLs to work on adapted curricular-related tasks can be beneficial. They suggest assigning students to groups of three to five and changing the groups periodically for different subjects and activities. It is important to establish clear routines, timelines, and expectations as well as develop conversational strategies so that these learners have the necessary social skills to express ideas and manage disagreements.

Other key instructional strategies for A1 ELLs, especially those at beginning levels, include: practicing new vocabulary by incorporating physical activity and objects as well as by using choral repetition, songs, rhymes, games, puzzles and role play; providing word banks for labeling tasks, completing sentences and graphic organizers; providing examples and modelling think-aloud processes while writing; and offering supportive, indirect feedback for oral and written errors by modelling correct forms (Coelho, 2012, p. 104).

Jane Hill (2016) in her article *Engaging Your Beginners*, urges teachers not to water down the curriculum for beginning language learners, but to use tiered questioning that is not only appropriate to the student's ability, but that also promotes higher-order thinking through the use of high-level questions. The use of tiered questions as an instructional strategy will "increase students'

access to and comprehension of the content and provide English learners with opportunities to practice their new language" (p. 3). She explains that for students in the Preproduction stage of language acquisition, which would be students at the very beginning of level A1, tiered questions about content such as *Show me...Circle the...Where is...? Who has...? match student capabilities. As students become more proficient and enter the Early Production stage, high level questions that require ELLs to answer yes or no, chose either-or, and answer Who...? What...? and How many...? become appropriate. Hill says that "with the aid of tiered questions, Preproduction and Early Production students can be included in all classroom instruction rather than working on a nonrelated activity" (2016, p. 3). As ELLs transition between level A1 and A2, they are capable of answering Why...? How...? Explain...and can provide short-sentence answers, all of which are examples of tiered questions from the Speech Emergence stage. Tiered questioning is also a key strategy to use when assessing ELLs.*

### **The A2 Learner**

The CFR describes A2 learners as being able to comprehend sentences and basic information related to their own needs and family activities. They are able to communicate information on matters familiar to them, including simple and routine tasks, through direct exchange with others. They can use simple language to describe their background, surroundings, and interests. They are able to use some simple grammatical structures with accuracy, but routinely make basic errors in things such as verb tenses and use of articles (CFR, 2013).

Coelho's Quadrant A is designed for students at *both* CFR levels A1 and A2, therefore instruction for A2 learners will also require maximum scaffolding, and the instructional strategies suggested above for A1 learners will also be required for these students (Coelho, 2012). It is important to remember, however, that A2 students have more developed BICS than A1 students, and are growing in their ability to complete tasks that are more cognitively

challenging. Instruction in this quadrant will still focus on BICS, but instructional strategies that develop CALP will be increasingly applicable as they align with students' growing proficiency.

In addition to the print-rich environment strategies that help level A1 ELLs develop literacy skills, A2 learners are increasingly able to benefit from intensive (guided) reading as an instructional strategy, in which "the teacher intervenes between students and text, guiding and helping them as they read. Additional support may be provided through the use of key visuals" (Coelho, 2012 p. 273). *Before* reading, teachers prepare ELLs for the text by pre-teaching key words, using visuals or other sources to build background knowledge of concepts, finding out what students already know about the topic possibly through jointly completing a KWL chart, surveying the text to learn about its organization and features, as well as predicting what they will learn from the text (Coelho, 2012). *During* reading, the teacher guides ELLs as they learn how to read material in different ways depending on the purpose for reading, an example of which would be skimming a chapter to understand its main idea. Other strategies that provide scaffolding are: providing guiding questions or prompts before reading paragraphs; teacher modelling of pronunciation, rhythm, and intonation as well as think-aloud modelling of useful reading strategies; providing graphic organizers for students to complete as they read; stopping after each section to check for understanding and answer student questions; and modelling think-aloud strategies for dealing with new vocabulary (Coelho, 2012). *After* reading, teachers can provide questions that encourage students to re-read specific sections. It is recommended to limit reading aloud by students during the initial reading of a text; however *after* reading, students feel more comfortable with the text and can be asked to locate and read aloud specific sections of the text. Teachers can select vocabulary words or phrases to study which will be useful in other lessons or subject areas, and can provide

blank or partially-completed graphic organizers with information from the text for students to complete (Coelho, 2012).

An after-reading comprehension task appropriate for an A1 learner might be to arrange pictures from the story in order, while an A2 ELL is capable of not only ordering pictures, but matching simple text to the pictures as well. To help students develop their writing at the sentence level, teachers can provide level A2 learners with writing frameworks that provide scaffolding such as sentence combining that helps them write longer sentences, sentence completion activities that teach how to construct sentences of various types, as well as simple paragraph frames that include series of prompts (Coelho, 2012). Since students at level A2 are able to understand and answer questions at the sentence level, Hill's Speech Emergence tiered questions described in the previous section should continue to be used as an instructional strategy to help increase comprehension of content (Hill, 2016).

### **The B1 Learner**

B1 learners, according to the CFR, are able to understand the gist of clear regular speech if the topic is familiar. They can use language to handle most in-school and after-school situations that may arise, can describe experiences and events, and can briefly justify and explain their opinions and plans. They are able to write simple, connected text on familiar topics or those of personal interest. Their use of structures and patterns is reasonably accurate in routine or predictable contexts (CFR, 2013).

ELLs at level B1 can now be supported by instructional strategies in Quadrant B of Coelho's framework, in which "students continue to receive maximum support for comprehension and language production, but the tasks become more academically challenging, so that students begin to accelerate their acquisition of academic language" (Coelho, 2012, p. 106). Coelho also advises that by continuing to provide quality scaffolding, teachers are able to help B1 learners achieve many regular curricular outcomes, unless the subject or topic is culturally or linguistically demanding. Coelho

further explains that many of the strategies central to Quadrant A remain important for B1 learners. Specifically, she suggests that continuing to provide comprehensible instruction, supportive feedback, strategic use of students' first languages, and cooperative learning will help students in Quadrant B cope as learning tasks become more demanding (Coelho, 2004).

Intensive reading is a key instructional strategy for helping level B1 students get meaning from complex text. The above-mentioned before, during, and after reading strategies apply to these learners as well, and can be extended to match their growing capabilities. Key visuals remain important. Webs, t-charts, Venn diagrams, and story maps are "content-specific graphic organisers that provide a visual representation of key ideas and the relationships among ideas in a text, a lesson, or a unit of study, making visible the underlying organization of ideas" (Coelho, 2012, p. 281). Using key visuals during intensive reading reduces the language demands and enhances ELLs' understanding of the text. After-reading strategies beneficial for B1 learners include: encouraging students to make inferences beyond and form opinions about the text; using role play to re-live the text and encourage the use of new words; focusing on transition words and teaching their use; and completing blank or partially-completed graphic organizers with information from the text (Coelho, 2012 date). Word banks for completing increasingly complex sentences and graphic organizers based on the content of a lesson can be used. The word banks can provide more word choices or forms of a word, and can manipulate grammatical endings such as plurals (Coelho, 2012). Coelho also explains that research indicates grammar instruction integrated into daily lessons is more effective than isolated instruction. During intensive reading, teachers can help B1 students learn grammar by looking at patterns such as various verb forms that recur in a text, and then reinforce learning by finding examples in other texts and completing extension activities such as cloze passages.

Teaching vocabulary as it arises, and focusing on those words that will be transferable to other academic contexts is an important instructional strategy for B1 learners. Roessingh (2016) draws on the model of tiered vocabulary developed by Beck, McKeown, & Kucan (2002) to encourage the teaching of these *Tier 2* vocabulary words because of their high utility and recurrence, and their importance in further developing students' CALP which leads to academic achievement. Examples of Tier 2 vocabulary words, which are often verbs with Greek or Latin origins and relate to procedures, are "investigate, experiment, analyze, and prepare" (Roessingh, p. 69).

Instructional strategies that scaffold specific forms of writing are helpful, especially for B1 learners in the older elementary grades, as they are expected to go beyond writing expressively and narratively and write non-fiction forms such as explanation and persuasion (Coelho, 2012). Teachers can help B1 learners understand how these types of writing should be organized by providing writing frameworks and templates for paragraphs, as well as composition templates that help older students write pieces that are two or more paragraphs in length. Coelho (2016) suggests providing completed models of writing for ELLs to see, as well as modelling the writing process by thinking aloud and demonstrating the steps in process writing. She also explains that another important Quadrant B strategy is to teach and guide students in a structured way through group and individual research projects, as this type of learning may be unfamiliar to ELLs. Providing students with alternative resource material may be necessary.

### **Conclusion**

Coelho (2012) says, "Language learning is a long-term process. While the help of a specialist language teacher is invaluable, especially for the first few years, language support must be provided over an extended period of time, by every teacher, in every classroom, in every subject area (p. 64)." Through scaffolding, providing comprehensible input, and offering

contextual supports, classroom teachers can implement instructional strategies such as those suggested in this paper to differential learning for their ELLs at CFR levels A1, A2, and B1 therefore helping them to develop language proficiency in English and achieve academic success. It is important to note that ELLs may be functioning at different CFR levels within each of the four strands of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, and this will need to be taken into consideration by teachers when planning strategy use. Another important consideration that teachers may need to address, highlighted by Helmer & Eddy (2012), is that differences in the backgrounds and culture of ELLs may influence their familiarity with and appreciation for some of the strategies used and valued in Canada, such as cooperative learning and group discussion.

Due to the confines of this paper, only *general* suggestions for all elementary aged-students have been given; some instructional strategies will require adaptation to make them applicable to younger or older students within each CFR level. A deeper look into strategies that promote vocabulary development is also needed. In my role as an EAL teacher, these are areas I plan to focus on in the future in order to continue providing specific and effective support for classroom teachers and the EAL students they serve.

Teaching is a demanding and complex job, and the growing number of EAL students in classrooms with diverse language needs and cultural experiences places additional burdens on teachers. Armed with instructional strategies such as those suggested in this paper, however, elementary teachers will be better equipped to meet the needs of English language learners at all ages and stages of development.

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## *8 - Supporting the Needs of EAL Learners*

DANIELLE CLATNEY

### **Introduction**

Teachers welcome a variety of students into their classrooms throughout the school year. Over the last ten years or so, the growing population of learners of English as an Additional Language (EAL) has dramatically changed the classroom composition in many Saskatchewan schools and in schools across Canada. In Saskatchewan, “The Ministry of Education describes learners of EAL as speakers of other languages who are adding English to their language repertoire in order to access the English language curriculum and achieve grade level outcomes” (Prokopchuk, 2014, p. 82). Since most EAL students spend the majority of their day in mainstream classrooms, their needs cannot be met by an EAL teacher specialist alone. Coelho (2012) emphasized, “All teachers need to be prepared to support L2Ls (Second Language Learners) so that they can learn the language of instruction and experience success with the curriculum” (p. 148). The numbers of EAL learners making their way into my own mainstream elementary classes have emphasized the important role that all teachers play in the education of EAL learners and the need to explore best practices for teaching them. This essay will

demonstrate how equity in instruction and assessment is possible for *all* students, not just EAL learners, if teachers implement five key practices that have proven to be effective for students learning English.

### **Five Key Practices to Support the Needs of EAL Learners**

#### **• Culturally Responsive Teaching**

One key practice that supports EAL learner needs is moving towards culturally responsive teaching. The Ontario Ministry of Education Student Achievement Division (2013) emphasized, “In order to ensure that all students feel safe, welcomed and accepted, and inspired to succeed in a culture of high expectations for learning, schools and classrooms must be responsive to culture” (p. 1). They encourage embracing a collaborative approach to learning by building strong relationships with students’ families, cultural groups, and community partners. Another key component of culturally responsive teaching is viewing student diversity in terms of student strengths that enhance learning rather than as challenges or deficits of the student. This includes encouraging students to use their first language to support and represent their learning. As well, “Connecting new learning to prior knowledge and experience helps L2Ls to learn the language they need to express knowledge and skills they already have in their own language” (Coelho, 2012, p. 233).

Teachers can draw on student languages and experiences to represent their knowledge in the curriculum in a meaningful way that can allow them to see themselves reflected in classroom learning. Helmer and Eddy (2012) advised, “We must note the differences, acknowledge their validity, create mechanisms to uncover their positive benefits, and incorporate them into our teaching as a way of building bridges among students, and between our students and ourselves” (p. 22). In doing this, we

create a positive and accepting culturally responsive teaching environment.

- **Integrated Language and Content Instruction**

The second key practice that supports the needs of EAL learners is the integration of language and content instruction. Genesee and Lindholm-Leary (2013) state “People do not learn language and then use it; rather, they learn language by using it” (p. 3). Coelho (2012) recommends content-based instruction, or integrated language and content instruction, as an approach to use with EAL learners. She explains that in this approach, students learn the language by talking, listening to, reading, and writing about content or subject matter. The content area and academic task determine the presentation of grammatical items as required. Coelho (2012) further explains, “Academic language occurs mainly in the classroom and therefore is best learned through engagement with the curriculum, adapted as necessary according to the students’ level of proficiency in the language” (p. 61). She suggested that the best way to acquire a language is by using it to do something meaningful, such as learning how to play a game, solving a word problem in math, or working on a group project. One way to achieve this is through inquiry learning, which allows the teacher to facilitate learning through active student involvement in constructing knowledge, which builds information-processing and problem-solving skills. Coelho (2012) writes that “Every teacher needs to incorporate direct instruction on essential academic vocabulary that arises within the context of the lesson and model the use of vocabulary acquisition strategies that students can apply to their own reading” (p. 317). This allows for improved comprehension and works towards independent learning. By combining language and content instruction, EAL learners can progress in language learning while working towards the same curriculum outcomes as their peers.

One other point to keep in mind with integrated language and content instruction is the necessity to focus on outcome assessment in content areas. Helmer and Eddy (2012) stress “If the objective of a lesson is to ensure that students understand content, evaluate their speaking and writing for content, not grammar” (p. 118). Student performance should be assessed in ways that do not depend on their proficiency in English. This is where differentiation comes in.

- **Differentiated Instruction Guided by Levels of Language Proficiency**

Using levels of language proficiency to guide differentiated instruction is the third key practice that supports EAL learners. In Saskatchewan, the Ministry of Education (2013) introduced the Common Framework of Reference (CFR). This provincial language reference scale is based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), created by the Council of Europe, and allows teachers to monitor progress of EAL learners by identifying and charting language proficiency levels. It also facilitates student self-assessment with a Can Do Self-Assessment Scale. Coelho (2016) emphasizes that:

*Using tools designed for use with ELLs informs teachers whether the student is progressing appropriately along a normal path of development for ELLs, and what the next steps should be, with the goal of enabling the ELL to catch up to native speakers of the same age within a five- or six-year period. (p. 286)*

EAL learners are often unable to meet curriculum outcomes in the exact same way as native speakers of English. Gottlieb (2006) asserts, “The skills and knowledge associated with content take precedence and the language demands are adjusted according to the students’ language proficiency levels” (p. 64). Teachers differentiate instruction by providing clear, simple oral and written instructions, by slowing down their speech slightly, by using

developmentally appropriate comprehensible input, by allowing extra time for students to comprehend key concepts, formulate answers, and complete assignments, and by varying the length or complexity of assignments. Helmer and Eddy (2012) pointed out, "Projects that involve using many different skills give EAL learners an opportunity to participate more fully, demonstrating their range of talents and abilities" (p. 63). Differentiated instruction allows students to highlight their strengths.

