

FROM FABRIC TO QUILT:  
ADAPTABILITY IN TEACHING EAL STUDENTS  
FROM A CLASSROOM TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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by

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## **Abstract**

As the mosaic of our classrooms becomes more diverse, teachers need to be able to celebrate the multilingual, multicultural students and provide the academic and social opportunities for their students. As well, teachers need to use culturally relevant pedagogy and diverse instructional strategies within the curriculum that will allow all students to develop meaningful language experiences. Through narrative inquiry and through qualitative research, I have examined my teaching practices and methodologies in relation to the observations and critical conversations with EAL teachers directly involved in the instruction and English language development as support for linguistically and culturally challenged students in the elementary school setting. I have taught a community of diverse learners with rich heritages and backgrounds in a multilingual classroom, and I have learned, from these four specialist teachers, to be more knowledgeable in teaching strategies and more adaptable in implementing culturally relevant content.

For a brief time, I was able to enter four different classrooms of students, who had come from many different countries and had been removed from their regular classrooms to receive EAL support. Through observations of these students, and interviews and dialogues with specialist EAL teachers, I have been able to critically reflect upon and analyze my results, expanding my repertoire of instructional practices as a multilingual classroom teacher. By allowing me into their professional spaces, and by sharing their teaching practices as English language specialist teachers helping students, I have been both inspired and enlightened.

EAL students in our communities and classrooms will bring their personal experiences and rich cultural backgrounds, created from their multigenerational histories. As teachers create welcoming classrooms, all students will receive the language support that they need, without

losing their cultural beliefs and values. School families and communities can become the threads that will eventually create a fabric, rich in design and texture. In representing the Canadian mosaic of individuals, this journey metaphorically takes our students, from individual fabrics to quilts of many hues and patterns.

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## **Dedication**

To my mother, Mary, who instilled in me a love for fabrics and sewing, and who told me once that the pieces that I really wanted to throw away would make into a beautiful dresser covering, if only I could come up with a design; for her words of encouragement when I was just a struggling beginning teacher, I thank you mom.

As the pieces of my life have fit together in a quilt I never could have designed alone.

## Table of Contents

Permission to Use .....	i
Abstract .....	ii
Acknowledgements .....	iv
Dedication .....	v
Table of Contents .....	vi
List of Figures .....	viii
<i>I Am an ESL Student</i> .....	ix
Chapter One - Introduction .....	1
The Materials in a Quilt .....	1
Saskatchewan: The Quilt’s Borders .....	4
Key Language Terms .....	6
The Research Question .....	7
The First Pieces .....	8
English as an Additional Language .....	10
Many Patterns Emerge .....	12
The First Few Stitches .....	13
Some Stabilizing Threads .....	14
Chapter Two.....	17
A Growing Mosaic in Saskatchewan .....	17
Historical Background .....	18
Changing Demographics.....	20
Canada’s Humanitarian Actions .....	23
Challenges and Anxieties in Language Acquisition .....	26
Culturally Relevant Teaching .....	31
Supporting Students .....	40
The Multilingual, Differentiated EAL Classrooms .....	43
Teaching Programs: Curriculum for EAL Learners .....	48
Teaching and Technology .....	57
Multilingual Communities .....	59
Chapter Three.....	61
Methodology: Assembling the Quilt.....	61
The Research Question: The First Layers.....	62
Qualitative Research .....	65
Fieldwork: Beyond the Theory .....	66
Participant Selection .....	68
Data Collection .....	69
Data Analysis and Naturalistic Inquiry.....	71
Consent .....	76
Procedures for Confidentiality .....	77
The Next Quilt to be Made .....	77
Chapter Four .....	79
Results and Analysis: The Colourful Quilts Emerge.....	79
Providing EAL Instruction.....	81
Supportive Agencies .....	85

Pull-Out Programs: As a Service Model.....	87
The Light in their Eyes .....	91
Building a Cultural Community: Walter, Teacher Mentor .....	91
Gail’s Story .....	98
Larry’s Role – Students beyond Borders via Taxi.....	103
Brenda’s Story .....	106
The Delivery of the EAL Curriculum.....	110
Teacher Planning and Organization.....	115
Physical Environment .....	116
The Challenges: Some Broken Threads.....	117
Engaging Language Opportunities .....	118
Students as Gift .....	119
Goals of Teachers .....	120
Additional Thoughts .....	121
Chapter Five.....	124
Completing the Research: We are all One People .....	124
Adaptability of EAL Students.....	125
Effective Teaching Strategies: The Strongest Quilt.....	133
Models of Delivery .....	136
Challenges in the Model .....	137
Welcoming New Families.....	142
Supporting Literacy through PWIM .....	144
The External Environment.....	147
A Bright Future: More Quilt Designs .....	148
From Fabric to Quilt .....	153
References.....	154
Appendix A: Application Form for Permission to Conduct Research in Saskatoon Public Schools.....	168
Appendix B: Letter of Consent for Participant/Teacher .....	172
Appendix C: Letter Of Consent For Release Of Transcripts.....	175
Appendix D: Letter of Assent for Classroom Observation.....	177
Appendix E: Interview Questions – Audio Taping for all EAL Teachers – 45 - 60 minutes....	178
Appendix F: Online Informational Sites.....	180
Appendix G: Children and Young Adult Books.....	181



## List of Figures

Figure 3.1: A Global Constructivist Approach. Based on the Definition of Effective Teaching, March, 2007 .....	75
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## ***I Am an ESL Student* by Neil Horne**

*I am an ESL student...*

I did not choose to be here, or to leave my friends, or to leave my home

I do not look like my brother or my sister, I look like me, and that is normal, it is you who looks strange I am very fortunate because at the end of the day I will have two or three languages

*you see, I am an ESL student...*

I like blue jeans – the first time I saw my national dress was at a Multicultural Night at my new Canadian school

I do not live on strange ethnic foods, I like ice cream, pizza, Coca Cola and junk food

I am not by birth-right a mathematics or science scholar

*you see, I am an ESL student...*

I am a child en route to adulthood and that trip will be as challenging for me as any other young person

I am not by ethnic definition a gang member, a cheat, a male chauvinist, a suppressed female, a bad driver, a compulsive gambler, or part of a close-knit extended family

I am not learning disabled, educationally retarded or in need of fixing, I just don't speak, write or read English well, but that will change

*you see, I am an ESL student...*

I am as unique as any Canadian-born young person and as a group my friends and I are as different and as similar as any group of young people

I would prefer to attend my neighborhood school and to become part of my community

I have parents who are very involved in my education, they may not, however, share your definition of involvement

*you see, I am an ESL student...*

I am not responsible for the sins of my father or his father

I, like you, have a personality that has been shaped, in part, by my culture; my parents, like your parents, have personalities shaped by their cultures, therefore we are different, And therefore, both of us must remember that our personalities are neither good or bad, they just are what they are

I come from a culture that is not without racist aspects, I have as much to learn about living in harmony as you do

*you see, I am an ESL student...*

I have a need to love and be loved, to praise and be praised, to correct and be corrected

## Chapter One - Introduction

### The Materials in a Quilt

A quilt that is stitched and designed ties cultures together. I believe that each person is a vital thread in another person's tapestry, and their lives are woven together for a reason, a season, or a lifetime. My thesis has given me an opportunity to observe students from a rich diversity of cultures: EAL (English as an Additional Language) students. In over 27 years, my experiences as a regular classroom teacher in multilingual classrooms have allowed me to build cohesive and collaborative relationships with my students as well as my colleagues. Using the tools of the curriculum and my abilities as a professional, my students have been able to learn about their world and themselves in it, through a changing, challenging, and adaptive curriculum. Over the years, thousands of students have entered my classrooms, full of hope and excitement. They were anticipating the myriad of learning opportunities that would be presented to them, as well as the friendships that they would form with their peers. In these buildings that we refer to as "schools," the classrooms of today are inherently more complex than the classrooms of the 1980s, when I began my career. In all areas, technology has created so many more opportunities for both teachers and students. Whiteboards, Smart Boards, and data projectors have replaced blackboards and film projectors. Within seconds, the World Wide Web can be accessed for current information and images, and opportunities for world travel have expanded. Students in classrooms today have sometimes come from any one of the six continents in the world.

Using the metaphor of the quilt to represent my understanding of a new group of students, I could make this connection: "...and the many pieces for my quilt lay scattered, colourful yet raw edged, threads everywhere, the potential design just in my imagination..." *As a classroom teacher, I was always excited for the first day of school. As I gazed upon my new*

*group of students each year, I saw wonder, apprehension, and excitement. A rich and varied background of color helped me to be cognizant that I would again have students from many backgrounds, heritages, and cultural milieus. The images were as vivid and varied as my most recently constructed quilt, machine, and handcrafted using 45 t-shirts. The wide bindings along all four sides were perhaps the most stable areas in the quilt. My multilingual classroom within the four walls, representing students from literally the four corners of the world, would present both opportunities and challenges for me in my teaching assignment.*

Educators and teachers, I believe, have always considered teaching to be a complex profession, and have attempted to meet the needs of all students. Yet today, the cultural diversity that exists in classrooms today necessitates that teachers will adapt teaching methodology to strive to meet the academic and social needs of this multicultural group of students. As the Federal Government mandates its target for immigration, data (2006, p. 5) indicated that: “Close to 90% of immigrants come to Canada from countries where neither English nor French is a first language.”

At the time of this writing, I had thirty students in my grade seven classroom, including at least one student each from China, Germany, Iran, Nigeria, and Taiwan. More than one student required EAL (English as an Additional Language) support, and had recently arrived in Canada. Within my school this past year, 20 students required EAL English language support, integrated within their regular classroom instruction. Within my school division, EAL English language specialist teachers, as well as Resource Room teachers, had been asked to assist in the instruction for students from kindergarten through to grade twelve. “A welcoming and inclusive multicultural school is one in which students and parents of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds feel welcome, valued, and included” (Coelho, 2004, p. 13). As Coelho stated, the

challenge for regular classroom teachers was to meet the diverse needs of these students, assisting with English language instruction, as well as helping these students adjust to a new cultural and educational environment, with the support of the designated EAL specialist teacher. This challenge for classroom teachers became my research focus: to observe English language specialist teachers in their classrooms, and analyze their teaching methodology and curriculum adaptations. My research question was: How could four English as an Additional Language teachers inform my classroom practices?

Much of the literature I reviewed described large urban centers, whose students and families had originated from the same countries, and they had settled into specific pockets or neighbourhoods in these cities. In large centers, often students were attending schools, coming from similar cultures, receiving instruction in English (bilingual education) from teachers who might also be able to speak their language. Honigfeld (2009) presented an overview of program organization issues related to the needs of ELL (English Language Learners) in the United States. She looked at four program models, including English as a Second Language model, describing the “push-in” and “pullout” programs (p. 168). Honigfeld summarized, “The relationships among the various curricular, instructional, and policy factors are intricate: Instructional decisions are triggered by national, state, and local (district or school-based) learning standards” (p. 169). Each model had its merits and documented success stories, and stakeholders and administrators in schools need to work collaboratively with each other, ensuring the success of all students.

In contrast, in western Canada, schools have multilingual classrooms composed of EAL students who come from many countries and other continents. For a number of reasons, such as war, civil conflict, political or religious oppression, poor social and economic conditions, lack of

educational or career opportunities, or simply a wish to move and work in another country, people and families have been motivated to emigrate and move. With changes in immigration patterns and with global tensions and political and economic shifts, students and their families have arrived from various countries at different times accordingly with the winds of uncertainty. Many families came in response to advertised skilled labour positions, in the fields of farming, electronics, mining, or simply as long-haul truck drivers with trucking companies.

Canada has promoted, increased, and welcomed new immigrants, providing educational and career opportunities, and promoting religious, social, political, and economic freedom. The population in the province of Saskatchewan has grown; families and children have settled and registered their children in both urban and rural school divisions.

### **Saskatchewan: The Quilt's Borders**

Since my teaching experience has been in Saskatchewan, this province was an ideal location for this research project. Due to the increasing diversity and economic growth in the province in the last few years, the province of Saskatchewan is establishing criteria to be consistently implemented in schools offering additional English language support to students. There is no Saskatchewan Curriculum for EAL and each school division develops their own English language support program.

The Saskatchewan Government (2007) Quarterly Population Report has recently increased the immigration quota and has changed the immigration policies regarding families in urban and rural areas. "10,403 people immigrated to Saskatchewan between October 1, 2007 and October 1, 2008." Statistics Canada (2009) through Canadian Citizenship and Immigration Resource Center, Inc. indicated that "Saskatchewan is quickly becoming one of the most booming provinces in Canada, and the provincial government has been working hard to attract

newcomers from other provinces and nations, aiming to welcome 10,000 new arrivals each year.”

Duffy (2005) stated:

...in a country that has embraced more than 3.3 million immigrants during the past 15 years, some clear and fundamental answers should be sought. How do ESL students fare when compared to other students? Are the ESL programs we have in place working? Are some better than others? Why? (p. 56)

As a teacher, I know that it is important to reflect upon and critically question the EAL programs and service delivery models that are currently in place. Many questions probe into the realities within the school districts, with the goal of meeting the needs of the increasing numbers of immigrants coming into Saskatchewan.

Related to the service delivery models for teaching English, are they meeting the needs of our students who are both immigrants and refugees? Is the pullout situation advantageous for these English language-challenged students? What is the current delivery model for teaching EAL students and how is its effectiveness measured? What accommodations are being made for international students at the high school level?

What does the research say about teaching EAL students? Is it the best practice to remove students from their neighbourhood schools and transport them by taxi to a central school to receive intensive English language instruction, two or three times per week? Is the current model in some school divisions an improvement, with the EAL specialist teacher moving from one school to another, trying to accommodate students? Are classroom teachers adequately prepared to educate and welcome EAL students into their classrooms? Are school districts prepared to provide support to EAL students and their families?



Are Resource Room teachers, if they are available, providing additional support to these students, as needed, cooperating with the classroom teachers? Are the high schools instructing EAL students in the best possible way, meeting their needs as well, and the needs of their families? What other local agencies are involved in helping families adapt to their new lives in Saskatchewan? These questions are being addressed by school districts who are trying to respond to this growing population increase in the best possible manner.

If a particular family cannot speak English when they are registering their children at a neighborhood school, it is currently recommended that any needed support be provided and a translator would be provided immediately through the support of outside agencies. Currently, major urban and rural school districts in Saskatchewan are responding to the growing need in helping immigrant and refugee students and their families assimilate into Canadian culture. Since this research has been conducted, positive changes within school districts have been made, re-structuring and re-shaping the delivery model of instruction and providing clearer assessment tools for EAL students. The access to information about ESL/EAL English language support programming is expanding rapidly, as the demand for implementing relevant teaching strategies and curriculum content rises. Other supportive agencies have become involved with families to assist in their settlement in communities.

### **Key Language Terms**

Nieto (2000, p. 383) included a glossary of definitions to clarify understanding of some of the following terms used throughout this research study. A few others have been added for clarification.

**ELL, or English Language Learner** refers to the student whose first language is not English and is a term used primarily in the United States.

**ESL, or English as a Second Language**, is a systematic and comprehensive approach to teaching English to students for whom it is not a native language. This term has been used globally to describe both students and programs pertaining to the acquisition of English for non-native speakers.

**Ethnography** is qualitative educational research that uses anthropological methods such as fieldwork, interviewing, and participant observation to study schools and students.

**Eurocentric curriculum** focuses primarily or exclusively on the values, lifestyles, accomplishments, and world views of Europeans.

**EAL (English as an Additional Language)** In Spring, 2009, the Ministry of Education changed the term ESL to EAL (English as an Additional Language) acknowledging that many students come to Saskatchewan schools functioning in more than two languages.

### **The Research Question**

In the multilingual classrooms of today, teachers have an important role to play in the lives of new immigrant and refugee students arriving in schools and classrooms. According to Cummins (1996), an expert on English language acquisition of school-aged children, the academic success or failure of EAL students is dependent on the ability of educators, students, and communities to genuinely become partners with families in the children's education.

When educators encourage culturally diverse students to develop the language and culture they bring from home and build on their prior experiences, they, together with their students, challenge the perception in the broader society that these attributes are inferior or worthless. (p. 3)

The classroom teacher will need to scaffold and support the language, emotional, and social needs of EAL students, adapting teaching methodology and curriculum, possibly working

together with outside agencies to ensure that the families are able to settle into their new lives. As a classroom teacher working with students who speak many languages other than English, I need to be flexible in trying new teaching methodology, patient in the delivery of meaningful curriculum choices, and adaptable in creating a warm and inviting classroom environment that will celebrate the differences and diversity brought by EAL students.

The research question framing this study was: How could four English as an Additional Language teachers inform my classroom practices? It was my intention to analyze the ways that these four teachers matched the pedagogical styles and organizational arrangements of literacy learning with immigrant children's language practices and cultural values. I also needed to record and analyze the school district's policies and resources available for classroom teachers to develop their proficiency in teaching children of limited English abilities in the regular classroom. Furthermore, I wanted to be able to make suggestions to teachers and administrators in order to facilitate further development regarding the education of EAL students in school districts.

### **The First Pieces**

I have always had an affinity and a love for the beauty of languages, especially French and Spanish, and different cultures, and the diversity that I saw and experienced in my life. When I received a young Chinese student into my grade seven classroom three years ago at the beginning of a new school year, I was unable to communicate with him. I was an experienced classroom teacher and had taught EAL students before but this student spoke almost no English, which made teaching a challenge. The journey that would take place in those next three years has shaped my teaching today, as I felt that I needed to implement specific teaching strategies

that would help him to learn English, communicate with his peers, and assimilate into the classroom situation, while still retaining his first language and culture.

Because I was taking a research course at that time and learning to extend research to my own teaching practice, I knew that this student had strong academic potential. I was searching for ways to enable him to develop sufficient oral language communication whereby we could begin to dialogue about important events regarding his previous school life in Shanghai, China. With his limited ability to understand and respond in both verbal and written English, I realized that my experiences in teaching English were limited in his case.

To become a culturally responsive teacher, I would need to adapt and change in the ways that I would relate to him as a student. I was determined to draw upon my years of teaching experiences and begin the process of understanding his culture, creating a bridge between what he knew and what I could draw out from him in our conversations. I created a goal that year: to make each day meaningful in language for this EAL student. Serendipitously, he would be the catalyst for my research. I would need diverse instructional strategies and I would need to adapt the curriculum in all subject areas.

Since he was eligible to receive additional EAL English language support beyond the classroom and the school building, in a pull-out model which was in place at that time, I was determined to learn about the day-to-day content that was presented to him. Since becoming aware of some of the literature regarding the acquisition of language, I was able to recognize the various stages in this student's progress in speaking with me.

## **English as an Additional Language**

As EAL students arrive in schools, it is important for teachers to have background knowledge to help them understand the language process. Cummins (1996), who has studied language and literacy development extensively, has made a distinction between cognitively demanding and undemanding language, as well as context reduced and context embedded language. He recognized that the communication more typical of the everyday world outside the classroom (social language) is different from the linguistic demands of the classroom (academic language), where subject content in the form of texts requires much more involvement, performance, and personal interaction.

His works reveals that the mastery of the two types of languages develops at different rates among English language learners. "The framework elaborates on the conversational / academic (or BICS/CALP) distinction by highlighting important underlying dimensions of conversational and academic communication" (p. 58). BISC or Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills refers to conversational fluency (social language), understanding others and being understood, developed within the first two years of immersion in an English environment. The Ontario Curriculum (2001, p. 7) supported Cummins' views: "The first language provides a foundation for developing proficiency in additional languages, serves as a basis for emotional development, and provides a vital link with the student's family and cultural background."

CALP or Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency refers to academic language, much more important in language acquisition, with much subject content embedded in texts, demands a much higher academic functional ability, placing the student at a similar level as their English-speaking peers.

Cummins, Pray, and Jimenez (2009, p. 382) wrote:

...one of the reasons that differences between native speakers and language-minority students persist longer in text-level skills than in word-level skills is that the 'catch-up' trajectories for these two components of literacy are very different (5 or more years for text-level skills compared with 1-2 years for word-level skills)" and "ELL students typically require at least 5 years to catch up academically (p. 383).

Other writers have supported Cummins' views: "The acronyms, BICS and CALP, are widely recognized labels for this distinction" (Cummins, cited in Richard-Amato, 2005, p. 76). Supporting Cummins' (1996) views, it becomes evident that because the EAL students will require much more time learning academic language proficiency at a level which would match their grade-equivalent peers, the role of the regular classroom teacher is critical, and will remain critical for the next few subsequent years.

Most recently, Cummins (2009, p. 383) further described why this inability for students to cognitively communicate with their peers was delayed: "vocabulary knowledge and phonological processing clearly follow different developmental trajectories after the initial grades." The classroom teacher needed to be able to support and scaffold EAL students' understanding and knowledge in all subject areas for a minimum of five more years, and would need the support of colleagues, the specialist EAL teachers, the administration, and the school division. Providing teachers with sufficient knowledge in scaffolding and supporting EAL students ensured the success for these students.

Using the metaphor of the quilt, I have woven my thoughts about quilt-making throughout this manuscript, and they will be recognizable by the use of italics. Speaking again about my classroom quilt and the writing of this thesis, I would need to sew a stabilizing,

continuous thread throughout this manuscript, representing my reflective thoughts, using an *italicized print* for emphasis. The italics reveal my ongoing thinking as I have attempted to interpret the information gathered through the literature available, in books, journal articles, on web pages, and through conversations with participant teachers and families. My ultimate goal was to synthesize the details, analyze the teaching methodologies for students requiring EAL English language support, and create a repertoire of skills and adaptations that would be effective for me, so that I would become that culturally responsive teacher.

*Creating a unique quilt requires that the designer is open to change and possibilities. Adapting a design, making it more suitable or aesthetically pleasing, is crucial to the finished product. In the classroom, both teachers and students need to be able to communicate, based on their cultural understandings. Language is part of culture, just as pieces of fabric can become a quilt.*

### **Many Patterns Emerge**

*As I began to reflect upon my multilingual classroom and the students, I was able to create an image of a large basket of scraps of material. As a young ten-year old, I learned to sew and quilt, and I loved designing and creating new things. As a researcher, I wanted be able to metaphorically use the terminology related to sewing and quilt making as a comparison to creating my multilingual classroom community each year. I am a visual individual, and I have appreciated the beauty and variety of colors and patterns in my everyday world.*

*New fabric pieces would be similar to new students in my classroom, for example, representing their diversity, background, and multi-faceted personalities. New students are often quite resilient, able to change their choices and to continue to learn new things, regardless of struggles; to work cooperatively and constructively with their teacher. Materials are resilient*

*also – able to be changed with temperature and pressure, time and patience. Depending on the design, materials can be rearranged and even re-shaped. Inside the quilt lies polyester batting which provides additional loft as well as warmth. The personalities of the students bring warmth and caring into the classroom environment, shaped by their heritages, life experiences, and families. A finished quilt could be the summation of a dynamic school year, blending in the students, staff, and families who supported and interacted with the school, giving their time, energy, and expertise.*

### **The First Few Stitches**

From the first day of school, teachers try to learn about their students. Through both academic and social learning opportunities, teachers interact with their students and visually observe social relationships among peers. These interactions help to provide the teacher with information about their students' lives. *The daily interactions I have had with my students, annually, represented the many stitches and pieces of fabrics.* When students are unable to communicate using the English language, the teacher's abilities to learn about those students becomes limited, at least temporarily. Upon further written assessment, the teacher may realize that the student struggles in following directions and generally does not understand classroom routines. Visually observing students and trying to interact with them and teach them requires a different lens. The teacher would need to be able to use an engaging, relevant curriculum in the classroom, in addition to implementing diverse instructional strategies. As well, other supports might be needed to assist the student in learning English. In the social context, other strategies would be required, including miming, hand gestures, and a welcoming attitude.