Coelho (2016) also encourages differentiation through the use of the alternative assessment strategies to enable students to demonstrate learning in ways that do not depend completely on their proficiency in English. One strategy involves removing or lowering the language barrier by allowing use of the first language or dictionaries. Other strategies include simplifying language, giving oral tests, allowing students to physically show what they know, using cloze passages or graphic organizers, and asking fewer questions on tests. Teachers can also provide models representing a range of performance, provide opportunities for practice and feedback before actual assessment, use assessment portfolios or learning journals, and provide extra time to complete work being assessed. Differentiation of both instruction and assessment is critical for EAL learner success.

- **Scaffolding Learning**

The fourth key practice that supports EAL learners is the use of the scaffolding strategy of teaching and learning. Coelho (2012) explains that scaffolding allows the teacher, as an expert, to make success attainable for all students by providing "support that enables students to achieve levels of performance beyond their independent level and gradually moving them towards independence at that level so that they can begin working at the next, with continued scaffolding" (p. 102). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) advised, "Unless there is plenty of scaffolding to

support comprehension, ELLs may spend large amounts of time sitting at their desks, with little understanding of what is happening around them” (p. 5). In a basic way, scaffolding learning may include using gestures, facial expressions, pictures, or realia to clarify concepts and support comprehension and it is essential to ensure EAL learner success and the development of language skills.

Reiss (2005) states that there are two types of language skills (Cummins, 1984) and that EAL learners must transition from one to the other for academic needs at school. Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) is the language of everyday activities that takes one to three years to acquire. Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) skills involve the language of the classroom and require students to do things with language that are more abstract and cognitively complex. This language typically takes five to seven years to acquire. Roessingh (2016) stressed that academic vocabulary (CALP) must be taught with a focus on words that are high utility or general academic words that travel across curricular boundaries (sometimes referred to as Tier 2 words). Students must shift from learning to read to reading to learn. Prokopchuk (2014) articulated, “Learners of EAL need to move beyond conversational language toward academic language and this transition requires strategic, targeted support over time” (p. 82). Scaffolding can provide this support.

Cummins and Early (2015) recommend the use of specific instructional strategies to scaffold students’ ability to understand and use academic language. These include the use of graphic organizers and visuals, writing frameworks and templates, hands-on experiences, collaborative group work, guided projects, use of L1 for a variety of purposes, supporting students in acquiring efficient learning strategies, and clarifying language features and structures. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2009) also recommends pre-teaching key vocabulary words before a lesson, encouraging oral rehearsal of key ideas or vocabulary, and checking often for comprehension. Helmer and Eddy (2012)

recognized, “The importance of establishing clear, consistent routines and expectations, as well as the students’ continuing need for feedback and support, cannot be overemphasized” (p. 117). Scaffolding learning is a long-term process for EAL learners and their teachers.

- **Opportunities for Interaction**

Coelho (2012) reinforces the fifth key practice to support EAL learners in her statement, “L2Ls need frequent sustained interaction with native-speaker peers and adults in order to learn the language to a high standard of performance” (p. 61). She notes that “Opportunities for purposeful talk enable students to clarify ideas, share their knowledge and experience, and solve problems collaboratively” (p. 228). Coelho believes that this authentic interaction provides opportunities to negotiate meaning and allows EAL learners to develop oral fluency, grammatical accuracy, and an adequate vocabulary when they receive comprehensible input, produce meaningful output, and receive supportive feedback to enable them to refine their language use. Genesee and Lindholm-Leary (2013) assert “Authentic communication in the classroom about matters of academic importance provides critical context for learning the communicative functions of the new language” (p. 6). This kind of authentic interaction can be facilitated through small-group activities that challenge EAL learners to participate orally rather than passively and take place in a learning environment where EAL learners feel safe to experiment with the language. Relevant, authentic tasks that use hands-on, interactive learning and have real-life application can be very effective in promoting purposeful, interactive language use to the benefit of EAL learners. Teachers should also remember that opportunities for interaction occur inside and outside of the classroom at school. Helmer and Eddy (2012) suggest, “Encouraging EAL learners to participate in extracurricular activities supports their social, emotional, cultural

and linguistic adjustment” (p. 121). Teachers can support EAL learners by encouraging interaction in all school environments.

### **Conclusion and Reflection**

All teachers play an important role in the successful integration of EAL learners into the classroom and school environment throughout the school year. The growing population of EAL students has created a need for teachers to re-evaluate their approaches to teaching in order to allow EAL students to experience success with school curricula. Gottlieb (2006) recognized, “There are instructional strategies, supports, and methods that facilitate English language learners’ language development and conceptual understanding” (p. 70). By moving toward culturally responsive teaching, integrating language and content instruction, differentiating instruction guided by levels of language proficiency, scaffolding learning, and providing opportunities for interaction, teachers will gradually implement the five key practices to support EAL learners and create equity in instruction and assessment for all learners. I have used these five key practices while teaching Core French and Social Studies from Grades 1-8, and I look forward to challenging myself professionally as I ensure that these five practices continue to be evident in my own teaching. Not only will I be supporting the unique needs of my EAL learners, I will be supporting all learners, because all students can benefit from these teaching practices.

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## *9 - The Power of Visual Notetaking: Empowering EAL Student Learning in the Classroom*

SARAH GERRARD

English as Additional Language (EAL) students are diverse. Prokopchuk (2017) defines EAL learners as “recent immigrants, refugees; fee-paying and international students; First Nations and Métis students; Hutterite students; or, local students who speak languages other than English when they arrive at school” (p. 3). With the increased numbers of EAL students in Saskatchewan classes, visual notetaking is a powerful teaching tool that teachers should embrace. Visual notetaking, herein defined as drawings that combine both visual and text elements to convey information, enhances teacher-student communication, helps EAL students acquire their second language (L2), supports students learning academic vocabulary, enhances memory performance, and is culturally responsive. As someone who has been on both sides of language instruction—both as an L2 learner and a teacher of L2 students—I am convinced of the value of visual notetaking and plan to infuse it into my own lessons in the future. The research

clearly illustrates that when teachers incorporate visual notetaking in their classes, they amplify their EAL students' comprehension of subject matter and simultaneously enrich their students' learning experiences.

### **EAL Newcomers in Saskatchewan Schools**

There has been an immense increase in EAL learners entering Saskatchewan schools in the last eight years. In 2009, "Ministry of Education sources indicate that less than one percent of all K-12 students required EAL support" (Prokopchuk, 2017, p. 6), whereas in 2015, "8.5% of Saskatchewan students in Grades 1-12 were receiving EAL support" (Prokopchuk, 2017, p. 11). In Saskatchewan, EAL students' placement in classes is often based on their age versus their L2 fluency, which "takes into account the research that students are more motivated when placed with groups of age-alike students, as well as guidelines in place in other provinces" (Anderson & Tilbury, 2014, p. 91). Because urban school divisions, such as Saskatoon and Regina, have experienced higher EAL student enrollments, they are often able to provide specific programming for their EAL students using a "pull-out . . . push-in . . . co-teaching approach" (Anderson & Tilbury, 2014, p. 89), even offering specific EAL courses in high schools. In contrast, rural school divisions often employ itinerant teachers who provide professional development to classroom teachers working with EAL students, but rarely teach EAL courses themselves. This means that many EAL students across Saskatchewan are relying on their classroom teachers to support their L2 learning; in an era when support staff are being cut due to budget restraints, this places even more pressure on teachers to differentiate and adapt their instruction. Visual notetaking is one way that teachers can better support L2 learning and offers a practical approach to enriching their lessons for all students.

### **Visual Notetaking: A Powerful Teaching Tool**

- *Visual Notetaking Enhances Communication*

Visual notetaking offers teachers a powerful way through which they can convey meaning to EAL students. Using Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, teachers can explicitly teach students how to construct visual notes and model visual notetaking themselves, scaffolding their instruction before gradually shifting to support students in creating their own original visual notes. Carroll (1991) wrote that "students should be encouraged to draw into meaning" because drawing is "a powerful writing tool" (pp. 35-38), arguably because "Before there are words, there are images" (Rico, 1983, p. 157). In essence, sketches convey meaning. Examples of visual notetaking approaches include: edu-sketches (Pillars, 2016), sketchnoting (Rohde, 2013), and info-doodling<sup>TM</sup> (Brown, 2014).

The authors of these approaches all stress that teachers need not be artists (in fact, Pillars discourages this), and describe visual notes as being constructed from expressive fonts, shapes, stick figures, symbols, and selective use of colour, with special attention focused on how containers of information are connected together (For an example, see: <https://www.bluelatitude.com/how-we-think/an-introduction-to-sketchnotes/> ). Pillars (2016) writes that since "nonlinguistic symbols. . . can be imparted quickly and clearly without a single word. . . across linguistic barriers" (p. 6), visual notetaking helps communicate meaning to EAL students in a way that written or spoken words do not. In fact, Parkland Ambulance's use of Kwikpoint brochures (Karasiuk, personal communication, Sept. 24, 2017) reflects this sentiment since these brochures use visual graphics to "foster two-way communication when no interpreter is available" (Kwikpoint, 2016, p.1). Although all learners benefit from visual notetaking, EAL students arguably have more to gain by having their teachers use this approach since art functions as a universal language.

*Visuals Help EAL Students Acquire Better Language Fluency*

There are a lot of similarities between how young children learn to identify letters, words, and their corresponding sounds in early literacy and how EAL learners acquire language and literacy in their L2. The Institute for the Development of Educational Achievement (2004) states that “the best approach to reading instruction is one that incorporates explicit instruction in phonemic awareness, systematic phonics instruction, method to improve fluency, and ways to enhance comprehension” (p. 1). DiLorenzo, Rody, Bucholz, and Brady (2011) state that, “Of these critical areas, the alphabetic principle is commonly identified as a challenge to many young readers” (p. 28). EAL learners go through a similar process of learning the Roman alphabet, attaching sounds to letters and words, and gaining fluency in their L2. Citing research that showed “that prereaders who were taught letter-sound associations through integrated picture mnemonics learned more letter-sound associations than did their peers who were not exposed to the mnemonics” (DiLorenzo et al., 2011, p. 29), DiLorenzo et al. (2011) conducted a study on kindergarten students who were developing their sublexical skills and found that kindergarten students who received instruction about “letter-sound knowledge and phonological awareness” (p. 29) using Itchy’s mnemonic alphabet were “better able to segment words into individual sounds” (p. 32) and “better able to decode unfamiliar (nonsense) words than those who were in the comparison class” (p. 33). While “educators and administrators understand that the developmental stages in learning one’s first language (between 0-5 years of age) *are not replicated* by EAL learners at school” (Prokopchuk, 2017, Module 7, p. 1), some of the same strategies are effective in supporting L2 acquisition.

I have extensive experience as an L2 learner: I completed elementary and middle school in a French immersion program, studied Japanese for three years in high school, and took two introductory Spanish courses in university. My Japanese language teacher taught our class the hiragana alphabet using mnemonics,

which is probably why, two decades later, I still remember how to read and write it (for examples, see images for a *key* and *no smoking* on the hiranga alphabet website). The time it took me to learn the hiragana alphabet was much faster than the time it took me to learn the Roman alphabet as a young child, because “L2L [second language learners] who start learning the language years later than their peers can understand language at a higher level of complexity” (Coelho, 2012, p. 230).

Teaching the Roman alphabet and its phonemic sounds using visual mnemonics would increase EAL students’ abilities to learn letter-sound associations in their L2. Coelho (2012) would support this approach, since she points out that school-wide actions that would support academic progress for EAL students include teachers incorporating more visuals into their lessons. Coelho (2012) writes that, “Using key visuals can reduce the language demands of the curriculum and enhance understanding, thus enabling L2Ls to handle new concepts and information” (pp. 280-281). Creating visual notes is also a way that teachers can provide differentiated instruction for EAL students, something Garnett (2012) argues is needed because there is so much variation between EAL students’ socio-economical, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds.

- ***Visual Notetaking Supports Learning Academic Vocabulary***

Coelho (2012) points out that there is a “strong correlation” (p. 307) between students’ vocabularies and their academic achievements. While some classroom teachers argue that “Teaching English is the job of the EAL specialist” (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 8), Helmer and Eddy (2012) refute this, explaining, “Because research in second-language acquisition clearly indicates that it takes five or more years to become fluent and proficient in a second language, responsibility for meeting the educational needs of these learners must realistically extend to all the teachers our EAL learners

encounter” (p. 8). Coelho (2012) explains that the English language is extra complex due to the fact that in addition to its Anglo-Saxon words, it contains words from other languages, such as Latin and Greek. Coelho (2012) defines low-frequency vocabulary that is essential to academic success as “General academic words” (p. 314) and notes that these tend to be “Latin-based words such as *observe* or *accurate*” (p. 314). Roessingh (2016) explains that, “As language becomes more cognitively demanding and context reduced, learners must avail themselves of language itself to make meaning” (p. 69), something that is difficult for EAL learners to do in their L2, especially if they don’t have a high Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). It is essential that EAL learners are explicitly taught academic vocabulary since “It is impossible to get an education without knowing these words” (Coelho, 2012, p. 314) and “it is difficult to learn [academic vocabulary] from mere exposure through reading alone” (Roessingh, 2016, p. 71).

One way to support EAL students’ academic vocabulary learning is to have students create visual notes for these words. It is imperative that classroom teachers receive professional development regarding visual notetaking since “The school-level personnel with the most direct effect on ESL students are teachers” (Garnett, 2012, p. 17). Pillars (2016) states,

*When students are learning vocabulary for the first time. . . Simple assessments can occur quickly – even though one student spelled ‘learn’ as ‘lean,’ the sketch shows comprehension of the meaning of ‘learn,’ whereas another wrote ‘lean’ and sketched the meaning of ‘lean’ instead of ‘learn.’ In other words, I could see immediately whether it was a spelling or semantic error. Both were easy fixes, with the sketches. (p. 126)*

Visual notetaking allows teachers to better understand if EAL students comprehend the academic vocabulary that has been taught in a lesson. If administrators in Saskatchewan school divisions took Garnett’s (2012) advice that “more and better [EAL] professional development is. . . an important investment” (p. 17),

classroom teachers would be better prepared to support EAL students' learning in schools.

- *Visual Notetaking Supports Memory Performance*

Pillars (2016) claims that adding visuals to a piece of information increases a student's ability to recall it three days later by 65%. Brown (2014), another visual note-taker, concurs with Pillars, claiming that a person who doodles is "engaging in deep and necessary information processing. A doodler is connecting neurological pathways with previously disconnected pathways" (p. 11). Skeptics may be tempted to dismiss claims about the power of visual notetaking and may argue that the act of notetaking alone is responsible for boosting one's cognitive performance. They may base their argument on Mueller and Oppenheimer's (2014) study where researchers found that the act of writing longhand notes helped individuals synthesize and recall information better than individuals who took notes on their laptop computers. However, Paivio's dual-code theory, which "suggests that pictures are better remembered than words because they are represented both visually and verbally" (Wammes, Maede, & Fernandes, 2016, p. 1754), challenges this notion.