*All the students, like these pieces of material, needed the strong fabric of my determination. My ability to create a design for the quilt and my ability to adapt to the dynamics*



*of my students could be seen as parallel ideas.* The students required my knowledge on cultural perspectives, family life, and language, all of which became the bindings to stabilize and strengthen our relationships with each other.

### **Some Stabilizing Threads**

In my school division, the common practice for EAL students needing additional language support has been to remove the EAL students from their regular classroom for intensive English language support for a particular amount of time. The pullout program, up to eight hours per week, two or three times per week, would provide English language support, depending on initial assessment of spoken and written language ability. Within the past few years, students who were serviced included those from grade two to grade eight, in the elementary school system. Students were *pulled out* of their classroom, or even from their neighbourhood school, in half-day segments. That particular model, which was not specifically mentioned or supported in the research literature, created small multilingual classrooms with a maximum of fifteen students taught by an English specialist teacher.

Currently, the previous model has been adapted to deliver English language instruction in the pullout program, which does not require the students to be removed from their neighbourhood school. Instruction is provided by either an itinerant specialist EAL teacher, or even the Resource Room teacher. Based on initial language assessments, students receive language support and remain in the neighbourhood school in which they are registered. The majority of research dealt with schools with large populations of immigrant students within urban cities and also included the growing trend of the multilingual classrooms of today. For example, Kendall (2006, p. 30) wrote:

Although some question the effectiveness of instruction that is isolated from classroom contexts, a skilled teacher in a pullout setting can make it work. Success, however, requires constant communication with the classroom teacher to facilitate students' integration of strategies into classroom activities.

The importance of collaboration among teachers has been supported by other authors. Fu (2004) wrote: "But it is the disconnection between the ESL and regular classroom instruction that makes this system so ineffective. The solution is to combine efforts from both fronts" (p. 9). Fu's solution was relevant, indicating collaboration time between teachers, in addition to diversifying instruction. "Teachers who don't believe in using multiple books, having small-group instruction, or giving different assignments to meet individual needs shouldn't be teaching ELL (English Language Learner) students with limited English proficiency" (p.10). These important guidelines for teachers have been documented in articles and books and will be further discussed in the final chapter of this manuscript. *On-going communication between the regular classroom teacher and EAL specialist English language teacher is a vital thread in ensuring that the students' needs are being met.*

With specific leadership being established in various school divisions as a response to requests from EAL teachers, meetings were available to support English specialist teachers, as they worked together to meet the needs of all students. The team approach, which encouraged dynamic interaction and on-going support of English language support teachers, created a group of individuals who were strengthened to deliver the best program possible, as they worked together for common goals.

The experiences of feeling inadequate, uncertain, and "wobbly" on my teacher legs helped me to discern that I would need to be able to differentiate the curriculum and find the

threads of information and abilities which EAL students brought to my classroom. With the support of colleagues and an attitude of responding to the growing needs of all students in today's multilingual classrooms, teachers need to be prepared to meet the many challenges that they will face in their profession. To begin to respond to the research question, awareness of the current literature provides a theoretical framework which supports teacher and student learning.

In Chapter Two, I present some relevant background literature which will further support the instruction and program delivery needs of students requiring EAL support.

## Chapter Two

### A Growing Mosaic in Saskatchewan

*Creating a quilt initially requires assembling fabric pieces and other needed supplies, and preparing a design that will reflect an artist's creativity and workmanship.* Writing this chapter can be metaphorically compared to gathering the necessary supplies and beginning to create the quilt design. As the numbers of immigrant and refugee students continue to settle into rural and urban communities in Saskatchewan, school districts are faced with a multitude of decisions to make regarding the efficacy, effectiveness, and delivery of culturally relevant curriculums which will meet the needs of all students.

Some theoretical underpinnings include the changing demographics of our province, cultural backgrounds of students, the process of language acquisition, providing in-service to teachers regarding being culturally sensitive to the needs of EAL students, and knowing how to assess and deliver culturally relevant programs within the multilingual classrooms. To fully understand the importance of this research, it was necessary to present a brief historical background, indicating the beginning of EAL curriculums and immigration trends within Canada that have impacted both education and society.

As the demographics of Saskatchewan schools changed, it was also evident that challenges arose that impacted students, teachers, and their families. Immigrant families enriched our country and our province through their cultural backgrounds, and effective teachers strived to become culturally responsive to the academic and social needs of their students, in their delivery of relevant programs which met curriculum standards. Teachers who used a diverse blend of instructional activities would be able to motivate and inspire their students through their intensive, thorough planning, inherent in their professional practice.

## **Historical Background**

According to Ashworth (1988):

There was little official control on immigration to Canada prior to the first decade of this century...Between 1896 and 1911 the Canadian government actively sought agriculturalists for the prairie provinces and had no objection if they were members of a religious sect...Early in the new century, the federal government began to take control of immigration. (p. 33)

The research in this area suggested that immigration has continued to rise and fall because of both national and world events. For example, there have been immigrant children who came in a sponsorship program set up by the Federal Government of Canada, and with the recent tragic earthquake in January, the government was fast-tracking these Haitian children to be with their adoptive parents. Families have come from the Philippines, invited by certain companies to come to work in Canada. To fill vacancies in segments of employment shortages, there have been a large number of nurses who have come to Canada with their families, to work, and specifically in Western Canada in urban and rural areas. The universities, mainly requiring doctoral students, entice immigrant families to come, to study in the sciences where there are a number of funding opportunities for graduate research.

Immigration trends have a profound impact on societies and their educational programs, since families and students' rich cultural heritages are being assimilated into Canadian culture. Educators in schools have needed additional skills in teaching children whose first language has not been English; families have struggled to find gainful employment and settle in their neighbourhoods.

Ashworth (1988) stated:

“The Saskatchewan government leaves it up to the districts to set up their own assessment and placement programs...New students are placed in ESL programs upon teacher request and after a brief oral examination by the ESL coordinator or the teacher” (p. 127).

In 1984, the Saskatchewan Minister of Education formed a Committee on Curriculum and Instruction, which reaffirmed a commitment to instruct according to students' developmental levels.

In that same year, Saskatchewan Education wrote its *Programs and Policies*, indicating the need to adapt the environment, program, and instructional approaches. In 1985, *Toward the Year 2000: Future Directions in Curriculum and Instruction* was presented. One year later, the adaptive component was described in *Program Policy Proposals*. In 1987 the *Core Curriculum Plans for Implementation* stated that the adaptive dimension expectation was to be part of all programs of instruction. In 1992 the *Policies and Procedures* affirmed that all curricula had to be adapted to meet individual needs of all students. “The responsibility for providing good instruction lies with every teacher who is in contact with ESL students, whether that teacher is a specialist in ESL or a regular classroom teacher” (Ashworth, 1988, p. 145).

A Proposed Pilot course began in September, 1994, to help EAL students to develop a functional level of literacy in high school, and at that time, a provincially authorized curriculum did not exist. In the hearts and minds of a few, very dedicated individual teachers, necessary documents were submitted to SaskLearning (now referred to as the Ministry of Education), including instructional materials, student and program evaluation. Students had worked hard in a Grade 10 course of study titled ESL 10 L (\*L refers to a language class) and wanted to receive

high school credit. This was a manageable classroom at the time and the Ministry of Education granted approval for students to receive credit. This official approval paved the way for further communication regarding ESL students (prior term) and the potential that they bring to the educational system.

Program and instructional objectives, behavioural outcomes, and Common Essential Learnings were all included. Print and non-print resources, software including *The Rosetta Stone*, Internet sites and appendices on Language Development, Cultural Orientation, Learning to Learn and Instructional Strategies have all been documented.

A group of high school teachers believed they could make a difference by allowing immigrant students to receive credit for their EAL course. These teachers had worked with students from war-torn areas of the world like Africa, Al Salvador, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Yugoslavia, motivating these teachers to create the document. "Some children have witnessed appalling scenes of injustice and brutality which affect their subsequent behavior..." (Ashworth, 1988, p. 129) The first few immigrant and refugee students from Vietnam who arrived in the high school in one year were almost seen as celebrities, since they were so easily noticed. The following year, forty students came to this urban prairie high school, which changed the delivery of the program. Being able to adapt to these changing numbers in classrooms was crucial. Immigration policies were changing and creating opportunities for families to come to Canada and the schools needed to accommodate their language and social needs.

### **Changing Demographics**

It is evident in my classroom, and within many multilingual classrooms that the growing number of immigrants and refugees arriving in the province of Saskatchewan has shifted the

pedagogy of school classrooms. Teachers, like me, are expected to provide an educational and social environment which will meet the educational, emotional, and social needs of a diverse group of possibly thirty students, nine of whom do not speak English as their first language. This was my situation one year ago. For two of these nine students, their ability to communicate, either in writing or verbally, was understandably limited, as they came from China. Another student had only been in a Saskatchewan classroom for one year, emigrating from Germany with his family. In speaking with many of my colleagues, this is today's reality in the multilingual classroom.

This increasing multicultural group of students brings diversity to Saskatchewan's economy. These students also bring vitality and a freshness which creates the multidimensional aspect of what Canada has always been: a *mélange* of different cultures. *Quilts can metaphorically represent the growing diversity in our province, reflecting families' lifestyles and celebrations through an artistic palette of many stitches and designs. Historically quilts provided warmth, opportunities for freedom as maps to guide weary travelers northward to Canada, and even dowries for daughters. Today, quilts may even be seen as valued tapestries hung as murals.* The growth of Canada's population has been dependent upon the arrival of immigrant families spread across the country in urban and rural centers. During the past decade, the federal government has made a concerted effort to increase immigration quotas that will fulfill an array of employment and investment needs and opportunities. This diversity within Canada's borders has the potential to facilitate harmony and growth in understanding each other's cultures and paving the way to appreciating the differing lifestyles of other people.

Saskatchewan's population grew by 16 492 in 2007 to 1 006 644, an increase of 1.7%, well ahead of the national average growth of 1.1%, "the biggest one-year jump in our population



in more than half a century.” Increased immigration is continually highlighted in the media. From Statistics Canada (2009), Saskatchewan's population growth exceeded 1 million (December 19, 2008) and on Saturday, December 20, 2008, the headline for The Star Phoenix read, “There's 1 020 847 of us.” To boast a provincial population which exceeded one million in Saskatchewan was a newsworthy item.

More recent statistics from Statistics Canada (2009), a News Release, March 2009 indicated “...the population last year increased by 15,131 to 1,023,810, a new 20-year high.” As part of this news release, the Minister responsible for Immigration, Rob Norris said, “Newcomers help to build our communities through diversity and innovation.” Switzer (2010) wrote: “The population was up 3 711 during the first three months of 2010 – the largest first-quarter increase in the province since 1972...net international migration increased the population by 1,549” (p. A1).

The Government of Saskatchewan has a partnership with the federal government to attract more immigrants and to enhance settlement and integration services. With adequate skills, education, and work experience, immigrants might find positions in the labour force. As well, established citizens and permanent residents of Canada may sponsor their family members, which bring in more immigrants. From the March 27, 2009 News Release regarding immigration from Statistics Canada (2009), the information said: “The provincial government has set an aggressive immigration target of 3,400 nominations for the Saskatchewan Immigrant Nominee Program (SINP) for the 2009-2010 fiscal year. Including nominees, spouses and families, this represented more than 10,000 newcomers to our province.” The news release indicated that immigrants in SINP came from more than one hundred countries, including China,

Germany, the Philippines, Ukraine, and United Kingdom, which were the top five countries of origin.

This population surge will continue to have a dramatic effect on education. Though students from these families bring to their classrooms certain richness from diverse cultures, schools scramble to design professional development opportunities to meet the needs of these students. As families settle into prairie communities, questions arise about how the children of immigrants will succeed academically in school. As well, teachers will need to upgrade their professional practice for working with EAL students in multilingual classrooms.

Families from other countries have brought richness to communities, immersing themselves in their careers, raising their families, and becoming contributing members of society. Statistics Canada indicated that "Saskatoon's immigrants come from all over the world...the most common country of birth was China" and "The top ten countries of birth are: China, United Kingdom, the Philippines, the United States, Iraq, Yugoslavia, South Africa, Ukraine, Taiwan, and Iran...representing 59% of Saskatoon's immigrants...from four continents" (2001). When students are validated for their uniqueness, teachers can approach them positively. *Quilts are enjoyed and recognized for their beauty, intricate designs, and colourful motifs. In the diversity of designs, quilts are valued for their aesthetic appeal as well as the workmanship inherent in each piece.*

### **Canada's Humanitarian Actions**

Canada also offers refugee protection to people in Canada, following the humanitarian tradition of international obligations. The Government Assisted Refugees (GARS) program tries to respond to the desperate circumstances of refugees.

“Of the more than 7,000 refugees who arrive in Canada each year under the GARS plan, approximately 75% are children and youth who are school-age... Their parents are extremely poor, have low levels of education, minimal life-skills suited to the Canadian context, do not speak either English or French and are often illiterate in their first language” (Position Paper on Second Language Learning, September, 2006, p. 5).

Consequently, school districts need to be able to respond to the educational needs of these children and their families, as do their communities for many of these refugee children have experienced trauma and war.

For a recent example, Canada is one of the countries who began resettling **Ka-ren** refugees from Burma (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2006). Their settlement has presented a challenge.

The Karen, a minority ethnic group, fled their country in 1995 following a major offensive by the Burmese government army against the Karen National Union. They are part of the 140,000 Burmese refugees who have been living in Thai refugee camps for up to 20 years. In 2006, Canada accepted a first group of 810 Karen for resettlement.

The **Ka-ren** refugees (also referred to as the hill tribes) include those who come from Burma (now called Myanmar) and Colombia, who have left their countries due to political unrest. These families were fleeing to refugee camps, and have come to Canada with very limited exposure to schools. The students have a much lower level of English ability as EAL students with many social and emotional needs. They are learning to hold a pencil, sit in a desk, recognize the alphabet, and learn to read, which are challenging tasks.

According to Fu (2004), these cultural differences and perceptions related to family values are different in other countries:

And therein lies a cultural difference in the concept of family values. For centuries, Chinese men (now women too) have left their families (parents and spouses) to travel to a faraway land for education or a better life. To the Chinese, maintaining a sense of family structure means that someone in the family has to sacrifice the present to make sure the family can survive and be prosperous from generation to generation (p. 15).

In a similar way to the Chinese, the Ka-ren and other groups come with a desire to establish roots in a politically safe country. At times, some family members have immigrated, hoping to bring others later. Culturally this idea may seem foreign. For all cultures, there have been adaptations; to adapt is to change. Personal, emotional, and social strengths are needed in order for people to fit in successfully in another country. Cultural acclimatization is learning about another culture and being immersed in it. With continuing and increasing trends in immigration patterns, families from outside Canada have chosen to be immersed in another culture. To provide some distinction among terms used related to culture, Lessow-Hurley (2003) provided some useful definitions for these terms:

acculturation – learning the elements of a new culture

enculturation – children learn the elements of their own culture

assimilation – what happens to people as they enter a new culture and elements of their own are altered or even eradicated (p. 56)

As human beings are social, where we live and the language we speak defines us as individuals in a society. Families and communities have had to deal with their anxieties, hopes, and frustrations, as they have become assimilated into Canadian society. *By looking at quilt designs, it is possible to know the region and time period that the quilt was created (e.g. the log cabin design).* The next section will analyze some of those struggles faced by immigrants.

## **Challenges and Anxieties in Language Acquisition**

Regarding placement of immigrant students in school programs, Cummins (2006) prepared a major study in 1984 involving a thorough investigation into the theories and practices in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. His research and findings are highly recognized and accepted among most educators. Presented earlier in this document in chapter one, this relevant information by Cummins (2006) is noteworthy:

Specifically it takes only one to two years for students to become reasonably fluent in conversational English. About two years is also typically required for many students in the early grades to acquire basic decoding skills in English to a level similar to that of their English-speaking classmates. However, ELL students typically require at least *five years* to catch up to native English speakers in academic English (p. 6).

Richard-Amato and Snow (2005) supported this idea, and identified even further time for the catch-up period:

... research suggests that it takes five to seven years for second language learners who have received some schooling in their first language to compete with native English speakers; students who have had little or no instruction in their first language may take as long as seven to ten years to achieve on par with their native English-speaking peers.

(p. 86)

Cummins (2006) has clearly pointed out: “two reasons why such major differences are found in the length of time required to attain peer-appropriate levels of conversational and academic skills” (p. 62). In school, children expand their ability to handle increasingly complex language, as they use cues such as eye contact, facial expression, and intonation. Picture books provide many images for children and as the level of English difficulty increases, chapter books

and subject textbooks no longer have visual images to assist in the comprehension of the material. "Every year English L1 (first language) students gain more sophisticated vocabulary and grammatical knowledge and increase their literacy skills. Thus English language learners must catch up with a moving target" (p. 63).

Providing clarity to the above quote can be explained through Krashen (1983). When students acquire knowledge, this term is input (*I*), or new knowledge, which adds to the next understanding of a message. Krashen's term is:  $I + 1$  (input plus one), where the new knowledge is added on. When a teacher is able to create a climate which allows for low anxiety level, then this student can dialogue with peers and good communication and dialogue can happen with the teacher, as well. "The activities done in the classroom aimed at acquisition must foster a lowering of the affective filter of the students" (Krashen & Terrell, 1983, p. 21).

Optimal input which causes a lower filter is advantageous.

Krashen (1983), in speaking about language acquisition, wrote:

However, by paying close attention to the context and the key words in the sentences, they (second language learners) will be able to make a good guess at the meaning of the sentence. This 'contextual inferencing' is the secret to learning to understand a second language and to the eventual success of the student in the acquisition process. (p. 75)

Krashen and Terrell (1983) created the term, the "affective filter", which refers to a limiting factor in learning. They suggested that language was subconsciously attained, the first surface-level conversational proficiency. Most language learning happens at this level and there is a purpose in this learning. The second part of language acquisition is learning language through drills. Drills refer to the repetitive verbalization of vocabulary through listening, speaking, reading, and writing exercises, through direct or indirect instruction.

Krashen (1983) wrote that “the affective filter” will never be totally eliminated, though the goal for teachers is “to bring it down to as low a level as possible” (p. 59) by allowing students to speak when they are ready. Early speech production is not required; students need to individually decide when they want to begin speaking the ‘target language’. Single words and simple phrases can be spoken first, any attempt to speak is congratulated and praised, and speech errors do not need to be corrected until later on. The relevancy of the materials continues to be important: “the requirement that the input be interesting to the students will contribute to a more relaxed classroom” (p. 60). Students may go through a silent period, when they are listening actively to the spoken words, trying to connect these words with their own understanding in their own languages, and this time period is normal for these students. Students will speak when they are ready.

In learning any language, listening and speaking precede reading and writing. Krashen (2009) was a strong advocate of teaching students to read by reading, and by understanding what is on the page. Reading comprehension was most important, and he wrote:

I present here only a small portion of this research in an area that has not received much attention: studies of students of English as a foreign language...The results were startling...If it is true that more reading leads to better reading, as well as better development of other aspects of literacy, then increasing access to books should result in better reading. (p. 20, 21)

Krashen supported the idea that students will be motivated to read, and they will read when the material is self-chosen and interesting to them. The challenge for classroom teachers is finding relevant student materials, which will interest and motivate their students, at every grade level.

As a renowned authority on language acquisition, Krashen suggested comprehensible reading that was compelling, interesting, and would help students to use strategies that are innate. He wrote: “in acquiring vocabulary by reading, readers use cues external to the word, from the text and their prior knowledge” (p. 22). There are many extraneous interests for students beyond the school walls; the challenges in schools are to create a climate that entices students to seek challenges in learning about themselves and their world. Students need relevant information, challenging yet comprehensible, in an environment that lowers their anxiety level. In this way, they will become the engaged learners in the classroom, becoming life-long learners in our society. *The threads in a quilt are sewn at the proper tension, ensuring that the individual pieces lie flat and even, creating a uniform texture.*

Dragan (2005) further supported Krashen's term, filter: “anxiety creates a block, the affective filter, which closes students to comprehensible input and gets in the way of learning” (p. 23). As well, Russell (2007) wrote: “Any teacher will tell you that a lack of student motivation may be the most important factor in limiting teachers' effectiveness” (p. 771). It is the responsibility of teachers to try to engage their students in relevant learning experiences, and the more varied these experiences, the more successful the students will be, as they respond to the activities presented to them.

Cummins (2006) asserted:

The assumption that only ESL teachers are responsible for ESL support is clearly problematic in view of (a) the timelines required for ELL students to catch up academically, and (b) the fact that even beginning ELL students are likely to spend only one or two periods per day with the ESL teacher, while the rest of the time is spent in the mainstream classroom. (p. 5)



Teachers have an important role in creating situations, both academically and socially, to prevent such lags in academic achievement. Both the EAL teacher and the regular classroom teacher need to work together with all professional individuals, to ensure an effective communication network with the students' families.

Typically, students from other countries demonstrate substantial language deficiencies in English skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. They do not understand our Canadian culture, which hinders their academic study. The aims for educators include improving the literacy skills in English for these ESL/ESD (English as a Second Dialect/Aboriginal) students and helping them learn cultural concepts. Students from different dialects, however, are not included, generally, in receiving EAL language support, outside the classroom.

Most students will become somewhat functional in their language acquisition and usage within two years, their social language development. "The major goal of any ESL classroom is to provide students with the language skills they need to be successful in grade-level classrooms in as short a period of time as possible" (Custidio & Sutton, 1998, p. 20). It is important to note that many factors are involved in this idea: parents' ability to speak English, parent involvement and communication with the school, cultural norms regarding education, and others. Adding to that viewpoint, Pransky and Bailey (2002) wrote: "One of the main challenges for many at-risk students is bridging the gap between their home cultures and the culture of the public school" (p. 373). Pransky and Bailey's words have been based on this idea: "Our main premise is that learning is fundamentally a social and cultural process. In this sense, instructional tasks are social and cultural tasks in which students make meaning based on their previous life." (p. 382)

Supporting the concept that learning is a social and cultural process, Vygotsky's (1978) perspectives are relevant. "Vygotsky's concept of the student's zone of proximal development

has important implications for helping Western educators analyze classroom literacy instruction and assessment practices” (Dixon-Krauss, 1996, p. 15). Vygotsky explained that the student must be engaged in an instructional activity that exceeds his/her ability to perform independently, and an adult must be able to support that child's performance. For the EAL student, this concept of the zone of proximal development forms the brace to support English language development, as the student socially constructs language within the multilingual classroom environment. The gap between what the student knows in his/her own language (actual development) and what he/she will be able to do by problem solving supported by an adult or more capable peers are the zones or stages. Vygotsky's contributions to education and social learning have been recognized in much of the literature regarding second language learning. Immigrant changes in population have implications for the students in our schools, as well as the professional development of teachers in in-service and pre-service learning. An understanding of culture and its influence upon children's lives cannot be ignored.

### **Culturally Relevant Teaching**

For both teachers and students the students' ability to communicate, both orally and in writing, is inextricably woven into their capacity to survive in a global or worldly context, presented in a particular culture. The students have many challenges in their paths, and their interactions with their teachers will be complex and vital. As an educator, I strongly agree with Ferst (2007) who stated, “We must engage students in learning languages of the world. It is through language that one can begin to understand the culture” (p. 76). I needed to become familiar with the cultural experiences and language abilities of EAL students.

Educating teachers to accommodate a culturally diverse group of learners “requires a commitment to a society that is both democratic and multicultural and it requires us to look

carefully at what knowledge, skills, and attitudes today's teachers will need to teach tomorrow's children" (Ladson-Billings, 1991, p. 194). I was able to confirm for myself that in 2010, almost two decades later, Ladson-Billings views are still very relevant today, supporting teachers who are prepared to make the commitment in adapting pedagogy for EAL students. To continue refining the concept of effective teaching, or more specifically, culturally relevant teaching, one must identify the reasons that many students from diverse backgrounds, EAL students, have been able to experience success in schools.