Curious about Paivio's theory, Wammes et al. (2016) executed a study to "determine whether drawing provided a measurable advantage over passive note-taking" (p. 1753), and explained that data they collected and interpreted from seven different experiments with numerous participants suggested that there was a direct correlation between people who drew words and people who experienced better word retention and "memory performance" (p. 1752). Wammes et al. (2016) described this as the "drawing effect" and argued that, "the mechanism driving the effect is that engaging in drawing promotes the seamless integration of many types of memory codes (elaboration, visual imagery, motor action, and picture memory) into one cohesive memory trace, and

it is this that facilitates later retrieval of the studied words” (p. 1773).

Visual notetaking does not just help with vocabulary retention; it can help students process short stories, essays, and other course content. A study conducted by Weimar and Perry (n.d.) found that students who both wrote notes while Perry read a short story and created visual notes immediately following the reading did 7% better on a ten question quiz the following week than students who only made written notes. This study reinforces the notion that visual notetaking is coded in multiple ways; drawing is not just creative as it increases one’s memory performance.

- *Visual Notetaking is Culturally Responsive*

Effective education for EAL learners must be culturally responsive and extend beyond direct L2 language instruction since many EAL learners often experience societal marginalization due to both their low socioeconomic status (SES) and the fact that many of them are visible minorities (Cummins & Early, 2015). Cummins and Early (2015) argue that teaching should aim “to counteract both the negative consequences of socio-economic variables and the devaluation of student and community identity experienced by marginalized social groups” (p. 25). Since teachers are predominantly from white, middle-class, Euro-Canadian backgrounds, this means that teachers need to reflect upon the privilege and power they possess (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013).

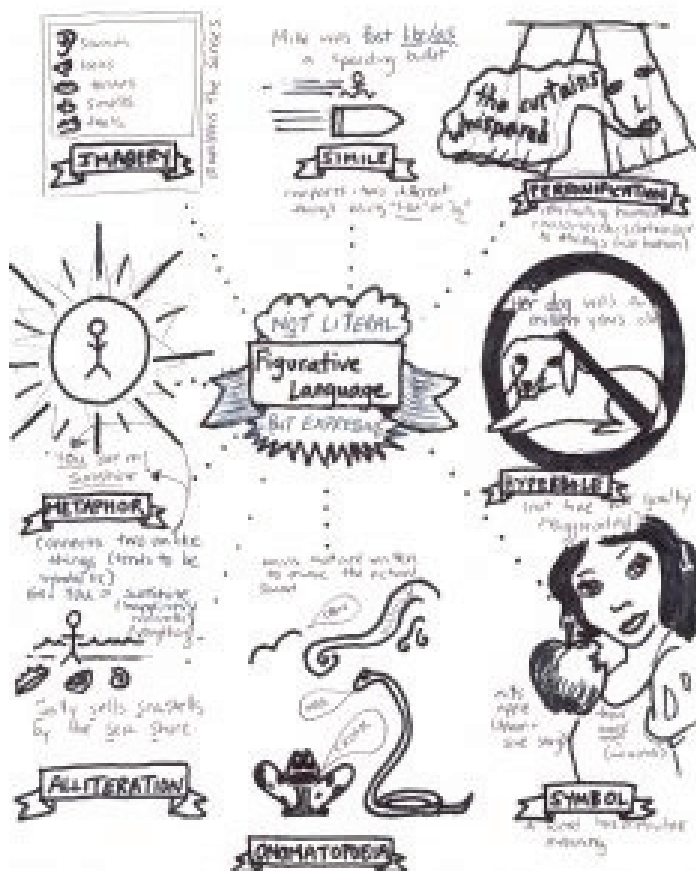
In the Ontario Ministry of Education’s (2013) monograph titled “Culturally Responsive Pedagogy,” it states that teachers who employ a constructivist approach and offer authentic learning opportunities to students demonstrate two characteristics of culturally responsive teachers. Visual notetaking, then, is culturally responsive because it is constructivist in nature and authentically allows students to attach their own symbols to represent meaning;

for example, Pillars (2016) writes how “the word ‘ancient’ was signified by a spider web for one student, an Egyptian pyramid for another, and a pirate ship for yet another student” (p. 66). These students’ visual notes serve as examples that illustrate “Instruction [that] connects to students’ lives by activating their background knowledge and stimulating their curiosity and interest. Instruction affirms students’ academic, linguistic, and cultural identities by enabling them to showcase their literacy accomplishments in both L1 and L2” (Cummins & Early, 2015, p. 31), thus visual notetaking is an approach that fits within Cummins and Early’s (2015) culturally responsive literacy engagement framework.

### **Application of Visual Notetaking in My Own Practice**

John Dewey (1944), wrote that, “If we teach today, as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of their tomorrow” (p. 167). Visual notetaking offers teachers an opportunity to teach differently than the traditional norm; an avant-garde teaching method that reaps rewards for more than just EAL students, “visuals are equally useful for native speakers of the language” (Coelho, 2012, p. 281). Brown speculates that classism is behind society’s valuing of print-based literacy, saying in an interview that, “Historically, literacy, verbal and spoken language has been associated with a certain level of status and economic class” (in Maverick, 2012, para 2). Indeed, Kerkham and Hutchison (2005) write of how teachers “privilege written and verbal forms of communication over visual and multi-modal forms” (p. 117). Rodriguez (in Alexis, 2016) challenges this ideology, writing that teachers “should be focused on what works for students, capitalizing on [students’] funds of knowledge and strengths, such as ‘drawing’, in which [students] conceptualize literacy, to equip them for the twenty-first century skills” (para 4-5). As a teacher, I am convinced of the value of visual notetaking, and am committed to infusing my future lessons with it. As a first step, I attempted my own original edu-sketch (illustration shown below) to experiment with how I could use visual notetaking to better explain figurative language to students, which is language that Roessingh

(2016) describes as particularly difficult for EAL students to interpret.



*Figurative language visual note (Gerrard, 2017)*

## Conclusion

Visual notetaking is a powerful way that teachers can support EAL students in their classrooms while simultaneously enriching their courses for all students. As both an L2 learner and a teacher of L2 students, I believe if teachers use this method, it will correlate with their students experiencing enhanced memory performance.

It will lead to EAL students developing stronger academic vocabularies and gaining better overall fluency in their L2 than they would otherwise experience. At the very least, visuals enhance communication between students and teachers and visual notetaking offers a creative medium that helps facilitate more engaging lessons. Visual notetaking is constructive and supports authentic student learning opportunities, which means that it demonstrates characteristics of a culturally responsive approach. With so much to gain and so little to lose, it is time to spread the word about the power of visual notetaking so that teachers can use it to support EAL student learning in their classes.

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## *10 - The Importance of Meaningful and Consistent Assessment Practices*

KELLY KOSHINSKY

The word assessment is often intimidating for both students and teachers. When it comes to school-aged English as an Additional Language (EAL) learners, assessment can be extra challenging as it encompasses both language and content. Although assessment can be difficult, it is essential that it start immediately after newcomer students enter Canada and continues throughout their entire education. Whether students are in a pull-out, push-in or co-teaching type of support program, assessment helps guide teachers to successfully help their students learn English. Assessment is a crucial component of newcomer EAL learners' success. Students deserve meaningful and consistent assessment to help them achieve the ultimate goal of full integration in a mainstream classroom.

As a relatively new teacher, with most of my teaching occurring abroad in South Korea, I have limited experience with consistent and meaningful assessment practices. Throughout this course I have gained knowledge about the value of the right kind of assessment for both teachers and the students. Through readings,

module content, and EAL classroom observation, I have learned about effective assessment practices for immigrant and refugee students and I am motivated to continue learning about how assessment is used to benefit newcomers in our province.

Assessment begins as soon as both immigrant and refugees enter into Canada and before they are placed in any type of EAL program. In Saskatchewan, protocol requires students to complete the important first step of Initial Assessment at a Newcomers Student Centre (or other assessment site). "The procedure should include an interview followed by assessment tasks" (Coehlo, 2012, p.22). Anderson and Tilbury (2014) explain, "By reviewing a student's academic background and administering assessments in the four skill areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, baseline data can be recorded and an appropriate educational program for each EAL student can be developed" (p.89). Initial assessment allows professionals to gather information on students' L1 and L2 skills, as well as their cultural backgrounds and values. The information gathered is used to find the best fit for the student to meet their language needs and position them into a program where they can be successful. Anderson and Tilbury (2014) further explain that the data acquired during initial assessment can be used in the long term to track students' language learning over time). It is important that initial assessment is part of families' reception into a new country and new school system.

As mentioned above, initial assessment serves a key role in immigrant and refugee students' intake into a new system. It is vital that initial assessment and all following assessments hold both validity and reliability. Coelho (2012) explains, "In order to ensure that students are progressing steadily and sufficiently towards the high levels of literacy that are required for success in school and beyond, teachers, and others involved in the education of L2Ls need some means of assessing and tracking progress over time" (p. 84). In order to ensure the level of validity and reliability required,

“the ministry introduced the Common Framework of Reference, a provincial language reference scale for charting language proficiency. The CFR presents a reputable reliable and objective scale for monitoring and recognizing formal and informal language learning experiences” (Prokopchuk, 2014, p. 84). “The CFR consists of six levels between absolute beginner and a highly proficient user of the language whose performance is virtually indistinguishable from that of an extremely competent native speaker” (Coelho, 2012, p.86). In the CFR all six levels are explained for the four language skill areas of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Each level provides an explanation of language abilities at that level. It is a well-known assessment too throughout Europe and North America that helps teachers track students’ language competence.

As ELLs progress in their language skills it is important for their teacher to continually assess their growth and movement from conversational language to academic language. Roessingh (2016) uses Beck, McKeown, and Kucan’s (2013) three-tiered model for understanding communicative and academic language. They explain Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) in terms of three tiers: Tier 1 as conversational words; Tier 2 as high utility/general academic words; and finally Tier 3 as subject specific words. As students move closer into Tier 3 it is important that teachers continue to assess students’ progress by continuing to refer to the CFR and their levels.

In Saskatchewan, once students have reached an adequate level of academic language, they will begin to be assessed alongside their peers. Anderson and Tilbury (2014) state, “The goal of English as an additional language program at both elementary and secondary levels is to improve students’ cultural and linguistic competency so that they can be successfully integrated into mainstream classrooms (p. 89). As students work towards fluency and the goal of integration, “teachers working with English

Language Learners have to consider both language and content” (Gottlieb, 2006, p.64). Therefore, they need to develop both language and content objectives that line up with Saskatchewan standards in the form of curriculum outcomes. Objectives for both language and content need to be measureable to accurately track student knowledge and skills (Acevedo, 2014). Teachers must complete both formative assessment and summative assessment and use it as wash-back into further teachings. Once students have reached this level of competence it can be common for them to participate in large-scale assessments in a standard classroom.

Although many students will achieve the goal of integration and participate with their peers in learning and assessment for all subject areas, there will be challenges when it comes to assessment of ELLs; alternative assessments may be required for EAL learners. The Colorin Colorado website explains that alternative assessments allow teachers to track the ongoing progress of their students regularly and often and it also allows teachers to target specific target areas, adapt instruction, and intervene when needed. This eliminates the problem of standardized tests not accurately showing students’ abilities or knowledge. Colorin Colorado suggests portfolio assessments and performance-based assessments and the website provides different examples of assessment to try with EAL learners. Hill (2016) also provides educators with information on alternative assessments for EAL students, including the importance of using tiered questions and tasks.

It is undeniable that assessment plays a key role in teaching both in standard classrooms as well as EAL support programs. After teaching abroad for two years, I fell in love with teaching English as an Additional Language and I knew it was a teaching path I wanted to continue on upon returning to Saskatchewan. When I came home I soon realized the difference in standards and protocol between South Korea and Saskatchewan. A key difference is the area of assessment. The information I have gathered from this

course through the module material, readings, interactions with English Language Teachers (ELTs), and observation of EAL students has given me a firm understanding of the importance of consistent, constant, and purposeful assessment.

Initial assessment requirements, CFR standards, language and content objectives, tiered academic language, assessment adaptations for EAL students, are all valuable sets of information for ELTs and classrooms teachers. Knowledge about each topic should impact the steps teachers take to ensure ELLs receive the support they need to be successful in learning English. As I move forward in my teaching career, I hope to use what I have read and heard throughout this course in practical ways. First I will have students go through the initial assessment process so they are placed in a support program that best fits their needs. Secondly, I will refer to the CFR when teaching and assessing students' language skills in all four areas. Third, I will continually monitor and assess students with both formative and summative assessments using measureable language and content objectives that meet Saskatchewan curriculum standards. Finally, I will make any adaptations necessary to assess students' abilities and help them reach their academic goals. Although assessment is viewed negatively at times, the use of consistent and meaningful assessment can help both teachers and students successfully navigate the learning of English as an Additional Language.

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## *11 – Support and Resources for EAL Students and Teachers*

EDDY PASLOWSKI

English as Additional Language (EAL) students and their families take on a tremendous challenge when they enter schools in the hope of receiving an extremely valuable education in a language which is new to most newcomer students at the time of entry. Our job as educators is to help them adapt to a completely different school culture and then give them the tools to be successful in this new culture so they have the best chance for success while out in the rest of society. For us to be able to do this, we must have access to the best information and resources that are available to ensure we can do the best job possible in this area. In Saskatchewan, our education system has had to quickly adapt to a quite dramatic increase in EAL students from a variety of backgrounds and circumstances. Rising to the challenge, our system has developed a strong protocol for these students, and in the following pages evidence will be presented to support the strength and success of our programs.

The reason for choosing this area to expand upon is that, as a middle-aged soon to be new educator, I have seen the evolution of our society and our education systems. Memories of the way education was delivered when I was younger, in the direct

instruction, one-fits-all style, would not work at all with the diversity of cultures and learning styles that are in nearly every classroom today. This realization, coupled with the fact that my wife has taught for nearly 15 years, has shown me that extra resources will be an absolute must for me, no matter where or what I teach.

The first sections of this paper will explore some of the resources provided by the Government of Saskatchewan and the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation. Later sections will look specifically at resources provided by two urban school divisions in the province. The final section of the main body of this paper will discuss literature that we can use to help us prepare, on our own, for the challenges in this field. At the end of the main body, a final discussion section will attempt to synthesize all the information with the thesis, and explain how this information can assist teachers in their schools.

Let us begin with what is available on the Government of Saskatchewan website Information on Pre-K to 12 Education for Newcomers . Here, EAL students and their families can find easy to use links for all aspects of starting school in the province such as who needs to go to school, age requirements, language interpreters, assessment guidelines, and immigration services. All are in easy to read documents that will be a tremendous help to both students and families There is also a link to the “Quick Reference for Newcomers” which is a PDF, printable four-page checklist for families to use in relation to education. This just provides the basics for families to get a good start upon arrival in our province.