Nieto (2003) collaborated with seven urban teachers who had a reputation for successful teaching with students of diverse backgrounds. She wanted to identify the reasons why these teachers were successful.

These teachers demonstrate love through high expectations and rigorous demands on students and by keeping up with their subject matter through professional activities... These teachers also believe in affirming their students' identities... They (the teachers) have hope and faith in their students, in their own abilities as teachers, in trusted colleagues and new teachers, in the promise of public education, and in the profession of teaching. (p. 16)

Nieto also believed that "all educators – teachers, administrators, curriculum coordinators, and others – need to develop the attitudes and skills to be effective with our increasingly diverse student population" (2002, p. 9). She challenged all teachers to look at inequities in ways that teachers related to students. "My questions are not meant to diminish the noble efforts of educators who struggle daily to reach students through culturally responsive education or through an accurate representation in the curriculum of students' histories and cultures" (p. 10).

Teachers have the mandate to move students progressively through the school system, based on their assessment practices. Culturally responsive and effective methods of assessment will ensure future success of all students, and Cummins' (2006) words seem to be cautionary and very relevant, especially as regular classroom teachers are providing language experiences for their students in multilingual classrooms.

Cummins (2006) also suggested: "The cultural knowledge and home language proficiency that ELL students bring to school have little instructional relevance" (p. 5). Cummins continued: "Home languages other than English or French are viewed as largely irrelevant to children's schooling." Cummins believed that the cultural backgrounds that students bring to the classrooms are relevant and need to be recognized as valuable resources: "ELL students' cultural knowledge and language abilities are important resources in enabling academic achievement; ELL students will engage academically to the extent that instruction affirms their identities and enables them to invest their identities in learning" (p. 7).

Levin, Nolan, Kerr and Elliott (2005) provided a very clear definition of culture: "Culture refers to the knowledge, customs, rituals, emotions, traditions, values, and standards shared by members of a population and embodied in a set of behaviours designed for survival in a particular environment" (p.156). The education of our students becomes increasingly challenging "as the Canadian mosaic has become increasingly multicultural" (p. 156).

The Canadian educational system has a Euro-centric view as its foundation, emphasizing individualism, reason, personal conformity, mastery over nature, and impulse control instead of interconnectedness, emotion, personal uniqueness, living in harmony, and expressive movement. (Levin, Nolan, Kerr, & Elliott, 2005, p. 156) A teacher's perception of individual students may

be limited, unless that individual is willing to use a “different set of cultural lenses to view behavior” (p. 158).

A similar viewpoint is presented by Sumaryono and Ortiz (2004): “Recognizing and validating multiple cultural identities in the classroom community and developing positive student-teacher relationships strengthen individuals’ sense of worth and, ultimately, their academic performance” (p. 16).

So the challenge to teachers remains clear: to the degree that it is possible, affirm the cultural background of the students and build and scaffold instruction, using technology, based on the knowledge that students bring to the classroom. As teachers continue to support the language and cultural backgrounds that ELL students bring to the classrooms, their teaching within the classroom will be perceived as relevant and worthy of engagement.

Regarding the classroom teacher, Cummins (1996, p. 63) wrote, “Exiting children prematurely from bilingual or ESL support programs may jeopardize their academic development, particularly if the mainstream classroom does not provide an environment that is supportive of language and content development.”

Ladson-Billings is credited with creating the term *culturally relevant teaching* in 1994. According to Nieto (2005), this pedagogy or teaching style is different than simply trying to assimilate students into a particular culture, by transmitting dominant cultural beliefs and values in an uncritical manner (p. 48). The cultural background of students needs to be perceived positively, as students can make connections between what they already know in their first language and culture background, and transfer these to the target language. Teachers are encouraged to build upon what students know, and acknowledging cultural practices and traditions will have a positive impact for students, when teachers are able to value and accept the

cultural differences within their multilingual classrooms. *The unique designs in quilts have been created by artists who have integrated their social and cultural backgrounds, honouring and weaving their past experiences into the present, building upon what they know.*

Tomlinson (2003) believed that “the most effective teaching... attempts to help young learners discover the power of knowledge to reveal, amplify, and develop the best that is in them” (p. 12). Placing students above the curriculum, she wrote: “it is important to begin with the conviction that we are no longer teaching if what we teach is more important than who we teach or how we teach” (p. 10). With the increasing number of students needing EAL English language support, the challenges for the mainstream classroom teacher continue as that individual tries to attend to the academic, linguistic, social, and emotional needs of each student in the multilingual classroom.

Effective differentiation begins with awareness and understanding of basic student needs.

It progresses as teachers become more and more adept at understanding how those basic needs are manifested in the classroom and how each facet of classroom experiences meets a learner's need – or misses the mark for that learner. (Tomlinson, 2003, p. 19)

Consistency and patience are virtues demonstrated by culturally responsive teachers and Tomlinson wrote, “A persistent teacher doesn't assume a student cannot learn, but rather assumes the student is not learning in the way he is currently being taught” (p. 32).

Referring to culturally relevant teaching, Lessow-Hurley (2003, p. 9) stated, “Culture is what human beings believe, think, make, and do to adapt to their environments.” Noddings (2006) supports the previous authors: “We have to show how it is possible to include social, emotional, and ethical learning in all curricular and extracurricular activities” (p. 238). She indicated that teachers must become better listeners to their students.

It is not simply a matter of teaching students topics and skills associated with social-emotional learning. It is essentially a matter of showing, by our own acts and attitudes, that we care about what our students are going through and that we are partners in the search for meaning (p. 240).

Ethics of care was a foundational belief for Noddings.

Nieto (2005) exhibited very strong feelings regarding multicultural education, even citing Dewey (1916), an American philosopher and educator, who believed in democracy and equality in education. Dewey wrote: "the school becomes itself a form of social life, a miniature community, and one in close interaction with other modes of associated experience beyond school walls" (Nieto, 2005, p. 360). Nieto's vision in education included all students, involved and accepted, learning and growing in a climate which allows their differences to blend.

According to Nieto (2005), more recently changing demographics in Canada related to races, ethnicity, and social class have caused a shifting in the goals of public education. She cited three major efforts to equalize learning: desegregation, multilingual education, and multicultural education. "Because their culture in many ways is simply unacknowledged, these families are engaged in an impossibly difficult balancing act of cultural adaptation without complete assimilation" (Nieto, 2000, p. 170).

In speaking about cultural adaptation and assimilation, Cummins (2006) stated:

This language replacement process represents a loss of opportunity and linguistic capital for the individual child, a squandering of linguistic resources that are highly valuable within a globalized economy for the country as a whole, and frequently an interruption of communication and cultural transmission within the family. In many cases, children no longer have a language in common with their parents and grandparents. (p. 6)

The language loss develops because the dominant language takes precedence, particularly for students who have not developed their home literacy language sufficiently. As the EAL students become more proficient in learning the new language within the new culture, their native language (L1) loses its importance and relevance within the educational system, the school. Students become marginalized within the culture and society in which they are trying to adapt.

Pransky and Bailey (2002) have supported Nieto, Cummins, and Noddings in their views on effective culturally responsive teaching practices:

Students who are not members of the dominant community often are at risk when the social and cultural fabric of their classroom learning interactions are foreign, uncomfortable, or confusing. The challenge for teachers is to accommodate these students' needs in mainstream classrooms where, in the end, all students must learn to work constructively, productively, and successfully. (p. 382)

Duffy (2005) asked some powerful questions: "How do ESL students fare academically when compared to Canadian-born students? What are best practices for teaching immigrants English?" (p. 56). In his one-year research time inquiring into the education of immigrants in Canada, he was surprised by the lack of tracking of students following their first few years in Canada. Prior to 1997, one longitudinal study in Calgary over an eight-year time period indicated that "ESL students suffered a drop-out rate of 74%, about twice that of Canadian-born students" (p. 56). In Vancouver, another study indicated that 60% of thousands of immigrants and Canadian-born students disappeared from the school system, though the extraordinary academic performance of Mandarin-speakers in mathematics and science out-performed Canadian students, raising the overall level of performance of immigrant students. Duffy argued



that national ESL standards needed to be created, and the federal government needed to improve the resources available to immigrant students to prevent dropouts.

Empowerment is the term used by Cummins (1996) to indicate the attitude that bilingual students develop as they achieve both academically and socially. He cited a reason for underachievement of bilingual students; it was not lack of fluency in English. "One of the major reasons why students mentally withdraw from academic effort is that the instructional environment frequently does not facilitate or encourage active participation on their part" (p. 65).

His claims about second language learners are clear as they often get lost in the system: "typically it takes between five and ten years for second language learners to catch up academically" (p. 71). The regular classroom teachers will have increasing numbers of bilingual students in their classrooms (students who functionally speak two languages), and academic language is central to all areas of the curriculum; teachers today need to be prepared for this, as "the crucial dimension in helping students succeed in cognitively demanding tasks and activities is the contextual support that is activated in the learner (motivation, prior knowledge, etc.) and embedded in the instruction" (p. 72). The classroom teacher has a key role and responsibility.

Cummins and Sayers (1995) were aware of the importance of cultural diversity in the educational system. "Perhaps the major challenge for us as individuals and as a global society is learning how to work together across cultural and linguistic differences in ways which generate empowerment for all participants" (p. 167).

Delpit (1988) suggested: "we must learn to be vulnerable enough...in order to allow the realities of others to edge themselves into our consciousness...to become ethnographers in the true sense" (p. 297). With an open mind, teachers can decide that their world is an open door for all students and they have choices regarding how far they open that door. Delpit continued: "The

dilemma is not really in the debate over instructional methodology, but rather in communicating across cultures in addressing the more fundamental issue of power” (1988, p. 296). How teachers communicate and the empowering relationships that they build with their students establishes the degree to which they learn both about themselves and others.

Cultural differences have been appreciated and valued. Costa's views (2001) celebrated the similarities and differences in different countries:

...individualistic cultures, such as Australia, Britain, Canada, Germany, and the United States, esteem the person as an individual. These cultures foster an autonomous self - ... and emphasize independence, self-determination, and self-reliance to achieve personal goals... rely on personal guilt for social control (p. 217).

Later on, he cited other countries in his comparison: Africa, China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, Pakistan, Peru, the Philippines, or Thailand. Costa wrote that these cultures believed that the self was interrelated and interdependent on others. “Harmony, social reciprocity, obligation, dependence, and obedience are dominant values” (p. 217).

Students coming from different countries in the world approach education through a different lens; being aware and respectful of these differences creates harmony in working with other cultures.

A critical point to consider is that children raised in another country have experienced different approaches to teaching and learning and may have difficulty adjusting culturally. Ashworth (1988) stated, “Cultural transition is seen as a continuum. At one end immigrant parents identify positively with Canada and its culture” (p. 131). Ashworth suggested that children may struggle with the duality of two worlds of home and school, since parents strongly support their cultural heritage and expect their children to do the same. As these children try to

blend both the Canadian culture and their own, they will need emotional support and security within their family. Cultural differences cannot be ignored because they are inherent in personal beliefs, based on previous experiences and knowledge. Ideas about homework may not be similar to the teacher's views and the emphasis on mathematics training and academic expectations may be different.

### **Supporting Students**

Teachers have tried to offer both stability and personal security (a sense of being taken care of) to their EAL students and their families. The school system was responsible for overseeing the EAL program and has played a key role in ensuring steady communication among school principals and local groups who are service providers for immigrant groups, like the Open Door Society, The Salvation Army, and Global Gathering. These groups ease the transition of immigrant families by assisting them with such tasks as grocery shopping, banking, finding jobs and homes, and settling in to daily living.

The Saskatchewan Settlement Worker in Schools (SSWIS) position is a federally funded project which provides services to both public and catholic school systems in urban centers primarily to assist refugee families arriving from Sudan, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Colombia (September, 2006, Position Paper on Second Language Learning, p. 28) by fostering links from the school to the families and community. Several EAL specialist teachers have been specifically placed in different schools, in neighbourhoods where the immigrant families are finding affordable housing and a sense of community with others. If there was sufficient student population to warrant offering English support classes, students attended the school in their neighbourhood, and a specialist EAL teacher taught there. If this was not possible, students might have been transported to a school in close proximity, keeping travel time to a minimum,

yet still being provided with English language support. The particular model of service delivery to EAL students requiring additional language support within their neighbourhood school has changed, depending on numbers of immigrants and administrative policies and procedures within school divisions.