This website also discusses how funding is provided to school divisions to assist with both initial and ongoing assessment. There is also information on which school divisions worked together to develop assessment kits to be used. These are primarily urban school divisions, which makes sense, since the vast majority of EAL students are located in urban centres. This was covered in Module 1 of this course and supported by data in Slide 8 of the Power

Point for this section. (ECUR 415, Module 1 pdf, pg. 8) Contact information is provided on several fronts for anyone having questions about information provided on the Government of Saskatchewan site.

The next resources to be discussed are those provided by the Saskatchewan Teachers Federation (STF). These resources are provided solely to teachers and are funded by the teachers. One of the main ways the STF supports teachers in gaining knowledge on EAL issues is with the use of Professional Development opportunities. The STF provides short, one-day, educational sessions that give educators new instructional and assessment strategies for use with EAL students. These are provided at a small cost to teachers ([www.stf.sk.ca](http://www.stf.sk.ca)) and are put on at a variety of locations around the province. It is important to note that the STF provides a large number of PD opportunities to its members on a wide variety of topics, and these are offered year-round. A calendar of upcoming events, as well as online sign-up, are provided on their website.

The STF has a large library that is accessible online as well. This resource is free of charge and has copies of all matter of literature and information, relevant to K-12. Upon request, STF librarians will locate all related literature on the subject requested, and ship them to your school. Postage-paid stickers will also be sent with your material for easy return, or you can do this in person as well.

Next, information will be examined about two specific urban school divisions, and what resources each provides. The first one that will be examined is the Saskatoon Public School Division. On their website, [www.spsd.sk.ca](http://www.spsd.sk.ca), they provide information on an EAL flyer. There is contact information for what they term as their "Newcomer Student Centre" as well as a brief overview of the benefits, skills and types of support available through this division. This is also where EAL families get a brief look at the common framework used to categorize EAL students, which is based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages or

CEFR referenced by Coelho (2012). The information on this site is brief, but it is a good beginning point for new EAL families.

The second urban school division to explore is the Regina Public School system. On their website, [www.rbe.sk.ca](http://www.rbe.sk.ca), there are links to a wide variety of documents related EAL students and families. They start out with links to their EAL Flyer and the Regina Newcomer Welcome Centre to give families a good starting point and then move into a link to a 4-part video presentation called "Supporting Refugees in Schools". There is also a link to the "Immigration Presentation" that is provided by the Ministry of Education. The next section on this site has many documents with information on initial assessment, program recommendations, and progress reporting for EAL learners. Here again we see information on the Common Framework of Reference (CFR) and how it would be used. This site gets far more in depth than most and families of EAL learners would need a higher level of comprehension of the English language or probably assistance to ensure a proper understanding of all the information.

Literature is a resource that is accessible for all of us to improve our instruction and assessment of all students, not just EAL learners. In this course, we were provided with two examples of great texts that will help us in our careers: Elizabeth Coelho's *Language and Learning in Multilingual Classrooms, A Practical Approach* (2012), and *Look at Me When I Talk to You* (2012) by Sylvia Helmer and Catherine Eddy. The Helmer and Eddy text gives us information on the cultural and personal side that EAL learners and teachers must navigate. There are many aspects of culture that I had not considered prior to reading this book, such as cross-cultural values and non-verbal communication.

Coelho's (2012) text, as demonstrated by the title, is a very practical text with examples of assessment and learning strategies. Examples of actual teaching strategies such as scaffolding, cloze sentences, charts, and guided projects are given in great detail. This text even breaks down strategies for individual subjects to help

us understand how they would work for students. Implementation ideas are discussed and assessment strategies are also explored in detail.

In conclusion, it is my belief that the need for EAL assistance will only continue to grow, as our world continues to be more accessible for all. Canada continues to be a wonderful safe haven for families trying to ensure the best for their children and hopefully this does not change. For those of us going into the field of education, the challenges of successfully assisting these students may seem overwhelming at times, but with use help of the resources discussed earlier as well as the support of staff and administration in our schools, we can be successful. If there is one thing I learned in this course, it is that communication between all groups involved, (parents, students, staff, and administration) is the key. Even with tougher financial times in the field of education, with a little creativity and hard work, educators can still offer the very best for all their students.

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## **PART 3:**

# **SETTLEMENT AND REFUGEE SUPPORT**

# *12 - Integration of Newcomers in Saskatchewan Schools: The Role of Settlement Workers*

VICTORIA OLDERSHAW

## **Introduction**

Saskatchewan welcomes thousands of immigrants to the province every year. In 2014 these immigrants increased the province's population growth by 76%, with the addition of 11,826 newcomers (Ministry of the Economy Government of Saskatchewan, 2014). Although the majority of immigrants entering Saskatchewan settle in large urban centers such as Regina and Saskatoon, the Government of Saskatchewan reported that "from 2012 to 2014, 292 Saskatchewan communities saw the arrival of immigrants who were migrating from 158 different countries" (Ministry of the Economy Government of Saskatchewan, 2014, p. 5).

Newcomers seek to contribute positively to their new communities, but there are challenges immigrants face regarding settlement and integration. As immigrant populations continue to grow in the province, there is a need for settlement and integration programs that target school-aged newcomers attending schools in Saskatchewan, especially in smaller urban centers and rural communities. A collaborative approach is recommended – one

that links settlement service providers, Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS), and communities across the province – in order to help newcomer families with children to navigate and succeed in a new culture and education system.

### **Rationale for Social Inclusion and Integration of Newcomers**

Omidvar & Richmond stressed that “social inclusion” is an important part of the settlement and integration process for new immigrants, describing the need to “dismantle barriers” and “risks” by focusing on “basic notions of belonging, acceptance, and recognition (2003, p. 1). Successful social inclusion of newcomers to a country “would be represented by the realization of full and equal participation in the economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of life in their new country” (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003, p. 1). Settlement services within Saskatchewan communities aid immigrants in the social inclusion process; “the provision of these services is essential both to ensuring the effective settlement of newcomers and maintaining public support for the continuing high levels of immigration” (Omidvar & Richmond, 2003, p. 7). The Government of Saskatchewan funds eleven Newcomer Gateways located in urban centers with varying populations. These Service Providing Organizations (SPOs) offer settlement and integration services to newcomers across the province. These SPOs offer services relating to housing, employment, education, health, transportation, budgeting and finance, and social supports such as connecting newcomers with community groups that share ethno-cultural background, faith, language, or interests.

### **Settlement Needs and Integration of School-Aged Children**

Many immigrants settling in communities all over the province include families with school-aged children. For many immigrant families, “the challenges of resettlement may appear overwhelming. These challenges may include the language, cultural differences and conflicts, economic difficulties, problems in finding suitable work, or in the case of children, feelings of loneliness and difficulties associated with school” (Coelho, 2012, p.

11). In 2009 the majority of the 2,424 immigrant children and youth (age 19 and younger) who immigrated to Saskatchewan “require[d] support to learn an official language. Almost two thirds, or 1,566 children and youth, had no knowledge of either official language of Canada upon their arrival” (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 14). A lack of knowledge of the official languages used in Saskatchewan schools can pose a challenge for newcomer children and youth, but “it is important to remember that students from around the world bring with them complete communication systems, individual differences, and rich cultural backgrounds” (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 15). As such, there is a continued need for supportive settlement and integration programs that help immigrant youth navigate a new culture and education system, while respecting the dignity of each individual.

As noted by Coelho, immigrating to a new country is a “life-changing experience” (2012, p. 8). Immigrant families and their “children who end up in classrooms in North America...have lived through a period of transition that may have been very difficult, and now they face new challenges as they adjust to their new environment” (Coelho, 2012, p. 8). Helmer & Eddy stressed that there may be “enormous differences among school systems” (2012, p. 59) that families have emigrated from; differences include “the way they are organized, the way instruction occurs, and the extent to which they conform with the cultural norms of a given society” (2012, p. 59). The Saskatchewan Annual Integration Summit reported that in K-12 education, there are “many challenges newcomers face within the school system” such as a lack of support for students with limited formal schooling or students who are “not familiar with the school structure” (Saskatchewan Annual Integration Summit Report, 2018, p. 10). Due to the challenges young immigrants and their families face, “it is important [for schools] to provide initial and ongoing orientation to the school system for students and parents, and to be explicit about norms

and expectations, so that students understand the roles and relationships in their new school environment” (Coelho, 2012, p. 1).

For immigrant families with children, registering students in school is one of the first challenges of settlement. Initial contact with schools can affect a family’s impression and perception of the new education system. Coelho highlighted how important it is for schools to “create a good first impression and establish a good relationship from the start” (2012, p. 19). A good first impression for families takes “careful planning”, involving “all members of the school community” (Coelho, 2012, p. 19). In an ideal setting, successful intake for newcomer families includes “a school team that will coordinate all aspects of newcomer reception, assessment, and orientation” (Coelho, 2012, p. 22), involving the welcoming of immigrant families and their children to the school system.

### **Settlement/Intake Services for Newcomer Students in Large Urban Centers vs. Smaller Communities in Saskatchewan**

Successful intake programs “ensure that all families feel welcomed and their questions regarding the school division and the school are answered” (Anderson & Tilbury, 2014, p. 90). This can be an “involved process for families who are new to the country and for whom English is not the first language” (Anderson & Tilbury, 2014, p. 90). Major urban centers in Saskatchewan have well-established intake centers for newcomer students enrolling in school. One of Saskatchewan’s largest cities and its school division has a centralized Newcomer Student Center (NSC) open to all students who are newcomers to Canada and to the school division, and who speak a language other than English. A directive of the NSC is to “provide a welcoming environment where [families] can learn about [the] school system, about [English as an Additional Language] programming and about supports for their children, so that the transition to school will be positive” (Anderson & Tilbury, 2014, p. 90). The NSC is necessary to meet the needs of ever-increasing enrollment of school-aged newcomers and their families to the city. By providing a centralized intake process in a

welcoming and supportive atmosphere, immigrant families and their children have more opportunities for successful social inclusion in their new communities.

Even though smaller communities in Saskatchewan welcome fewer newcomers each year, this does not mean that the need for settlement and integration services is any less significant. Most school divisions in the province, particularly those serving smaller urban centers and rural communities, do not have centralized intake for new immigrants and English as an Additional Language (EAL) students. This poses a challenge for many schools and the staff assigned to welcoming new enrollments of EAL students and newcomers to Canada. In some cases, enrollment of immigrant and EAL newcomers in school is no different than that of all other students entering the school system. As such, little to no additional support is provided to immigrant families, when schools do not have a coordinated system for welcoming newcomers.

Research conducted at the Rural Development Institute, Brandon University (2015) focused on the need for expanded settlement and integration services in western Canada, including those for families with school-aged children. The study found that “all of the communities sampled across western Canada identified that all or most of the services offered in the communities needed to expand in order to meet the demand” (2015, p. 18). Continued research in this field focused on Saskatchewan:

*Some respondents reiterated that services needed most by this particular group of newcomers were more readily accessible in the larger centers with full-fledged settlement service organizations and key mainstream service organizations than in the smaller communities that did not have such organizations. (2015, p. 17)*

There is a definite need for additional and expanded settlement and integration services for newcomer youth and their parents. Omidvar & Richmond recommended that “recent research and

program developments suggest that the school system is the natural location for such programs" (2003, p. 17).

### **Settlement Workers in Schools (SWIS)**

Services such as the federally-funded Settlement Workers in Schools program (SWIS) benefit newcomer students and their families as they navigate the challenges of settling in a new country with school-aged children who are entering the education system. The Saskatchewan SWIS program is described as,

*...a partnership of the local Boards of Education, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, and a Service Providing Organization. It is a school based outreach program designed to help newcomer students and their families settle in their school and community. ("Saskatchewan SWIS Coordination", 2018)*

In Saskatchewan, six of the eleven Newcomer Gateways (as described earlier) located in large urban centres have designated SWIS workers, who work together with partnered school divisions in their designated locations.

SWIS allows for more comprehensive programming and support for newcomer students and their families; "the first few years in Canada are particularly difficult for newcomer students and their families. SWIS connects newly arrived families to services and resources in the school and community in order to promote settlement and foster student achievement" ("Saskatchewan SWIS Coordination", 2018). According to a SWIS worker who currently works in a Saskatchewan community (see Appendix A for interview questions):

*SWIS is an entry point for the newly arrived as we work to connect them to the broad range of services offered by the settlement agency and other community services, and at school will meet the families at their arrival at student services, do a tour of the school, find an interpreter if is needed, ask for information/transcripts related to previous education, do bus registration and also explain the essential school information and refer the newcomer to appropriate school staff as necessary. (personal communication, June 12, 2018)*

From the perspective of an EAL teacher in Saskatchewan (see Appendix A for interview questions):

*...the role of the SWIS worker is flexible and is negotiated with the school/staff they work with...the settlement workers handle all things connected to settling newcomers and their families – specially related to school...settlement workers provide a safe space for students...students may go to them with questions/concerns about life and school. (EAL Teacher Respondent 1, personal communication, June 12, 2018)*

The SWIS worker interviewed also emphasized the need to “provide a service that respects the rights and dignity of the students, without discrimination, understanding that each student’s unique background needs to be taken into consideration” (personal communication, June 12, 2018).

### **Benefits of SWIS Programming for all Stakeholders**

Programs like SWIS benefit school divisions, adding much needed support to the workload of English as an Additional Language (EAL) specialists and teachers, particularly with the intake and integration of immigrant students. In schools without external support of SPOs, the roles and responsibilities, as noted by the SWIS worker above, are delegated to the EAL teacher/specialist (if available), or other school staff. When asked about how the implementation of a SWIS worker benefits the professional workload of EAL teachers, EAL Teacher Respondent 1 replied as follows:

There is no question that SWIS has benefited our EAL teaching staff. If the EAL teacher has a full-time teaching schedule and there are high numbers of newcomers, then it is impossible to fulfill all the students’ needs completely and effectively. It is important to remember that newcomers may arrive at any time during the year and may show up at a school any time of day. Thus, the EAL teacher cannot set aside a specific day or time at the beginning of a semester to help with registration, orientation for families and do language assessments. It can be stressful and ‘hurried’ to

be called out of class to help a new student when they show up mid-semester. As a result, there is undue pressure on the teacher and the newcomer does not receive the support they require. SWIS workers also provide a 'missing piece' or valuable information about students that the teacher might not know. Because settlement workers work with families and have 'case files' they might know information, such as whether a student has a hearing problem. Having a team to work with is critical with the numerous, ongoing needs newcomers have. (personal communication, June 12, 2018)

A SWIS worker is an integral team member within a successful school community that strives to meet the needs of all its students.

As a member of the school community, a SWIS worker can be a "role model and mentor who provides a significant amount of mental and emotional support to newcomer students" (EAL Teacher Respondent 2, personal communication, June 12, 2018). When asked about the impact a SWIS worker has had on his/her professional practice, EAL Teacher Respondent 2 explained that:

*SWIS has relieved the workload of the EAL teachers, within the school, by providing students with a trusted adult who can support them with daily 'life' activities that newcomers to Canada may have difficulty with. Instead of teachers spending their day setting up doctor's appointments, phoning SGI [driver's education], or contacting home about extracurricular activities happening that weekend, SWIS is another adult who can help with these responsibilities...this in turn frees up the teacher to focus on planning lessons that help our students with language acquisition. (personal communication, June 12, 2018)*

It is important to note that a SWIS worker does not take on any role related to teaching and instruction, as this is the domain of the EAL teacher and school staff, but the role is an integral part of a successful school program. A SWIS worker's partnership with school staff ensures more comprehensive and ongoing support for vulnerable newcomer students. EAL Teacher Respondent 2 explained how the SWIS worker affiliated with his/her school is

“connected with each of the student’s families, and makes home visits” (personal communication, June 12, 2018). Respondent 2 also noted how this provides “additional insight into our students’ lives that can help build empathy when teaching” (personal communication, June 12, 2018). Collaboration and communication between SWIS workers and EAL teachers helps build bridges with newcomers and their families. Helmer & Eddy stressed that “taking time to find out where EAL learners are on the path of cultural adjustment and consistently communicating with them enables us to find areas of commonality” (2012, p. 19). Therefore, ongoing support and connections between SWIS workers, students and their families, and teaching staff are advantageous for all stakeholders in the settlement and integration process. Both EAL teacher respondents who were interviewed expressed the essential need for a SWIS worker in their school, in that this not only benefited students and families, but also EAL teachers and school staff.

### **Continued Need for Settlement Support in Saskatchewan Communities**

SWIS programming and other settlement services for students are currently in place in urban centers in Saskatchewan, but the need extends to many more Saskatchewan communities. A SWIS worker is non-partisan, affiliated with a SPO, and as such, can provide services to many schools, including public and Catholic school divisions, within one community. Often population numbers of newcomer students are not high enough for centralized intake, settlement, and integration support. Even without a centralized intake center, a SWIS worker assigned to an SPO in a community can support newcomer students and their families in that community and surrounding areas. As noted earlier, settlement services, and particularly SWIS workers, provide the ‘missing piece’ that many school divisions currently need. As a federally-funded program, more communities in the province need

to foster community partnerships with SPOs and school divisions need to take advantage of this service.

### **Identifying Needs in My Community**

In my own professional practice, as an EAL Lead Teacher at a Saskatchewan school of over 900 students and in a division serving over 5,000 students, there is a very clear need for settlement and integration services for newcomer youth attending schools in my community. I began my role as EAL Lead Teacher one year ago, meaning I take on the role of program planning for all EAL students in my school. Currently, no centralized intake for newcomers is in place at the school level nor the division level. Each school in my division is responsible for aiding newcomer students and families with registration and integration in the school system. Although each school does its best to help immigrant families and children navigate the challenges of attending a new school in a new country, little professional training or knowledge is provided to staff at the division level. This is concerning, since levels of immigration in my community continue to rise.

I can relate to and empathize with the EAL Teacher Respondents interviewed, in that the role of an EAL teacher often takes on more responsibilities than just classroom instruction. Currently I aid in registration, meeting with families, school orientation, initial and ongoing language assessment, academic monitoring, and social and emotional support. Many of these roles are beyond my professional scope; for example, I have spent hours working with families who were having difficulties with immigration documents, something I know very little about, but as many teachers do, I feel compelled to help families in need. It has been a challenge balancing my work load, when my primary focus should be within the domain of language instruction of EAL learners.

At the division level I have proposed the need for a SWIS worker in my community, to serve the needs of the many immigrant students entering and attending school. I am pleased that administration at my school and superintendents at the division

level also understand this need. My school division plans to work jointly with our local Newcomer Gateway and another school division within my community to apply for a federally-funded SWIS worker. I am confident that a SWIS worker will be in place in my community in years to come, adding a much needed team member that will aid in settlement and integration to ensure both social and academic success of newcomer students in my community.

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## *13 - Accessing Academic Language in Math and Science for Refugee Learners*

CHRYSTAL POLANIK

### **Rationale**

As English as Additional Language (EAL) teachers, “We must work to create classrooms where there is a discourse of possibility and hope...where we are much more attentive to using the text of students’ lives in our work” (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 59) The direction and scope of the discourse in this essay is derived from personal EAL classroom teaching experiences and my work to support EAL refugee learners in mainstream math and science content classrooms. Ideas, approaches, and methods presented are supported with evidence and research from course content and readings.

Refugees are a vulnerable group of English Language Learners (ELLs) who view education as an important means to obtaining better employment and life opportunities. Many refugees arrive with well-established oral communication skills in L1 but are often frustrated when language becomes a barrier to everyday communication and academic achievement in English language school systems. Age-time constraints place further stress and

anxiety on refugee ELLs. By attempting to bridge the achievement gap in a shorter time span with accelerated academic language acquisition, refugee ELL performance is often compromised.

The educational aim of this paper is to examine how English Language Teachers (ELTs) can approach instruction to support refugees in academically challenging learning contexts, specifically math and science, in order to achieve curricular outcomes that facilitate refugee academic success and open doors to post secondary education or employment. Information presented in the paper will assist ELTs currently working in math and science teaching contexts to achieve the following: (a) consider the effectiveness of existing EAL practices, supports, and adaptations; (b) determine if academic language acquisition is occurring; and (c) evaluate whether assessment practices appropriately reflect refugee ELL academic language learning in the content areas of math and science.

### **Essay**

A current issue in English as an Additional Language (EAL) education today centers around finding an approach to instruction that facilitates access to academic language and learning for secondary English Language Learners (ELLs) and yields academic success. Teenage refugee learners in particular are a vulnerable group at risk of not completing traditional academic programs due to interrupted or little to no formal education in their first language (L1), low or no literacy skills in L1 or English, and very little knowledge in academic content-areas (Freeman, 2002 as cited in Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p.76) Typically, teenage refugees receive one year of intensive EAL instruction within secondary schools, followed by a gradual integration into mainstream content classrooms with continued EAL supports. The dilemma facing ELTs today involves the early integration of refugee ELLs into mainstream classrooms, well before the minimum five to seven years required to reach CALP “intermediate fluency,” (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p.74) and how to approach academic language and learning to bridge the

achievement gap. This essay will illustrate why identification and explicit instruction of academic language, targeted teaching and implementation of instructional strategies, and selection of supports, adaptations, and assessments that facilitate academic language learning and comprehension are all critical to teenage refugee learners' academic achievement in the subject areas of math and science.

Refugee learners require intensive EAL support in learning communicative language (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and explicit instruction and EAL supports in academic language (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) learning. "CALP is the language of academia and textbooks (taking) a minimum of five years to develop an intermediate fluency" (Helmer & Eddy, 2012 p. 74). The complexity of academic language learning for refugee learners often occurs in accelerated and cognitively challenging academic learning contexts. In order to bridge the achievement gap, the ELT must develop and implement "approaches and materials that will help them (ELLs) catch up to and compete with mainstream students" (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p.76) within a considerably shorter time frame than initially predicted.

Refugee learners repeatedly struggle in the subject areas of math and science due to the specialized academic language found in each of these subjects. EAL teachers must identify and analyze the academic language found in math and science texts that are problematic for ELLs, break it down into manageable language components, and explicitly teach these language points for ELL academic language learning and acquisition to occur. Academic textbooks use formal language that is not normally encountered in daily usage. For example, the usage of passive verbs in academic texts is used to describe processes or focus on results or outcomes and is problematic for second language learners (L2Ls) still mastering the active voice (Coelho, 2012, p.242). Linking words and phrases that aid in organizing ideas is another language point that

requires explicit teaching, such as: Sequence (e.g. first, next, then), cause and effect (e.g. because, as a result of), and concession (e.g. although, in spite of) (Coelho, 2012, p.242).

Misconceptions around mathematics include that math deals with numbers and is universal across languages and cultures, leading to the assumption that L2Ls are able to acquire mathematical learning relatively quickly and with minimal difficulty. Current mathematic textbooks are language-comprehension based. Mathematics has its own unique language, which causes problems for refugee L2Ls still acquiring basic everyday vocabulary. Mathematical vocabulary has three categories, all of which are necessary to understand and do math. Vocabulary sub-groups are: a) specific technical mathematical terms (e.g. quadrilateral); b) technical terms with unrelated every day meanings (e.g. volume, product); and c) math words taken from everyday meanings (e.g. words like *similar* and *face*) (Coelho, 2012, p.242). The ELT now must explicitly teach vocabulary on three different levels, in addition to inferring meaning of everyday words that take on new meaning in a mathematical context. This is very confusing and frustrating for refugee learners, as another layer of language learning is added, causing increased anxiety around completing homework and writing exams.

Given that math requires problem solving skills, refugee learners benefit from explicit modeling and scaffolding that demonstrates how to approach solving math problems. Refugee learners (and many other ELLs) find it difficult to decode math problems and decide which information is required and which details are extraneous. Interchanging numerals and written words of numbers within the same problem further compound the L2Ls confusion. Refugee learners further struggle with symbols and the everyday function words and vocabulary that replace these symbols (e.g. +, plus, sum, and) (Jarrett, 1999). Depending on the country, some symbols may represent different functions or meaning, further complicating comprehension (Jarrett, 1999).

Science presents its own unique academic challenges. ELTs must first identify the key topics and terms, and then make decisions about the approaches to be used to help refugee learners access the academic language within this content area. For example, challenges in science language may include “use of abstract nouns for processes (condensation), passive verbs, and condensed expressions (organisms in water)” (Coelho, 2012, p.263). Science also has its own unique vocabulary and use of words that have similar everyday meaning requiring intensive vocabulary instruction. In addition, science uses the inquiry and scientific methods. “Students who are new to the study of science may need to begin with explicit instruction and progress to more exploratory learning, gradually developing independent-learning skills” (Jarrett, 1999). Therefore, ELTs need to identify and plan refugee L2L instruction for the specific ways language is used in math and science content and curricula (Coelho, 2012, p.263).

Once problematic academic language elements are identified, the ELT must then select and implement instructional strategies to facilitate refugee ELLs’ academic language acquisition and learning. “The processes involved in doing school work are seldom described explicitly and are usually learned over an extended period.” (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 59). Refugee learners arrive with little or no experience with consistent regular schooling, and in addition to learning a new language must also acquire a new way of learning. When selecting instructional strategies, the ELT must address: a) identified problematic academic language elements (e.g. grammatical structures – passive verbs, abstract nouns, vocabulary); b) reading strategies that facilitate comprehension of academic language and texts (e.g.) skimming, scanning, summarizing, main idea); c) book literacy (e.g. textbook features and how to use them – table of contents, glossary, index, headings, sub-headings, diagrams, maps, labels, tables, graphs, photos, text boxes, font features – italics, bold); d) writing and writing strategies specific to the content area studied (e.g. math and science –

scientific method, problem solving, how to write a lab experiment, compare/contrast, describe, analyze, identify, note taking, annotation) and; e) study skills. These are all skills that native speaking peers have been developing cumulatively in each grade level over an extended period of time. However, refugee learners must acquire these skills in cognitively demanding learning contexts at an accelerated rate. The learning curve for these skills and the amount of language required may be overwhelming for refugee learners, creating anxiety and mental exhaustion. As a result, a flight or fight response is usually induced resulting in absenteeism, failure to submit assignments, lack of motivation, and in some cases dropping out.

Finally, the ELT must examine and provide EAL supports, adaptations, and assessments that complement instructional strategies in accessing the academic language in the content areas of mathematics and science for refugee learner comprehension and academic learning. Different approaches and intensive EAL supports are required to assist refugee learners in meeting academic success due to the heavy cognitive, language, and content demands. Some examples of effective supports include: EAL tutorials, use of Educational Assistants (EAs), graphic organizers, visuals, technology, manipulatives, physical gestures, and scaffolding. Scaffolding is a particularly important support in assisting refugee learners in academic achievement as it models, guides, and breaks down learning into manageable chunks and achievable tasks. The “Scaffolding in the Quadrants” chart on page 294 in Chapter 13 of “Planning Instruction and Assessment” by Elizabeth Coelho (2016) provides an excellent scaffold framework for ELL differentiated instruction.

With regard to adaptations, “specialist language teachers need to collaborate with their colleagues, sharing strategies and resources that can be used to adapt the curriculum in the mainstream classroom” (Coelho, 2016, p.293). Adaptations may include: a) cooperative learning, pair or small group work; b) thematic

instruction around key concepts or big ideas; c) adapting activities and discussions that center content around authentic real-world situations and examples that can access ELLs' prior knowledge and experiences; d) rephrasing problems or ideas in their own words; and e) incorporating L1 where possible (Coelho, 2016). Kang, Pham, and Latham conclude, "When students are allowed to use their home language in the classroom, their academic performance as well as English-language development often improves" (as cited in Jarrett, 1999).

In terms of assessment and evaluation, teachers must carefully examine their assessment practices and consider adaptations to assist refugee learners in achieving academic success. Curriculum outcomes and tasks are designed for native English speakers and may require adaptation for refugee learners who "have not had opportunities to develop the same knowledge and skills as their peers who have been immersed in the curriculum throughout their years of schooling" (Coelho, 2016, p.295). Coelho states that, "Adaptations may include revising outcomes, reducing the number of outcomes, and substituting alternative outcomes that are more appropriate" (Coelho, 2016, p.295). The important idea is to ensure that attainable learning is the focus of the assessment. Refugee learners require alternative assessment strategies to demonstrate learning, such as: a) reducing the language requirement (giving oral exams, demonstrate knowledge visually, focus on content and meaning); b) provide opportunities for practice and feedback; c) create performance-based tasks; d) portfolio assessment; e) provide think time and dictionaries; and f) use a team approach (Coelho, 2016, pp.298-301).

Academic language learning is complex and not only refugees, but all L2L students, would greatly benefit from targeted and explicit instruction, relevant instructional strategies, as well as supports, adaptations, and assessments in mathematics and science that purposefully focus on attainable learning outcomes for refugee ELL academic success. Working collaboratively as a

team, classroom teachers and EAL specialists can a) diagnose and specifically target problematic language, content, and curricular outcomes; b) tailor instructional strategies for refugee ELL language and academic learning goals; c) provide the appropriate scaffolding and supports that facilitate academic success; and d) work towards developing and adapting curricular outcomes that are attainable and reflective of refugee L2L language needs. In conclusion, adaptations that incorporate collaborative learning, inclusion of first languages of refugee learners, and authentic contexts that draw out refugee learners' schema and experiences, can facilitate learning and language growth in the content areas.

In personal praxis, the evidence and research presented in this paper has relevance to my work as a high school EAL educator. I will be able to apply my learning to the development of a hybrid non-credit EAL tutorial class at my school. This EAL tutorial class is being designed to provide dedicated EAL and content support simultaneously to immigrant and refugee L2Ls in mathematics and science. This is the first time that a combined math and science non-credit EAL tutorial will be offered in this high school. It is also the first time that an EAL teacher and content classroom teacher will collaborate and co-teach L2Ls together. The tutorial will be broken into three peer study groups that rotate between: (a) the EAL teacher focusing on language components and instructional strategies; (b) the content teacher working on teaching and reinforcing concepts and learning outcomes; and (c) an Educational Assistant providing tutorial support for content learning. Within this context, the goal is for the EAL specialist and the classroom teacher to work together to find areas within the course content that allow for adaptation and incorporation of explicit teaching of academic language, instructional strategies, supports, adaptations, and assessment. The classroom teacher currently practices culturally responsive teaching, has experience working with immigrant and refugee learners, and already incorporates many instructional strategies, supports and adaptations into lesson

plans. Some examples of alternative assessment practices already in use include provision of extra time for assignments and exams, alternate ways of demonstrating knowledge, visuals, and portfolios. An area to examine is assignments and summative assessments for heavy language usage which cause confusion for L2Ls and not knowing what is being asked or what expectation is required. The end goal is clear evidence of increased L2L academic achievement in math and science for refugee learners in high school.