Central to this program is the understanding of the EAL teacher, who is an effective culturally responsive teacher sensitive to diversity. EAL teachers hold a position of leadership, both inside and outside the classroom. This teacher is warm and caring, supportive of students and their families, and knowledgeable in many areas.

Nieto (2000) supported this viewpoint:

The key role teachers play in the achievement of their students is not surprising. The most important characteristic students looked for in their teachers was 'caring'...the time they dedicated to their students, their patience, how well they prepared their classes, and how they made classes interesting (p. 297).

As York (2008) wrote, "Remember that both smiles and frowns need no translation" (p. 26). Caring teachers have been positively recognized by many families.

Without language communication, students may feel lost and simply give up. The diversity of subjects taught in Canadian schools seems to exceed the three core subjects (English, Chinese, and Mathematics) taught in Chinese schools, which creates a key difference in priorities in education. The ability and desire to accommodate the EAL students related to teaching methodology remains with the teacher. As Nieto (2000) stated:

Educators can learn that there are many ways to show caring. Accepting students' differences is one way; another is to have rigorous and high expectations of them; and

becoming what Ricardo Stanton-Salazar has called 'institutional agents' who provide social networks for students is equally meaningful (p. 299).

High expectations in both academic and social areas are needed. A social structure is related to its culture and language. By learning social and cultural mores, in addition to language, a student will more readily adapt to a specific culture. Nieto seemed to suggest that the power of classroom teachers can be misused, since the movement of students through higher grade levels has been exclusively the responsibility and authority of those teachers.

Clear instructional strategies with culturally relevant material, as well as explicit teaching, will facilitate success for EAL students as they strive to catch up to their peers, within this multilingual classroom setting. It was important to present the role of the culturally responsive teacher, and the responsibilities and expectations that have been placed upon that individual. As parent, child, and teacher work cooperatively together, all three individuals are empowered, assisting the child in identifying the personal power inherent in him or her, and the capacity and motivation to learn.

In a regular classroom, students needed to be involved in their own learning. In my classroom observations, students were invited to share their ideas and to talk about their connections with the curriculum and needed to be supported in their efforts to communicate in English. Although Ladson-Billings suggested that teachers could learn to speak the languages of their students, adding to the students' comfort level in the classroom environment, this suggestion was not always feasible in smaller centers because classrooms are usually multilingual rather than bilingual. The validity of this research will show that effective, culturally relevant teaching strategies and an adapted curriculum will allow the EAL students to learn English, within the regular classroom.

## **The Multilingual, Differentiated EAL Classrooms**

Officially, there is no curriculum guide for teaching the EAL program in Saskatchewan at the present time. With rapid immigration and settlement of both refugee and immigrant families in Saskatchewan over the past three years, school districts in communities have realized and acknowledged that more programs and policies needed to be developed. Data on EAL students needed to be collected, initial “benchmarks” for their designation needed to be developed, and standardized assessment criteria was needed. Many positive changes have been made in all above-noted areas and they will be further discussed in Chapter Five. *The role of the regular classroom teacher remains a vital thread in the creation of a quilt. The many pieces in a quilt can represent the many individuals involved in its creation and ultimate design.*

With increasing diversity in the classroom, the onus is on teachers to create this warm, inviting, yet effectively managed multilingual classroom. “Classrooms should be places where each child’s individuality is recognized and valued, and this holds for the students speaking English as another language, as well as for those who speak English as their only language” (Rigg & Allan, 1989, p. 77). This is reiterated by Ladson-Billings (2000):

In addition to promoting learning and academic achievement, culturally relevant teachers foster and support the development of cultural competence...Cultural competence can be supported in the classroom by acknowledging the legitimacy of students’ home language and using it as a bridge (p. 210).

Tomlinson (2003) supported the idea that teachers need to be adaptable, to teach to all the students, to allow and accept individual differences, and to teach so that every student will experience success. “Teachers must understand that schools are culturally situated institutions... Second, teachers should strive to learn more about the cultural backgrounds of the students they

teach... Third, teachers should acknowledge and intentionally incorporate students' cultural backgrounds and expectations into their classrooms." (p. 157)

Cultural phrases and idioms are difficult to learn as an immigrant, and assimilating students from other cultures into a classroom could be challenging for the teacher. Making an effort to include aspects of each child's culture in the classroom on a regular basis is good practice. "Some simple actions each teacher can take include learning to pronounce each student's name correctly, finding out where each student is from, and gathering a little background information about each one" (Miller & Endo, 2004, p. 789).

With the availability of the World Wide Web, there are a vast amount of resources available regarding instructional strategies that teachers can use in their delivery of curriculum. For example, there is an online, alphabetized listing of 121 strategies (2010) available to access, prepared by Saskatoon Public Schools, 2004-2009. Regular classroom teachers have used many of these strategies to provide variety in their teaching methodology and to allow students' differences in learning and teaching styles to be accommodated.

Student readers, including those struggling with learning the English language, will have the potential to be successful when they are given knowledge by caring teachers. "When possible, choose texts that will match the cultural schemata and background knowledge of your English-language learners" (Drucker, 2003, p. 26). Drucker continued, "Multicultural literature is a positive addition to the classroom for all students in all grades, from kindergarten to high school." York (2008, p. 27) has suggested 20 books, including picture books, fiction, and memoirs, which can be used to teach students about traumas and triumphs of learning English. The literature and educational resources to use in teaching EAL students is readily available and curriculums have been changing to meet the needs of these diverse learners.

As mentioned previously, foundational to teaching EAL students is an awareness of the “*zone of proximal development*” that adjusts instruction to the child's ability. Based on the work of Vygotsky (1962), the zone or stage refers to the edge of one's learning. In the zone, the student can do certain tasks successfully but only with adult assistance. The zone is always moving forward and at the edge of our competence as the level of work needs to be just beyond what the student can accomplish on his/her own. Enabling helps build the student's independence while responding is about accepting each student as an individual with a specific personality and preferred learning strategies.

Silver, Strong, and Perini (2000) wrote about Gardner's (1983) Theory of Multiple Intelligences (2000, p. 101). This research showed that humans express themselves in culturally meaningful ways. Each person has many “intelligences” and demonstrates high ability in one or two of these, but each intelligence can be developed through meaningful learning experiences. These ideas have implications on the field of education. By using differentiated teaching and an integrated curriculum, students are provided with choices and different assessments, which support students' learning in their particular styles. The intelligences include verbal-linguistic, logical-mathematical, interpersonal, spatial, naturalist, musical, intrapersonal, and bodily-kinesthetic (p. 101).

*The beauty of a quilt is celebrated when one visually is attracted to the many pieces, threads, and detailed stitching within the design. The more intricate the design, the more value it may bring to the artist, based on the time to create the quilt.*

The teacher must be able to effectively communicate. Instruction, evaluation, assessment, and interactive lessons, directly supporting the curriculum, are all aspects of teaching. EAL students must be given the necessary skills to have debates, to inquire, to use



creative and critical thinking, and to develop higher order processes. Silver, Strong, and Perini (2002) suggested that students have opportunities to experience: discussions and writing, reasoning with problem solving in mathematics, art and color, manipulatives as objects, music and lyrics, role-play, partner activities, journals with self-reflection, and nature activities in the outside world beyond the classroom.

An American philosopher and professor between 1904 and 1930, Dewey (1916) believed that all genuine education came through experience, and that playful experiences that are guided by caring teachers were important and necessary. The perfect school could be mathematically represented by adding the content of the child's own experiences and the subject matter of the curriculum, which would equal the place to conduct life. "When engaged in the direct act of teaching, the instructor needs to have subject matter at his fingers' ends; his attention should be upon the attitude and response of the pupil" (p. 183).

Dewey's words about the school were relevant, as he supported ideas presented by other researchers who wrote about the social learning and interactions that take place within schools.

Schools and school districts have a responsibility to provide appropriate and timely feedback related to students' learning. School divisions have provided seminars, workshops and professional development ensuring that teachers have access to information, methodology, and technology. Universities have provided internship programs and teacher candidates have attained their teaching degrees. Technological advances and specific software and machines will continue to be required in buildings so that networks can continue.

The differentiated classroom is a concept for culturally relevant teaching. Culturally responsive and effective teachers will continue to use storytelling, puzzles, creative play, song, art, chants, drama, and additional activities with their students, to inspire and instil a love of

learning. In Chapter Four, I will present instructional processes and teaching strategies, as the participant teachers demonstrated. Solomon & Franklin (2006) stated:

Instead of looking at adaptations for ELs in the mainstream classes as a separate strategy, mainstream teachers must plan an integrated instructional system that truly includes the EL (English Learner) in the total learning process. That can be done by enriching the language of the classroom, using new words in a context and paraphrasing it, instructional scaffolding and schema building, and using assessments that inform student progress. (p. 44)

Past studies have indicated that background knowledge related to reading will help students read in a second language. "In other words, children who had begun learning how to read had already started moving toward an orientation incorporating sound/symbol correspondence" (Drucker, 2003, p. 24). As well, shared reading allows students to hear language while observing phonological representation. The teacher would lead the students in reading sentences altogether; students would learn left to right and top to bottom directionality. Paired reading, with students reading comprehensible texts and taking turns, has been an indicator of a good teaching strategy.

Supporting the ideas from Solomon and Franklin (2006), adorning the classroom, and visually providing stimulation for students by having language-rich pictures will also foster student progress and add interest to the environment. For example, when students can see a variety of images, which include pictures of students from around the world, and calendars which celebrate Yom Kippur (Jewish holiday), then their respect and acknowledgement of other nationalities of people improves. Guided inquiry questions were an integral part of this research. Some of these questions included: How do teachers create a classroom which celebrates

diversity? In the physical environment of these four classrooms, what visuals will be represented and displayed to celebrate diversity? What teaching strategies will be presented to students to recognize their diversity in teaching and learning styles? In what ways will the curriculum be adapted to provide rich language learning opportunities for these multilingual classrooms?

### **Teaching Programs: Curriculum for EAL Learners**

Initially, the EAL program began in the urban areas in the late 1970s, with most students being Vietnam refugees, who needed language support and counselling from trauma and insecurity related to political difficulties in their country. Ashworth (1988) explained:

For example, immigration in 1963 from Hong Kong, China, and Taiwan combined was only 1,187 and from India and Pakistan it was 858. By 1973 those figures had increased to 16,094 and 11,488. The arrival of the Vietnamese “boat people” in 1980 added yet another new Asian ethnic group (p. 37).

These students also needed to learn to communicate in English, to become as independent in their own lives as they could, and to use their knowledge to allow them and their families to enrich Canada. With much needed intensive language support, students in these classes returned to the classroom environments, sufficiently capable of continuing their learning, over the course of the subsequent five to seven years. Within that time frame, their ability to communicate cognitively with their peers would develop, because the students would receive the support they needed from the regular classroom teachers.

Nieto (2006) continually challenges teachers in their roles: “What does it take to become effective teachers of students of culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and racially diverse backgrounds?” (p. 457) How are specialist EAL teachers meeting the needs of students, and how am I, as regular classroom teacher meeting the diverse needs of my students? I have always

had a responsibility to try to ensure the success of every student, making certain that my teaching was culturally relevant.

Nieto (2009) believed that school districts needed to provide meaningful and engaging programs, respecting “the intelligence and good will of teachers and help them grow in terms of knowledge, awareness, and practice” (p. 10). She looked at surveys of more than five thousand teachers regarding their preparedness to teach and found that less than half of these teachers had “participated in professional development programs focused on teaching students of diverse cultural backgrounds” (p. 10). In another study, in 2002, Nieto had interviewed a *Massachusetts Teacher of the Year* who had decided to raise her personal awareness of multiculturalism. Nieto added that “teachers need to learn about the socio-cultural realities of their students and the socio-political conditions in which they live” (p. 12) and another teacher shared how she visited her students’ homes during August before the school year began. In summary, Nieto wrote about the connections that teachers created, forming “strong collaborative relationships with their peers” (p. 12), which allowed teachers to thrive and remain hopeful and inspired.