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# *14 - Supporting Refugee English Language Learners in Canadian Classrooms*

MISTY SCHROEDER

Canada is becoming very diverse as more people choose to start a new life in the country. While some immigrants arrive by choice, many refugees come to Canada because their country of origin is no longer safe. As the school systems in Canada continue to welcome many refugee learners each year, educators and support staff must be aware of how to best meet the needs of these vulnerable new students. Although the practices educators use may be appropriate for students in mainstream classrooms, or for those with English as an Additional Language (EAL) needs, the selection of practices is especially important for learners who may have limited or no experience with schooling, or those who have experienced trauma in their lifetime. By analyzing applicable and relevant Canadian research, I will describe the characteristics of refugee learners and outline various effective practices that teachers can use when working with refugee English language learners in schools and classrooms.

As described by the Government of Canada, refugees are people who have fled their countries because of a well-founded fear of

persecution. They are not able to return home and may have seen or experienced many horrors. A refugee is different from an immigrant. An immigrant is a person who chooses to settle permanently in another country while refugees are forced to flee (Government of Canada, 2017). The Calgary Board of Education (CBE) states that “since 2002, Canada has been among the top three re-settlement countries in the world for refugees, and the Government is increasing the number of refugees and other persons in vulnerable circumstances that this country resettles each year by 20%” (CBE “Canada’s Refugees,” n.d., para.1). As more families enter the country and the Canadian school system, educators and support staff must have the knowledge and skills necessary to provide refugee students with the most supportive and beneficial educational experiences possible.

When refugee students enter the school system, teachers must first get to know who their learners are as individuals and what their life experiences have been. Educators have to be aware that “many refugee learners come from war-affected countries and they have often experienced trauma, tragedy, persecution and prolonged stays in transitional refugee camps. Some have been forced to serve as soldiers and many have witnessed acts of violence, torture and crime” (CBE “Characteristics of a Refugee,” n.d., par. 1). Refugee learners may also arrive in Canada without their parents. In some circumstances, parents may have died, gone missing or may have been detained in the country of origin (CBE, 2017). The physical and emotional trauma that students may have experienced in their lifetime can seem unimaginable to an educator who is unaware of what many refugee learners have been through. Education, knowledge, understanding, and empathy are all necessary for teachers and support staff who work with refugee learners and their families. We cannot begin the process of teaching until we genuinely know students and families, what their experiences have been, and what they need from us at school in order to feel safe and comfortable in their new environment.

A teacher shared a story with me about a young refugee learner that struggled to focus and often seemed tired at school. After connecting with the student's parents, this teacher learned that each night, the child would sleep in the porch, beside the front door, in order to escape quickly if need be. After many years in a refugee camp, this child learned that sleep was often interrupted by noises or experiences that caused the family to flee quickly, and those feelings of fear and uncertainty carried over as they began a new life in Canada. This child's lack of focus and drowsiness could have been dismissed as boredom or lack of comprehension in English, but the situation was understood by the teacher after connecting with the family and learning about their past experiences. This knowledge not only built empathy and understanding, but also allowed the teacher to provide more targeted emotional support as well as much needed quiet time for this student during their time of need. Genuine human connection, understanding, empathy, and support is a necessary starting point when refugee students and their families become part of a school and classroom in Canada. Connecting with students and families and earning their trust and respect is the first step in creating a positive school experience.

Once a teacher has begun the critical stage of relationship-building with his or her refugee students and their families, he or she must ensure that the school environment is reflective of students and student need. Creating a school and classroom environment in which students feel safe and comfortable is essential to the well-being and success of all learners, but especially to that of refugee students. It is important for teachers to understand that schooling in Canada may be the first educational experience for many refugee learners: "For a variety of reasons related to war, environmental disasters, civil unrest, or political instability, they have attended school sporadically, if at all. They have minimal schooling in their native language, and low levels of literacy and numeracy" (CBE, "Students with Limited Formal

Schooling,” n.d., para. 1). Refugee students may have had disrupted schooling due to time spent moving between countries, or time spent in refugee camps or enclaves of displaced people for several years. Schools may have been closed or unsafe, and children may have been denied education due to gender, ethnicity, inability to pay fees, or to being victims of forced labour or forced military service (CBE, 2017). We cannot expect students with these experiences to transition quickly or smoothly to a mainstream classroom. Teachers must ensure that the classroom environment feels welcoming, safe, and comfortable to our new learners.

While some refugee students may have received schooling in their home country, the learning environment would have differed from the typical Canadian classroom. Expected behaviours in Canada such as using bathroom facilities, waiting in line or for one’s turn, staying in one place for extended periods, or using and handling school materials may have to be explicitly taught and consistently revisited for some refugee learners (CBE, 2017). It is also important for teachers to be aware of occurrences in the school environment that may trigger anxiety or behavioural reactions for refugee students, such as dark hallways, people dressed in uniforms or heavy boots, elevated noise levels, bells, fire alarms, lockdowns, or evacuation drills (CBE, 2017).

Schools often practice for fire drills and lockdowns. It is critical that all students know why the practices happen and that they are safe throughout the process. In my EAL classroom, I made it clear to my learners that schools do the drills and practices to keep them safe. I reinforced that there was not an emergency and that they were not in danger. For one of my groups of learners, I utilized a translation tool because they were not able to understand English enough to grasp the concepts. By speaking into my phone and having the tool interpret what I was saying in three different languages, I was able to ensure that the students understood that no danger was present and that we were practicing the drills to make sure that we knew how to be safe in all situations. Teachers

have to ensure the comprehension of refugee students in these situations, especially if they have experienced trauma in the past. Visuals, books, role-plays, and translation tools can assist teachers in explaining these concepts in detail as a way to avoid triggers and be sure that students continue to feel safe regardless of the occurrences taking place in the environment.

All learners must see themselves within the walls of the school and the classroom. Cultural representation should be evident and can be accomplished through displays in community languages, flags hanging throughout the school or classroom, applicable student work that is representative of each unique individual, and artifacts celebrating cultural diversity (Coelho, 2012). Teachers can also provide reading or other materials in the students' first languages and learn key words or phrases to help students feel more comfortable as they transition into their new environment. Students must feel appreciated, recognized, represented, and valued at school in order to help them feel safe and free from stress as they begin their new educational journey.

Routines and consistency can also help refugee learners to feel safe in the classroom. When students know what to expect and are aware of what will happen throughout the school day, they are more likely to feel safe and at ease. Teachers can create predictable environments and use routines to assist students to know what will happen next. Establishing regular and consistent activities and transitions, and anticipating and preparing students for unexpected breaks in routines are some ways that teachers can provide a sense of safety and security within the classroom (CBE, 2017). These steps are important in all classrooms, but are especially beneficial when working to create an environment in which vulnerable students can feel at ease during their time at school.

As a new student enters the classroom, a teacher may feel like pairing him or her with a student from the same country of origin is a logical step. Although this may be beneficial in some

circumstances, teachers must be aware that students from the same country can come from completely different socio-economic, religious, and political backgrounds and therefore have vastly different belief systems from one another (Helmer & Eddy, 2012). In all classrooms, “care must be taken not to make inappropriate assumptions by disregarding particulars of the students’ backgrounds that may seriously affect this relationship that has been imposed upon them” (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 36). I experienced this first hand as our school prepared to host a Flag Ceremony earlier this fall. We wanted to celebrate the 23 countries represented at our elementary school, and, to do so, we held a ceremony in which a student from each country entered the gym carrying the flag from their country of origin. In preparation for this ceremony, students learned about their flag and had the opportunity to draw, color, and display their flags in the classroom and the school. Five of my early learners as well as nine middle-years learners came to our school as refugees from Syria, and as we were learning about flags, it quickly became clear that we were not appropriately representing our Syrian students.

Two of my first-grade learners were adamant that the flag I had presented them with was not their flag, and upon chatting with our other EAL teacher, I realized that some of her Syrian students were confused as well. After doing some research on the issue, we realized that one flag represents the political views of one group of people in Syria, while a second flag represents another set of views and beliefs. Once I became educated on the topic, I sent each student home with a blank template and had them work with their families to draw the flag that they identified with so that I had a completely accurate representation of each student. During the ceremony, we had two students who identified with one flag carry that during the ceremony, followed by two students carrying the other flag that represented their beliefs. It was an impactful learning experience and taught me the importance of genuinely getting to know students as unique individuals with complex and

varying views, beliefs, and values. Had we lumped all of the children from Syria into one category, the results would have been non-representative, inappropriate, and highly offensive to some families. As teachers, we must invest time into getting to know our students and learning about their home countries and backgrounds as much as possible in order to make their school experience in Canada comfortable, responsive, authentic, meaningful, and genuinely representative of their needs.

Teachers are encouraged to take into consideration three aspects of refugee learner characteristics and needs when designing programs for refugee learners: linguistic, academic background and experience, and learner experiences and personal characteristics (Manitoba Education, 2012). Beginning with the linguistic element, it is important to review student ability in both English and their first language. If a student has had limited exposure to English, analyzing his or her first language skills will provide pertinent information regarding how to program effectively for that student. If a student has had limited experience with literacy in their first language as well, English language support will need to be rather intensive and may progress in a slower fashion (Manitoba Education, 2012). I have worked with students who have strong literacy skills in their first language, as well as students who have limited or no first language literacy skills. Students who can read and write in their language of origin can often make connections between reading, writing, and speaking in English and their first language, and seem to progress rather quickly, even if they are beginners. Students who are unable to read and write in their first language often need differentiated activities and intensive support, as they are working to build literacy skills in general, and the entire process is new and complex.

Teachers must also consider the academic background and experiences of their refugee students. Students may or may not have attended school in their country of origin, and schooling may have been interrupted for significant periods. Some learners may

have consistently attended one school, others may have attended various schools with multiple languages of instruction, and some students may have had positive educational experiences similar to those in Canada (Manitoba Education, 2012). By gathering information regarding the academic backgrounds of refugee students, teachers can better plan to transition students appropriately and develop effective and individualized programming strategies for each learner.

Each student comes with a different academic history, and teachers must utilize the appropriate documents or support workers to learn as much as possible about each student that joins the Canadian school system. These supports may include intake forms, school support workers, outside agencies affiliated with the school system that work with newcomers, and/or interpreters. Teachers must also take into account learner experiences and personal characteristics to help them plan and program effectively. Learning styles and preferences, potential learning disabilities, physical characteristics and health, culture shock and socio-emotional well-being, mental health, and educational and personal aspirations will all affect how refugee students learn (Manitoba Education, 2012). Knowing students and being aware of their individual needs and challenges can help teachers to create relevant, applicable, and meaningful learning experiences for all.

Understanding effective classroom practices when working with refugees is critical to the successful implementation of planning and programming. Although each school division is different and will have its own set of policies or strategies for working with EAL or refugee students, many of the core ideas will remain the same from division to division. The CBE offers several examples of best practices, including “age appropriate groupings, self-contained programs or classrooms offering intensive, accelerated English, literacy and numeracy instruction for at least the first year or two, and intensive small group or individual literacy interventions” (CBE “Programming Ideas,” para. 2). Effective transition plans must also

be developed to ensure that students are able to access mainstream classes when they are ready. EAL teachers can plan with and work alongside teachers in mainstream classrooms to support learners and organize the use of first language educational assistants or tutors, if possible (CBE, 2017).

In order to effectively support students holistically, schools and teachers must also work with refugee families and connect them with the appropriate supports. Educators must understand that “many refugee parents or guardians are living under difficult socioeconomic conditions and experiencing emotional stress. They have a great deal of concern for their children but may lack the personal, financial or linguistic resources needed to effectively support them in the acculturation process or in their academic work” (CBE “Characteristics of a Refugee,” n.d., para. 2). School staff and affiliated outside agencies can assist parents in understanding the school system, provide access to services such as tutoring, mentoring, counselling, home-school liaison, and community services, connect parents with supports that include family learning in the area of literacy, help involve families in parent and community groups, and provide information and access to sports and art activities for children (CBE, 2017). By supporting the family unit, teachers are not only meeting the needs of their students, but also providing parents with information and resources to help meet the needs of the family as a whole.

By digging into relevant Canadian research and providing information on refugee learners with limited schooling and/or experiences with past trauma, I was able to detail effective practices that teachers can use when working these students. As more vulnerable students enter our school systems across the country, it is increasingly important that teachers have the knowledge and support in order to best meet the needs of refugee learners in mainstream and EAL classrooms. Enhancing teacher knowledge and confidence around best practices will allow schools

to provide the most beneficial learning experiences possible for refugee students.

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## **PART 4: EAL LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL LEARNING CHALLENGES**

## *15 - Trauma and its Impact on Learning*

ROCHELLE CHAMBERS

In the past decade, there has been a significant increase in the population of newcomers settling in Saskatchewan, many of whom are learning English as an Additional Language. "Between 2008 and 2012, the number of PreK-12 students in the province requiring support for EAL grew dramatically following the introduction of the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP) (Prokopchuk, 2014, p.81). "Increasing immigration means that our classrooms are likely to continue welcoming learners whose countries of origin are more and more diverse" (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p.14). Although working with newcomer populations can be exciting, I have had first hand experience and know that some newcomers arrive with various needs and experiences that can put a strain on the resources that are available in our education system. I selected this topic based on my experiences as a classroom teacher in a community school that welcomed over seventy refugee children in the span of a few weeks. My own experiences encouraged me to begin researching the topic of trauma and its impact on learning. This paper will differentiate between immigrants and refugees, provide a definition of trauma, and describe how educators can

ensure that they are prepared to work with EAL students who have experienced trauma.

It is important to examine the difference between immigrants and refugees when considering newcomers to our country. Manitoba Education (2012) explains that while immigrants choose to move and settle in Canada, refugees often do not have a choice. Coelho (2012) refers to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol, which describes refugees as “persons with a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership to a particular group.” Often, refugees are forced to flee from their home, are displaced for long periods of time and live in refugee camps. According to The United Nations High Commission on Refugees, as of six years ago “the number of refugees and persons of concern worldwide exceeded 19.8 million” (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p.13). Helmer & Eddy (2012) explain that this number has increased dramatically due to violence in the Middle East and Africa and is currently at an estimated 42 million.