Fu (2004) wrote, “Bilingual and sheltered ESL programs are highly recommended for helping ELL students make transitions linguistically and academically to their English learning in mainstream classrooms” (p. 8). Fu, just six years ago, cited one of the main reasons why regular classrooms are not prepared to deal with challenges in students’ instruction: “Most regular classroom teachers have to rely on workshops and personal reading in order to learn about ESL instruction” (p. 8). School districts’ challenges include providing relevant teacher workshops and in-services that will provide teachers with both knowledge and best practices in working with English language challenged students. *Workshops are available to assist teachers in the process of quilt making.*

Specifically indicating the amount of English language instruction, Fu wrote: "New York law mandates that ELL students be given 180 or 360 minutes weekly ESL service, depending upon their English proficiency level" (p. 9). These numbers of minutes for the amount of English language support falls within the above-mentioned guidelines indicated in my research. The push-in and pullout models are both mentioned in the article. School divisions in Saskatchewan have tried various delivery models over the past two or three decades, based on previous successes of EAL students, and there have been advantages to the pullout service delivery model. The lengthy instructional time is advantageous, yet removal of students from home schools has been disruptive. Students and teachers have been flexible, as school divisions have implemented various models. Within the last few years, as numbers of immigrants and refugees have increased, schools boards have changed their policies, based on current research practices.

School districts are responsible for identifying standards that indicate gaps and areas of competencies in students' written and oral language abilities. I wanted to be able to teach language and provide appropriate reading opportunities for my students. All students needed to write from their own experiences, and needed support and encouragement, as well as time to process translating their ideas. *The continuity of the previous pieces and the integrity of the design need to remain intact as new pieces are added to the original design of a quilt.*

Smith-Davis (2004) wrote, "Linguistic and cultural differences, communication barriers, and lack of understanding of prior education and experiences in the students' countries of origin interfere with effective education" (p. 26). One challenge that schools face is helping immigrant students to reach their maximum potential. She continued, "There are widespread shortages of instructional, diagnostic, administrative, medical, rehabilitation, and support personnel with the

competencies necessary for working effectively with immigrant students” (p. 26). Smith-Davis indicated that various pilot studies have begun to call attention to the needs of immigrant students and she suggested that national studies were necessary.

Teachers will need to adapt both curriculum and pedagogy in meaningful ways. In teaching immigrant students, Yoon (2008) said, “little recognition was given to the students’ cultural and social needs. In addition, there is limited research about the influence of classroom teachers’ approaches on ELL’s participation in regular classrooms”(p. 496). According to Yoon (2008), “Many teachers lack understanding of how their roles and teaching approaches can best support ELL’s needs” (p. 495). However, regardless of the challenges that I felt, I needed to understand the changes I might be able to make, and be open and willing to try to implement changes in my program delivery. Following observations of the participant teachers, and throughout the subsequent years of teaching, I have tried to implement these practices.

Nieto suggested this idea: “Teacher education is at a crossroads today” (2006, p. 457). I believe that she was referring to teachers and their administrators, who will continue to be challenged to develop and implement relevant curriculum and assessment materials, support colleagues in their program delivery with students requiring English language support, and continue to create multilingual classroom communities that support culturally relevant pedagogical practices.

York (2008) explained that teaching EAL students provided teachers with a unique opportunity to make a “significant contribution to your school’s emotional climate” (p. 26) since the diversity of our classrooms is becoming more evident. She continued, “Learners may be a challenge, but regardless of your experience, or lack of experience, with students who are not proficient in the English language, your responsibility is to work with *all* students” (p. 26).

Within my own multilingual classroom, I began to see who my students really were. Rigg and Allan (1989) refer to EAL students in this manner: “We like to call them REAL students: Readers and writers of English as Another Language” (p. xv). I knew that my daily interactions with my students needed to validate and strengthen their identities as individuals learning the English language, as they maintained their own languages and cultures. They were readers and writers in their own language; learning to read and write in English was their current challenge.

Nieto (2002) offered, “Let me make it clear that I strongly believe in multicultural education” (p. 6). She suggested that it was important to teach EAL students effectively, to prevent students “who know little about their cultural backgrounds and are even ashamed and embarrassed by them” (p. 6). It is the aim of English language specialist teachers to accept and encourage the students to continue to use their first language (L1) and to appreciate their culture and familial background. I wanted to understand effective strategies and methodologies, presented by four specialist teachers. I wanted to learn about culturally responsive approaches to teaching in a multilingual classroom.

In her writing, Kendall (2006) wrote about the importance of classroom management and making use of smaller instructional groups with EAL learners based on previous assessment that provides a flexible structure. Her words were relevant: “Teachers can plan wonderful lessons, but it won't matter how much time they spend planning or how creative the lessons are if classroom management doesn't support small-group instruction and classroom routines don't support independence” (p. 31). Teachers want all their students to become independent, successful, self-regulated learners, who take initiative in learning new material, which is relevant for them.

Students are motivated to learn when teachers provided them with appropriate educational opportunities. Linan-Thompson and Vaughn (2007) gave further credibility to teachers who provided ELLs with opportunities to be successful. "Students are motivated when they perceive they are making progress. Students are motivated when they are accepted for what they know and not excluded because of their language differences" (p. 147). In addition to dealing with language differences, these students were also trying to immerse themselves in a culture that was foreign to them.

Being an effective EAL teacher includes being able to provide culturally responsive pedagogy, allowing students to draw on prior knowledge and experiences, while learning to communicate in the English language. With an evolving curriculum, resource-based learning, diverse teaching strategies, and an inviting child-centered classroom, the academic success of all students is heightened. Using multiple approaches to teaching EAL students who have entered many classrooms, the cultural variations have had the potential to foster rich student learning and mutual respect.

Nieto (1999) believed that there were five principles of learning and the fifth one applies here, which says "learning is socially mediated and develops within a culture and a community" (p. 3). More recently, Nieto (2002) offered: "Let me make it clear that I strongly believe in multicultural education" (p. 6). She suggested that it was important to teach EAL students effectively, to prevent students "who know little about their cultural backgrounds and are even ashamed and embarrassed by them" (p. 6). Multicultural education and culturally responsive or culturally relevant teaching acknowledges the legitimacy of the cultural heritages of different ethnic groups, as legacies that affect students' dispositions, attitudes, and approaches to learning.



Culturally relevant teaching teaches students to know and praise their own and each others' cultural heritages, rather than being embarrassed by them.

In formal curriculum, culturally responsive teachers use content which builds bridges of meaningfulness between home and school experiences, and encourages dialogue about the differences. Teachers use a wide variety of instructional strategies that are connected to different learning styles, helping to meet the individual needs of all students. These strategies include direct and indirect instruction, helping students to develop those higher order-thinking skills that will be required. Culturally relevant teaching incorporates cultural information, resources, and materials in all the subjects and skills routinely taught in schools and includes an attitude of openness, listening, and sharing, by students, teachers, and families.

*Quilt making and storytelling weave together easily, as women would gather in each other's homes to sew and share stories about their families and themselves. A new family member or a special occasion, such as a wedding, might have been reasons to design the next quilt. With steady hands and cooperative attitudes, quilts would be created.*

Learning is a social process. Johns and Torrez (2001, p. 9), Rea and Mercuri (2006) both support Vygotsky's views that "children learn by doing, they interact with others, they use and practice language... which is embedded in the everyday process of communication." The culturally responsive teacher will need to be aware of language capabilities and obstacles to understanding to really capture the essence of ZPD and model instruction at the level of need.

Taylor (2004) suggested that people acquire language which then structures their thinking to create schema to accommodate new information. Hill and Flynn (2006) stated, "Language is the air that we breathe and the water in which we swim" (p. 1). Language, according to Hill and Flynn, is the key to our survival.

Nieto (2000) wrote: "In the end, all their voices challenge us as teachers and as a society to do the very best we can to ensure that educational equity is not an illusion but an achievable goal" (p. 20). She advocated multicultural education and insisted on a framework that would be anti-racist, important, educating, and inclusive (Krashen, 2004, p. 79). Nieto presented her views related to the role of the teacher: "I believe in the power of teachers because I have seen the tremendous good or harm they can do for their students" (1999, p. xxiii).

An effective teacher uses a rich background of resources to deliver a quality program to all students in the classroom. "ELLs need lots of authentic opportunities to write in order to become writers... Grammar, spelling, and vocabulary (as well as other aspects of writing, including organization, style, and content) can all be developed in the context of the student's own writing." (Samway & McKeon, 2007, p. 57).

These authors also provide some key guidelines for teachers working with EAL students:

- High expectations are held for ELL students
- Language and subject matter are integrated
- Concept development in the L1 (first language) is supported
- Comprehensive staff development for all faculty and staff is provided
- The entire school environment supports ELL learners
- There is active support from school leaders (p. 128)

Historically, effective teachers would be supported through their use of effective teaching strategies and an integrated curriculum, expecting their students to do well. Through the support of administration and colleagues, the effectiveness of teachers within their schools would be attainable. The research results will address these statements.

EAL students offer a rewarding dimension to classrooms, by bringing their diverse backgrounds. Teachers and schools need to be prepared for the challenges in teaching EAL students, and in preparing them and their families to live in a multicultural and multilingual country such as Canada.

“Mainstream teachers need to respect the language and culture of English Language Learners in their classes while designing instruction that helps these students use their background knowledge and skills and develop new ones, thus enabling them to function successfully in mainstream classes” (Richard-Amato & Snow, 2005, p. 2). Again, the responsibility and the challenge for the classroom teacher in the multilingual classroom are identified in the literature regarding program instruction and curriculum delivery. This research has provided a framework for the data that will be presented in chapter four.

Many books are available, which specifically identify strategies for teachers who want to learn more about culturally relevant effective teaching. Rigg and Allan (1989) have some guiding principles for teachers involved in teaching students whose native language is not English. These guidelines include:

1. People who are learning another language are, first of all, people.
2. Learning a language means learning to do the things you want to do with people.
3. A person's second language, like the first, develops globally, not linearly.
4. Language develops best in a variety of rich contexts.
5. Literacy is part of language, so writing and reading develop alongside speaking and listening. (p. viii)

Each student, regardless of whether they need additional English language support or not, will need to change, to grow, to learn to become independent using the knowledge they gain in

the school system. Students come with their families, their memories, and their past experiences. A caring, culturally relevant teacher who creates a supportive environment for a diverse group of students will facilitate this learning and growing process, which will take many years, allowing students to reach their potential.

Supporting cultural beliefs and practices, having students recall past experiences and knowledge, teaching meaningful and relevant content, using different instructional strategies, scaffolding and building upon prior knowledge, and assessing in many ways are all meaningful practices used by teachers with their students. These ideas are especially important with EAL students. Cummins (1996) and Nieto (1999) both supported Richard-Amato and Snow (2005, p. 145) in this statement: “teaching language minority students successfully means above all changing one’s attitudes towards the students, their languages and their cultures, and their communities.”

My personal knowledge leads me to believe that some Canadians do not always welcome immigrants who they see as coming to take jobs away from those who live here. “Society’s perceptions of them as legal or illegal immigrants...or as refugees also affect their schooling and the development of their cultural identities” (Richard-Amato & Snow, 2005, p. 13). As presented by many authors in this manuscript, children need positive academic and social experiences in school to demonstrate their best performance, in a caring classroom environment with reduced anxiety.

### **Teaching and Technology**

With the power of technology, modern classrooms today may include access to computers and data projectors, which provide the teachers in the multilingual classrooms the opportunities to inspire students’ learning capabilities by exposing them to current factual

information. The computer can be a powerful tool to engage students in their own learning, when they are used in appropriate ways. Cummins (1996) wrote about the growing impact of technology, which could be challenging the multilingual competencies of students. He referred to the literacy practices of people which are evident in the profound time spent by individuals using e-mail accounts, accessing web pages, and viewing videos. He discussed multilingual representations as in banking machines, text messaging on cell phones, digital photographs, Blackberry devices, and the multilingual competencies that students bring to school.