Trauma is a very individual experience. An event that is traumatic to one person may not be traumatic to another. According to Manitoba Education (2012), a person may experience two different types of traumatic events. Acute traumatic events can include experiences such as school shootings, gang-related violence, natural disasters, serious accidents, sudden loss of a loved one, or physical or sexual assault. Chronic traumatic situations can include events such as physical or sexual abuse, domestic violence, and wars or political violence. Whether a person experiences an acute traumatic event or chronic traumatic situations, both can “overwhelm a person’s capacity to cope” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 15). According to Souers & Hall (2016), students experiencing stress or trauma are using the downstairs area of the brain (limbic area), which controls arousal, emotion and the fight, flight or freeze response. Souers & Hall (2016) go on to explain that education and

learning requires students to be using the upstairs area of the brain (prefrontal cortex), which enables them to think and reason.

In the past decade, “the experience of trauma has dramatically altered the landscape of the schools we work in” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 1). “Immigrants and particularly refugees arrive in Canada from countries where they may have experienced trauma from wars, persecution, violence, torture, or other horrendous experiences” (Wilbur, 2017, p. 5). As educators, we expect our students to enter our classrooms ready to learn but this is not the reality. We expect our students to leave their baggage at the door and focus solely on what we deem important and worthy. “Trauma has a powerful negative effect on students’ readiness to learn, leading to the “triple whammy” of school troubles in attendance, behaviour, and coursework” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 20). It is plain and simple: “if our students aren’t in the learning mode...they will not learn” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 26). It is up to educators to help these students by building safe and trusting relationships with them, challenging our own personal belief systems, providing adequate positive reinforcement, and caring for ourselves.

One of the ways that we can support EAL students who have experienced trauma is by working towards building relationships with them. “A healthy relationship, in turn, is an instrumental aspect of feeling safe – and a sense of safety enables students who have experienced trauma to stay regulated and access the healthy parts of their brain” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 102). Building a relationship may involve taking an interest in something that they enjoy, articulating clear classroom expectations, engaging with their family, or modelling kindness and respect towards them and others. “We have an incredible opportunity.....to show students what they are capable of, to expose them to different ways of being, to teach them healthy ways of managing, to empower them to learn and grow in productive ways, and to love them for both who they are and for who they may become” (Souers & Hall, 2016,

p. 140). However, this cannot be achieved without first establishing a relationship with students.

Another way that we can support EAL students who have experienced trauma is by examining our personal belief systems. “The way we see our students – through a strength-focused lens or in a deficit-based model – shapes our beliefs and our expectations follow suit” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p.146). If we believe that certain students are only capable of being disruptive or uninterested, we will base our decisions and our efforts on those beliefs. Positive mindsets and belief systems about our students can help us be more patient, willing to help them or try new strategies that we have not attempted yet. Positive mindsets encourage us to think outside of the box for struggling students who might need us to go the extra mile for them. We must always remember that our EAL students who have experienced trauma are simply young people who are trying to make sense of the world and figure out how to get their needs met.

In addition to building relationships and examining our personal belief system, we must ensure that we are providing adequate positive feedback to our EAL students who have experienced trauma. Most people “rely on external feedback to confirm that we did something well, that we’re worthy of love, that our appearance is up to par, or that something we’ve done is valued” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p.183). Compliments and praise feel good and we all appreciate this in our lives. “Students who have experienced trauma have a significantly compromised capacity to self-acknowledge—that is, to recognize and validate themselves, their feelings, or their efforts” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p.184). “Younger children (8 and 9-year-olds) respond much more favorably to praise and, in fact, do not access certain regions of their brains after receiving negative feedback” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p.185).

One of the most important things that educators can do in order to support EAL students who have experienced trauma is to take a step back and focus on our own self-awareness. “If we aren’t

physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually healthy, we cannot reasonably expect to be able to help our students become healthier and more successful in school” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p. 40). Souers & Hall (2016) explain the importance of focusing on our health, love, competence and gratitude. Exercising for 40 minutes at least three times a week will do wonders to regulate and manage our stress levels. We need to take time each week to treat ourselves, whether it is with a bubble bath, reading a book, or a social outing. We must challenge ourselves and step out of our comfort zone by trying new things and overcoming our fears. Lastly, we must be thankful and express our gratitude for the little things in our lives. It is critical that we are also able to identify our own triggers, recognize when we are exhausted or emotional, and when we are thinking with our “downstairs” brain. Our ability to recognize these and regulate ourselves by providing self-care is critical for our jobs and interactions with students and their families.

“Although it’s not all about us, creating a trauma-sensitive learning environment begins with us” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p.146). If we do not take care of ourselves, it is just a matter of time before our health is affected. Burnout refers to “when the individual feels that they have too many demands, not enough support, and lack resources” (Manitoba Education, 2012, p.55). Individuals suffering from burnout may begin to feel powerless and/or overwhelmed. Compassion fatigue is a condition of “deep physical and emotional exhaustion that leaves the individual feeling drained and having nothing to give to others” (Manitoba Education, 2012, p. 55). Vicarious traumatization is the “result of the cumulative effect of contact and interaction with survivors of violence, war, and disasters” (Manitoba Education, 2012, p. 55). Educators working and supporting EAL students who have experienced trauma must be aware of these conditions, the importance of self-care and the risks associated with not putting ourselves first.

“As educators, we have an obligation to truly understand how

students learn and what may be affecting their capacity to learn” (Souers & Hall, 2016, p.117). Although I initially started researching EAL students affected by trauma, I quickly learned that trauma does not discriminate and it affects each one of us differently. I have also realized that in order for learning to occur in my classroom, I must create a trauma-sensitive classroom by building relationships with all of my students (EAL and non-EAL), provide a safe and caring environment, encourage them and believe that they are capable of becoming resilient young adults. Most importantly, I must take care of myself if I want to continue to be a positive and healthy role model for any of my students who have experienced trauma.

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# *16 - Distinguishing Between a Language Acquisition Problem and Learning Challenges in ELL Students*

MICHELE HUDSON

## **Rationale**

Working in the high school setting in a resource position, I often collaborate with teachers of students who are English Language Learners (ELLs) regarding placement and best programming options for some of their students. Distinguishing between a language acquisition difficulty and a possible learning difficulty/disability is very challenging, particularly when the student is a refugee with little or no education in their first language. This is perhaps one of the most difficult aspects of my job. Becoming more informed on best practices will enhance my ability to be effective and culturally responsive in my role.

## **Introduction**

English Language Learners (ELL's) come to us with a great range of cultural, linguistic, socio-economic and educational backgrounds. Some may be new immigrants by choice, others from refugee situations. Regardless of 'why', all students will have a

challenging road ahead of them in acquiring English as an additional language. “Cummins states ‘English language learners typically require at least five years to catch up to their English speaking peers in literacy related language skills’” (Coehlo, 2012, p. 313). “Those with limited prior schooling will need more support for a longer period of time” (Coehlo, 2012, p. 314). As well, “it is reasonable to think that most cultural groups throughout the world probably have the same percentage of children with more complex learning needs as those statistically found in North American populations”(Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 81). Because of the similarities in characteristics of learning disabilities and language acquisition problems, it has been common to find ELLs overrepresented in special education for language acquisition issues and for ELL students with a learning disability (LD) to go undiagnosed. Klingner suggests using an “ecological framework” that “considers both contextual and intrinsic factors that can affect a student’s performance” (Klingner, NYC document, p. 7) to determine whether an ELL has a LD.

In order to effectively distinguish between language acquisition difficulties and learning challenges there needs to be a team-based process requiring extensive analysis of student opportunities to learn in the classroom and response interventions, consideration of background data and factors, and the use of appropriate formal and informal assessments over time to monitor student progress.

### **Opportunities to Learn and Response to Intervention (RTI)**

“We cannot distinguish between LD and language acquisition without making sure that ELLs are receiving adequate opportunities to learn” (Klingner, 2012). As all EAL students are diverse in needs and backgrounds, a thorough profile needs to be established for new students during intake, gathering information about L1 education, first languages, cultural background, family circumstances and other specific needs. This “profile can be a powerful tool for informed decision-making about the kind of EAL support required within a school and a classroom” (Prokopchuk,

2017, Module 1). Along with the profiling at intake, whether at a centralized center or at school, it is important for newcomers to be directed and set up with other organizations that can support the student and family. School staff needs to keep in mind the diversity of EAL students and understand the stages newcomer students go through. Teachers must also be aware of their cultural beliefs and values and understand “the underlying values and belief systems that, translated into action or inaction often lie at the root of miscommunication” (Helmer & Eddy, 2012, p. 88). Following this, provision of quality instruction and appropriate assessment in a culturally responsive classroom occurs. Quality instruction includes taking into account students’ cultural backgrounds, providing research-based instruction and strategies such as scaffolding, comprehensible input and contextual supports, and use of appropriate assessment. Differentiated instruction and use of sheltered content classrooms as warranted should also be key components of effective instruction. Teachers must also be aware of the similar characteristics of LD and language acquisition difficulties, notably: difficulty following directions; slower processing speed; poor auditory memory and difficulty concentrating; being easily frustrated; and confusion with figurative language. However, there are slight differences to some of these behaviors when acquiring L2 over an LD.

ELL students may have difficulties with phonological awareness distinguishing sounds not in their L1, with sound symbol correspondence when different from L1 and difficulty pronouncing these sounds, as well as not remembering sight words when meanings are not understood (Klingner, 2012). It is also important to note, “EAL learners can miss the meaning of an entire lesson if key words in readings and presentations are beyond their level of proficiency” (Prokopchuk, 2017, Module 10). When students struggle, the first step is observation of the classroom setting. Klingner (2012) states that some ELLs are taught in ‘disabling

contexts,' with too few opportunities to develop their language/literacy skills.

The Response to Intervention (RTI) approach is a popular approach used by many school divisions in Saskatchewan to assess the quality of instruction. "RTI seeks to ensure that the learning difficulties are not the result of extrinsic issues in teaching, instruction, curriculum etc." (Ortiz, 2017). "It is a 'three-tiered' approach that supports student learning by adjusting and modifying classroom instruction to meet student needs" (Prokopchuk, 2017, Module 10). Tier 1 is quality instruction and progress monitoring, while Tier 2 includes small group intervention support. Students who do not progress enter Tier 3 for intensive support and further evaluation or possible special education placement. "There is general agreement among RTI specialists that about 90% of students remain in Tier 1, while 5% of students require additional, targeted support in Tier 2, and the remaining 5% require more intensive levels of support in Tier 3" (Prokopchuk, 2017, Module 10). RTI address learning needs and measures the individual's success. It is a team approach which often includes the classroom teacher, EAL specialist, consultants and when needed, and the Special Education teacher. When students continue to struggle after Tier 1 and Tier 2 supports, further investigation and evaluations by school team personnel is required.

### **Student Background and Assessments**

When a student shows signs of struggle and is not progressing, there are many possible reasons as to why and, as Klingner (2012) states, "there is a process of elimination and need to look at many factors." If a student's true peers are progressing, it is time to collect student data. "It is important to consider the unique characteristics ELLs bring to the learning environment and to think about how factors including their familiarity with and exposure to English, socioeconomic status, prior schooling experiences, and life experiences, interact with and influence their learning" (Klingner, NYC document, p.8). Data collection on student background should

include information on previous schooling in L1, development in L1, the student's cultural, linguistic and social systems, socioeconomic status, evidence of culture shock or trauma, and supports provided at home for learning the new language. "Thomas and Collier concluded that the strongest predictor of academic success is the amount of formal schooling in L1" (Coehlo, 2012, p.139). As well, "ELLs with LD exhibit difficulties in their first language as well as in English" (Klingner, 2012). Refugee students require special attention, as "most refugee learners require support to build basic literacy due to interrupted education or no formal education. There may be also be psychological, social, or emotional complications resulting from trauma, persecution, political upheaval, or war" (Prokopchuk, 2017, Module 10). "When conducting the assessment, do so with the notion that there is nothing wrong with the individual and that systemic, ecological, or environmental factors are the primary reason for learning problems. Maintain this hypothesis until data suggest otherwise and all plausible external factors have been ruled out" (Klingner, NYC document, p. 1). Since there are no tests that can reveal whether a student has an LD and because formal tests that are norm based are not appropriate for ELLs, assessment is often informal. Review errors over time. "EAL learners generally make consistent errors; learning-disabled learners generally make inconsistent ones" (Helmer & Eddy, p. 81). Monitoring progress of ELLs should be multi dimensional and include multiple assessment methods.

Ortiz (2017) identifies the following as appropriate methods of evaluation: Curriculum Based measurement (CBM), Response to intervention (RTI with progress monitoring), Criterion referenced evaluation (class tests, benchmark performance) and Dynamic assessment (teach-test-teach models). "Authentic Dynamic Assessment is a particularly useful evaluation approach as it can be used with classroom materials and academic content. The goal is to ascertain the degree of instruction required to promote learning.

The less assistance required, the greater the individual's "learning propensity" (Ortiz, 2017). The focus is on developing a profile of strengths and weaknesses and areas of need and to set a plan for intervention. If after quality instruction, intervention, appropriate assessments and background data have been taken into account and there is still no progress, further intervention by special education personnel may be in order to address a learning challenge.

### **Conclusion**

Distinguishing whether an ELL has a language acquisition problem or an LD is a very complex and difficult task. There are no easy tests, no quick fixes. If it were easy, there would not be numerous studies on the topic. Incorporating differentiation and scaffolding in instruction, using multi-dimensional assessment over time, and performing interventions as well as considering student backgrounds, are all examples of best practice. They do not give us the 'answers' but can at least lead us in the right direction.

I will be more insistent that systematic information gathering and appropriate classroom-based interventions occur before my involvement. We have sheltered content classes in our high school, which are crucial for student success, but we also have many EAL students integrated into mainstream classes in which the teachers are still unprepared and lack the knowledge (and time!) to provide the level of scaffolding and differentiation needed to support the students. Therefore, this leads me to believe I must ensure that appropriate classroom supports have been in place long enough before warranting further assessments from the lens of special education. Teachers must follow the Adaptive Dimension, whether for my students with learning challenges or EAL students. A collaborative, team approach to informal assessment will occur. And when appropriate, a shared service delivery will be established.

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## *17 – Disproportionate Representation of English Language Learners in Special Education*

CARI PANKEWICH

The landscape of Saskatchewan schools is changing. The Ministry of Education indicates that in September 2017, 9.2% of Saskatchewan students in Grades 1-12 were receiving EAL support. School divisions have noted that even newcomer students who arrive with some English language skills require EAL support to reach adequate proficiency levels for school purposes (ECUR 415 Module 1 Slide Presentation). EAL students enter school with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds that are different from their mainstream peers. This diversity can be misunderstood in the classroom context, resulting in disproportionate placement numbers in Special Education. This paper aims to provide information regarding the reasons that EAL learners are disproportionately represented in Special Education, how this placement affects EAL students, and how teachers can move toward a more balanced view of their EAL students.

### **Difference or Disability**

In the general population, about 12% will have a learning disability whether they speak one language or several, whether they speak English or another language. However, the same percentage of ELLs are not necessarily identified as having a learning disability and have been both under- and over-identified (Hamayan, Marler, Sanchez-Lopez, & Damino, 2007). Sullivan (2011) suggests that understanding the underlying issues regarding the disproportionate numbers of ELLs in special education requires an examination of current practices and willingness to explore new ways of defining educational practices. Disproportionately classifying ELLs as learning disabled will not aid ELLs, as many of their struggles are based on language development.

Traditionally, guidelines for identification of students with special needs have been designed for a monolingual, mainstream population. Such guidelines put culturally and linguistically diverse students at risk for either over-referral or under-referral to special education (Ortiz, 1998). Collier (2004) explains that the differences that ELLs may display in the classroom can be mistaken for disability. Teachers need to be aware that although social and everyday English can develop quite quickly in ELLs, research suggests that it can take at least five to seven years to develop the academic and language skills of their monolingual peers (Cummins, 1995, 1997, 2000). Adolescent ELLs may face more challenges in this respect and struggle with academic subjects due to lack of adequate academic language skills. Cummins (1995) expresses concern about Special Education placements, explaining that they are not a viable option for the amount of time that a student may need support in mastering the academic aspects of English.

### **Teachers' Limited Understanding of Language Learning**

EAL learners bring with them a range of skills and strengths. What they do not have are strong English skills. "We must make sure that we remember what they *do* have, and not always focus on their weaknesses, namely a lack of English" (Helmer and Eddy, p. 71).

Confronted with a struggling English language learner, many classroom teachers can be confused by the student's lack of academic progress. Often the teachers faced with this situation turn to special education for assistance because they are unsure of how to adapt their English language curriculum to meet the student's needs. They are also uncertain about how to determine whether EAL students are experiencing problems due to learning disabilities or due to their limited English language proficiency. They may believe their only recourse is to refer the student for an assessment and special education placement. Therefore, placements are not due to developmental delays but the inability to follow the regular streamed program due to language barriers.

According to Collier (2004) and Cummins (1995, 1997, 2000), there are many stages of acculturation when a child is learning new academic language and is in a new setting. Not behaving and not attending to the task at hand is typical for a beginner ELL. In some cases, students may not speak at all for the first year. Each ELL reacts differently when starting school, but these behaviors are usually due to limited English proficiency. As students become acculturated, they understand more in the classroom.

### **Assessment**

Due to the language and cultural differences, the reliability and validity of standardized tests may be affected. As a result of these differences, many ELLs may be inappropriately identified as having a disability. Assessments used in schools should be accessible and free of cultural and linguistic biases. However, these assessments are designed for English-speaking mainstream students, and are often beyond the academic reach of English language learners (Cummins 1995, 2000). The use of standardized tests does not adequately demonstrate an English language learner's cognitive ability, therefore the sole use of these tests to make placement and educational decisions is ineffective and inappropriate. As Klingner and Harry (2006) posit, schools should not rely only on standardized test scores, but should perform other alternative

assessments to obtain the overall picture of the English language learner's abilities.

According to Ortiz et al. (2011), in order to make special education referral decisions, educators must first collect baseline data that demonstrates English language learners' language and literacy skills and tracks their progress in over time. Teachers must also systematically assess and track English language learners' reading skills and development in areas such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Through monitoring progress in these areas, teachers can determine if English language learners have not made expected progress using culturally and linguistically responsive interventions, which may then lead to a consideration for special education (Ortiz & Yates, 2001).

### **Cultural Factors**

Much research has been conducted regarding cultural and socio-economic factors as contributing to the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education programs (Degato-Gaitan,1990; Delpit,1995; Gee,1996; Heath,1983; Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez,1992; and Moll & Greenburg,1990). This research has demonstrated that when students and teachers are knowledgeable about each other's culture, learning is enhanced. Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez (1992) observed that cultural practices shape thinking processes; therefore, in order to enable students to develop higher order thinking, students' cultural background should be incorporated in school learning.

Research on minority family literacy practices (Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Heath, 1983; Li, 2006) found that literacy practices of the culturally diverse are often very different from the mainstream, in terms of beliefs and practices about instruction and parental involvement, which may conflict with mainstream teaching models. North American models of teaching and learning tend to be teacher-centered and may disregard the autonomy of immigrant students and families with regard to what they are able to

contribute to the school and learning. In reality, these families have vast knowledge bases from their homes and communities (Moll, 2004; Moll, Amanti, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll & Greenburg, 1990)

Mainstream parents do not necessarily have more interest in their child's education, but have better resources to mediate the school system to help their children. These resources may include education, income, status, and social network. Despite the inequity of resources, schools tend to ask for very similar types of behavior, although resources are not equally available (Lareau, 2000, p. 8). Education is most often grounded in mainstream culture; teachers often filter curriculum through their own mainstream cultural backgrounds and teach the way they were taught. The primary discourse of students from mainstream backgrounds is often similar to that of the school, as their mother language (English) is used by the teacher in instruction.

### **Effects of misrepresentation**

The overrepresentation of ELLs in special education is complex, with a variety of factors contributing to the dilemma. Disproportionality refers to "the extent to which membership in a given group affects the probability of being placed in a specific disability category" (Oswald, Coutinho, Best, & Singh, 1999, p. 198). According to the American Psychological Association *Individuals with Disabilities Act* (IDEA), a child is not eligible for special education services if the determining factor is due to limited English proficiency. Consequently, if a student is inappropriately placed in special education, it could result in underachievement. Hence, if steps are not taken to properly regulate how referrals are made, there will be serious consequences. If the ELLs needs are not those best suited to special education, the remediation is futile. This situation is partly because the student might not suffer from a real cognitive processing problem, and as such, the placement will not be able to solve the problem if the issue is due to cultural differences between the child and the school (Ortiz, 1991). Moreover, research suggests that labelling also leads to

stigmatization, segregation and low self-esteem (Oriz, et al., 2011). The misplacement often predisposes students to other risk factors like learned helplessness, low academic performance, disruptive behaviour, and drop-out, which reinforces the designation. The more compelling reason for determining proper placement for ELLs is that we must ensure the most effective learning environment for these students. If a student is having difficulties in school because of second language issues, the best support for that student would come from expanding proficiency in English as a second language, and not from special education interventions (Damico & Hamayan, 1992).

### **Moving Forward**

In summary, this paper aimed to examine why there is a disproportionate number of ELLs that are being referred to Special Education programs. The influx of immigrants to our province means that there must be timely education on the parts of educators to understand the factors which affect language learning. We know that the acculturation process can mimic certain academic delays, therefore, students must be allowed time to learn language. Disproportionate number of referrals can be due to misunderstanding of difference or disability, lack of understanding about the needs of EAL students, skewed assessment practices, and cultural mismatches. The effects of misrepresentation can include stigmatization, learned helplessness, and inappropriate learning programs and goals. Through education and increased understanding, teachers can become more culturally responsive in their teaching and allow for the inclusion of varied learning needs. Teachers can work to create positive classroom climates for all students by incorporating inclusive teaching practices such as culturally responsive teaching. Culturally responsive teaching is based on the socio-cultural understandings of learning. Socio-cultural perspectives of learning see learning as participatory, relational, and interactive, and ask educators to relate the practices of school to practices which exist within the wider community (Moll,

& Greenburg, 1990). Through the use of culturally responsive methods of teaching, educators are encouraged to examine their own understandings about learning and culture, which may be biased. Understandings such as the official structure of the classroom, student teacher interaction, lesson transmission, and curriculum and hidden curriculum content which exists within the classroom: "In culturally responsive teaching, knowledge is viewed passionately and critically, and all biases are unmasked for what they are and are open for discussion" (Quiocho & Ulanoff, 2009, p. 9).

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## Glossary

*The following glossary terms are reprinted from the online course ECUR 415: Current Issues in EAL (University of Saskatchewan, 2017). The definitions may be helpful to your understanding of information and perspectives within this essay collection.*

**Academic language:** describes language that is specific to schooling, including classroom terminology, subject specific vocabulary, and language used in course materials, texts, assignments, and exams.

**Adaptive dimension:** refers to adjustments in instructional materials, methods, and/or the learning environment, so that outcomes can be achieved by diverse learners.

**Alternative assessment:** approaches to monitoring student learning that consider a learner's specific circumstances, vulnerabilities, or language learning needs.

**Assessment:** the process of gathering information on an ongoing basis in order to understand a student's progress with learning.

**Authentic language:** language used in real world situations and for real purposes *by* native speakers, intended *for* native speakers.

**BICS:** stands for Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills, a term that describes conversational language, or the language used to carry out everyday tasks and routines.

**Bilingualism:** the ability to communicate fluently in two languages using spoken and/or written language. In Canada, the term

bilingualism often refers to the ability to communicate in both official languages, English and French.

**CALP:** stands for Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency, a term that encompasses academic language, or the language specific to schooling and subject-area learning.

**Citizenship:** being a legal member of a particular country or sovereign state and accepting its policies, regulations and criteria for citizenship.

**Code switching:** a term used to describe the ability to alternate between two or more languages in the context of oral communication.

**Cognates:** words in two languages that sound somewhat similar and share the same meaning (e.g., bluzza – blouse, comprendre – comprehend).

**Common underlying proficiency (CUP):** a theory developed by Jim Cummins that illustrates how cognitive and literacy skills established in a first language (or mother tongue) are transferred to new languages. This theory is also called the *Iceberg Model*. The invisible part of an iceberg under water is the common operating system in the brain that stores concepts, while the visible peaks represent two or more languages that share the same conceptual base.

**Comprehensible input:** a strategy for language learning that involves the use of language that is slightly above the level of language that is understood by learners. Krashen described this small margin between the known and the new as  $i + 1$ .

**Community (heritage) languages:** languages other than Canada's official languages that are being studied or used for communication, and represent the heritage of Canadian residents.

**Content objectives:** statements that define what a student is expected to know, understand, and be able to do at the end of each grade, unit, or specific course of study. (In Saskatchewan, content objectives are called *learning outcomes*).

**Contextual support:** additional layers of support for language learning and comprehension that involve the use of available contexts. Examples are: activating prior knowledge, using visuals, props, gestures, hands-on activities, key words, specific instructions, pre-teaching strategies, comprehension checks, or incorporating first languages.

**Cultural values:** commonly held standards or norms for what is considered acceptable or unacceptable, important or unimportant, right or wrong, in a community or society.

**Culturally responsive teaching:** promotes a proactive approach to cultural diversity by incorporating a student's background knowledge and prior home/community experiences into the curriculum as part of daily instruction.

**Culture shock:** feelings of distress, loneliness, anger and frustration in a new and unfamiliar environment.

**Developmental continuum:** a sequence of skills that identify stages of learning in a particular domain. In the context of this module, the domain is L2 language development.

**Differentiated instruction:** adjusting instruction to meet individual needs through adaptation of content, process, products, or the learning environment.

**Dual language program:** based in USA, these programs use two languages for instruction throughout the day. The aim of dual (or two-way) language programs is to close the achievement gap by facilitating the use of a home language and English for instruction.

**EAL:** an acronym for *English as an Additional Language*, which is a term used in Saskatchewan and in other parts of the world to describe school students who speak other languages and are adding English to their language repertoire.

**Economic immigrants:** people selected for their skills and ability to contribute to Canada's economy, such as skilled workers, business immigrants, provincial and territorial nominees and live-in caregivers.

**Evaluation:** interpreting evidence of student performance over time as a culminating act (e.g., the end of a course or a grade) to determine results of learning.

**Formative assessment:** information that is gathered during and after learning to inform planning, adjust instructional approaches, and support student achievement.

**Functional literacy:** the ability to read, write, and perform basic mathematical calculations.

**Immersion program:** designed to teach language through subject area content by immersing students in the target language beginning in Kindergarten and moving through the grades. Students gain greater levels of proficiency as they achieve curriculum outcomes in the target language.

**Inclusion:** an attitude or belief system supporting an unconditional commitment to help every child and young person succeed in school, at home and in the community. In the Saskatchewan context, inclusive education promotes the integration of learners into age and grade appropriate classrooms together with peers.

**Indigenous language:** a language that is native to a particular region and the people who have lived there for many generations.

In Canada, the term is used to describe the languages and dialects of aboriginal (indigenous) peoples.

**Initial Assessment:** involves a series of assessments administered in the days and weeks following arrival to help determine a child's English language proficiency, math skills, and school readiness.

**Intake:** a term used to describe the combination of registration and orientation procedures for newcomers in a new school location.

**Integration:** involves processes that allow newcomer families and those from diverse backgrounds to become active, connected, and productive citizens without fear of discrimination, prejudice, or bias.

**Interpretation:** involves the transmission of a spoken message from one language to the other.

**L1, L2, L2L:** acronyms that represent first language, second (additional) language, and second language learners.

**Language competence:** describes a language learner's abilities, skills, and knowledge in the target language as demonstrated along an accepted performance scale.

**Language continuum:** illustrates the stages of language progression as evidenced by research using various languages and various ages of language learners.

**Language objectives:** present the academic language required to achieve content objectives. Language objectives reinforce the knowledge and skills identified in content objectives.

**Language reference scale:** a chart that describes language ability

at each stage of language learning from the beginner level (no mastery) to the highest levels of language proficiency.

**Language proficiency:** the combination of language fluency and accuracy, resulting in the ability to use language competently for various purposes and in different circumstances.

**Large-scale assessments:** widely distributed educational tools designed to determine the effectiveness of the education system on a district, provincial, national, or international level.

**Linguistic repertoire:** a fluid network of communication that encompasses all of the accepted ways of formulating messages in different languages, including regional varieties of language.

**Marginalized status:** describes students who are victims of systemic discrimination, prejudice, or identity devaluation due to existing societal power structures. There are negative effects on student identity, self-worth, self-confidence, and academic success.

**Multiculturalism:** a Canadian policy adopted in 1971 that affirms the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language, or their religious affiliation

**Outcomes:** statements that define what a student is expected to know, understand, and be able to do at the end of each grade, unit, or specific course of study.

**Permanent resident:** someone who has immigrated and received permission to live in Canada indefinitely through permanent resident status, but is still a citizen of another country.

**Protocol:** a set of rules that explain the correct conduct and procedures to be followed in formal situations. In the context of

this module, school registration follows protocols established by the provincial ministry of education.

**Reception:** refers to the way a newcomer family enters a school division for the first time. Reception may be conducted at a newcomer welcome centre (centralized reception), or families may be directed to the local school.

**Refugee:** someone who is forced to leave his or her country/ location due to persecution, war, trauma or violence brought on by political, social, racial or religious tensions.

**Response to Intervention (RTI):** a three-tiered approach that recommends universal screening, early intervention, continuous monitoring, and learning adaptations to prevent academic and behavioral failure for children who continue to have difficulty.

**Scaffolding:** describes the process of providing initial support to assist students with learning and gradually removing this support when students demonstrate the skills or knowledge to proceed independently (also called *gradual release of responsibility*).

**SWIS:** a school-based outreach program of the Canadian government designed to help newcomer students and families with settlement needs, community integration, and school transitions.

**Tiered vocabulary:** describes a language learning model that divides vocabulary acquisition into three tiers, with Tier 1 as conversational language, Tier 2 as recurring or procedural academic language, and Tier 3 as highly specific, subject-related academic language.

**Translation:** involves the transfer of written messages from one language to another language.

**Vicarious trauma:** second-hand trauma that affects people in the helping professions due to sustained care and empathy for the circumstances of the victims.

**Vulnerable learners:** students with an increased risk for

academic or social disadvantage due to specific conditions, characteristics, or demographic factors that have a negative impact on learning at school.