Cummins (1996) recognized the potential for technology to have a positive impact on students regarding their education: "In exploring pedagogical options that build on and extend the cultural and linguistic capital that students bring to school, technology offers powerful tools to engage students more actively with literacy and to promote overall academic achievement" (p. 4). The cultural capital includes the knowledge and mental framework that a particular individual uses, based on his or her experiences and language usage and communicative abilities, which allows that person to succeed in the school system.

Cummins and Sayers (1995) presented a different view than Cummins regarding global networks and global communities: "The same technology that opens the world to our consciousness frequently closes our consciousness to the world" (p. 4). These authors believed in networks which provided links for educators to make a difference in the lives of their students: "...computer-based networks to impact intercultural learning across cultural and geographic distances with educators using global learning to shape students' abilities in critical inquiry" (p. 4). Teachers have a responsibility to ensure that the impact of technological advancements and multimodal ways to engage students are delivered in prudent and ethical ways. Careful

planning and appropriate instructional practices allow students to become empowered through learning about their world.

### **Multilingual Communities**

Our challenge, according to Costa (2001) is: "...to foster in students the traits...of humility, listening and silence, reflective thinking, responsibility, civility, respect...and honouring accuracy, clarity, and rationality" (p. 220). As Turner and Kim (2005) stated, "...there is no one-size-fits-all approach to building literacy communities in multicultural and multilingual communities" (p. 37).

Nieto (2006) recognized some widely acknowledged qualities of effective teachers, including knowledge, pedagogical approaches, strong communication skills, and effective organizational skills. She continued:

Although these qualities are essential for good teaching, ...they are insufficient because they fail to take into account the sociopolitical context of education as well as the tremendous diversity of language, social class, ethnicity and race, among other differences...An additional set of qualities is proposed...have to do with attitudes, sensibilities and values. These qualities include a sense of mission; solidarity with, and empathy for, their students; the courage to challenge mainstream knowledge and conventional wisdom; improvisation; and a passion for social justice. (p. 457)

It is my responsibility as a regular classroom teacher within a multilingual classroom to create an environment that presents diverse teaching practices and instructional strategies. *Some quilts have been created with new fabrics entirely, from fabric bolts; each quilt is unique with beautiful colors and designs. Sometimes with just a few stitches at a time, "from fabric to quilt" is a very time-consuming process.*

*And so my opportunity to see other quilts taking shape and form will be possible, as I enter the spaces of the four English language specialist teachers. By entering their classrooms, I will have a direct glimpse into their methods, their instructional styles, and their classrooms. As the threads in a patchwork quilt continue to be interwoven and stitched together with the many fabric pieces, I continue my research question: How could these four English as an Additional Language teachers inform my classroom practices?*

## Chapter Three

### Methodology: Assembling the Quilt

The complexity and diversity that is inherent in the multilingual classroom easily lends itself metaphorically to the comparison of a patchwork quilt. I wanted to celebrate my passion for sewing and quilting as predominant as my chosen profession as teacher. *My goal in writing this thesis was to combine this love for materials and design in the quilt-making process with my career as a culturally responsive classroom teacher and weave these threads together.* “Since every teacher is ultimately a teacher of language – whether it is the language of biology, history, math, or art – the content classroom provides numerous opportunities for teachers to expand the language skills of all learners, including ELLs.” (Bouchard, 2005, p. 4)

I believe that I am a culturally responsive teacher, although one year ago I did begin the process of retrospectively thinking about my abilities in teaching students who had limited communicative English abilities. Were my teaching methods meeting the needs of all students and were these methods as diverse as they could be? The young student from Shanghai became the impetus for this research, *and he continued to blend and stitch himself into my stories that year.* As my program delivery was further adapted, I also had queries regarding the additional language support program for EAL students. Teaching thirty students in my grade six/seven classroom, Michael (pseudonym) needed intensive English language support and was driven by achievement motivation and the desire to please his teacher and be accepted by his peers. As a catalyst, he instilled in me a passion to adapt and assimilate a more culturally responsive way of teaching.

In this chapter, I have continued the metaphor related to the assembly and creation of a quilt. *Prior to any sewing, fabric pieces are gathered. Before any stitching will happen to*



*create this quilt, much planning is needed, including the design layout.* Likewise, authoring a thesis needs a blueprint which is a framework, one which sometimes crosses borders, and allows me to travel along my research journey.

### **The Research Question: The First Layers**

The overarching research question framing this study was: *How can four English as an Additional Language teachers inform my classroom practices?* With a research grant award from the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching, I designed a qualitative study to enrol four teachers as participants who were directly involved in the teaching of EAL classes within four separate schools. I had been inspired by their immediate response to me, during those first few months when I felt challenged to teach my young Chinese student, and I had contacted them for immediate assistance. With funded classroom release time, I was able to observe their teaching methodology with EAL students, who ranged in age from six to fourteen years and who attended grades one through eight, in four separate schools. To further interact with the teachers, I had prepared guiding questions that I would use in the interviewing and audiotaping process. These interviews were audiotaped and the conversations were transcribed. This process was definitely the most interesting part of my research because it gave them a prominent voice that has expanded my horizons about EAL teaching.

I entered four classrooms in different areas of the division to look for common themes regarding curriculum delivery and teaching methodology. I observed instructional practices for students who came from many countries and who demonstrated a keenness to learn and who were at different levels of academic capabilities. As Nieto suggested, I created field notes regarding their professional development, I observed their relationships with their students, and I asked them about their collaborative relationships with other teachers. I also made observations

of their classroom activities, to “step inside” the physical arrangements and recorded their sequence of activities with students. My research methodology included taking field notes, observing resources, noting the physical layout of materials and supplies, and using the information to create my own perspective of an ideal environment of culturally responsive and effective teaching.

*To become a culturally responsive and effective teacher, I needed to analyze the successes of these four participant teachers and try to stitch their strongest threads into my quilt designs in my own classroom. These threads would stabilize the quilt that I was trying to create. These threads would represent the additional information that would inform my teaching practices. Teachers would have different quilts, representing their different classroom situations, yet there would be similarities.*

The four teachers' goals would be similar: creating a group of students who would be competent in English language communication, and implementing the most effective strategies to assist these EAL learners to feel like they were engaged in their own learning, within this social multilingual classroom. In my mind, there were three major areas that were being stitched together: a struggling student from China in my own classroom that particular year, my interaction with specialist teachers on an ongoing basis, and my adaptations and changes to the curriculum I was attempting to deliver. I was not entirely cognizant of how these three areas would ultimately become sewn together, yet I had hoped that one day I would be able to observe those “other EAL classrooms”, and to have an inside opportunity to watch specialist teachers teaching. Within the classroom, I became even more determined to implement as many strategies as I could, and to seek out material which would be culturally relevant for all the students.

Prior to speaking with these teachers, I had to identify the rationale for coming into their classrooms. These teachers agreed to speak with me, allowed me into their classrooms to observe, and signed informed consent documents which indicated their agreement to assist in helping me to pursue a research question.

I made necessary preparations prior to beginning my research. The unofficial research in my mind essentially began over three years ago, as I began to question how EAL students in my multilingual classroom were learning. According to James Britton (1971), "Inquiry in a classroom context is a discovery process – a matter of looking closely at the stuff of our lessons, our students, and ourselves. We are all in the business of learning...for effective teaching is grounded in inquiry" (Class Notes, ERES 800, 2007). The EAL classrooms in my urban environment were the location for my research and I had an opportunity to dialogue with my four participant specialist teachers. The dialogue that had begun three years ago would continue to enable me to take those foundational pieces as framework and use them to scaffold and inform my present teaching practices in my multilingual classroom.

As a regular classroom teacher who was in transition, I needed to search out different methods in my teaching. I needed to be aware of the physical and emotional climate I was attempting to establish, in how I related to the students in the multilingual classroom. The curriculum was the framework for the units I was teaching, and I needed to be able to assess the adaptations I would implement, as I developed relationships and learned more about the needs of each of my students.

Previously, I had heard personal stories from my colleagues in the staffroom and the hallways of my school, referring to their teaching experiences with EAL students and their perceptions of experiences were both similar and different from mine. Together we wanted our

students to make greater gains in academic, linguistic, and social areas within our own timelines. We felt frustrated when we didn't feel that we were effectively teaching what these students needed to succeed. We also struggled with the ways in which we might have adapted specific units of instruction within the given curriculum; we wanted more communication with the specialist teacher as well, to support our efforts within our multilingual classrooms. I wanted to be an empathetic listener with my colleagues. I also began to see their struggles and frustrations in the time-consuming planning for the EAL students, so that the classroom teacher's roles were becoming more complex. These teachers needed support in EAL pedagogy.

### **Qualitative Research**

In qualitative research, researchers position themselves in their research projects to reveal aspects of their own world, challenge their own assumptions, locate themselves through the eye of the *other*, and observe themselves observing. This lens shifts the observer's lens inward toward a self as a site for interpreting cultural experience. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated, "The qualitative researcher's goal is to better understand human behavior and experience. They seek to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are" (p. 43). Qualitative research gave me an opportunity to understand and reflect upon the practices used by the four participant teachers. Through my analysis of how they were delivering a program which would meet the needs of EAL learners, I would be able to scrutinize my teaching practices. The four EAL teachers were providing a basis for social learning which included the physical and virtual resources which support student-centered interactive learning.

This research would be an opportunity to observe the diverse instructional strategies used by the four participant teachers, in combination with their adaptations to the curriculum, as they taught students requiring intensive EAL English language support. By incorporating the

knowledge gained from the literature that I reviewed, in addition to reflecting upon my past practices as a classroom teacher, I was guided to answer my own inquiry question about teaching EAL students. I was becoming more informed in my professional practice as I continued to face the challenges of teaching in a multilingual classroom.

Observing the four participant teachers in their classroom environment as they were teaching EAL students provided me an opportunity to conduct qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research. As Bogdan and Biklen (2007) stated, "The qualitative researchers' goal is to better understand human behavior and experience. They seek to grasp the processes by which people construct meaning and to describe what those meanings are" (p. 43). I have used qualitative research as the framework for this thesis, based on the goals I wanted to accomplish. I observed the students and the teachers in their own environments, because the teachers specialized in English language support. Outside my multilingual classroom, I would have an opportunity to observe immigrants and refugee students and the interactions between teacher and student and students with each other.

As my research journey was becoming more transformational, I could sense that I was beginning to be critically aware of my own tacit (implied) assumptions and assessing their relevance for making changes in my professional practice (Mezirow, 1991). With a research grant made possible by the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching, I was able to take time away from my classroom to become a participant observing four teachers.

### **Fieldwork: Beyond the Theory**

In designing my study, I wanted to see how the four participant teachers provided language support for EAL designated students. I queried how they used their past experiences to expand their repertoire of teaching pedagogies that could augment the language learning for each

student. Alternatively, these students needed to adapt to the cultural differences of their surroundings, both at school and in their communities.

To begin the research process, I had prepared nine guiding questions which I used in the individual interviews. At a later date, it was possible to analyze and review the information that was gleaned through the observations within the teachers' classrooms. The conversational interviews and the field notes gathered provided data to identify recurring themes. "Good interviews produce rich data filled with words that reveal the respondents' perspectives. Transcripts are filled with details and examples" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 104). Following the interviews, I was able to continue observations in the classroom, which stabilized or confirmed information that was presented in the interviews.

Fieldwork, as an element of observational research, provided me with an opportunity to work in other classrooms. "In participant observation studies, all the data are considered to be field notes: interview transcripts, official documents ...other materials" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 119). As well, they wrote: "Because there has not been extensive writing on the various forms of fieldwork in the various settings in which researchers work, there is a great deal of opportunity to publish methods papers in which you share your experience and advice with others" (p. 92). It was important as a researcher to balance observation and participation; it was necessary to refrain from initiating conversations though I was expected to be social. I needed to be discreet in my demeanour, blending in with the external environment. My aim was to promote my research goals, and to allow the participant teachers to continue their roles.

In addition to classroom observations, interviewing and audiotaping the four participant teachers provided me with additional information about the delivery of the EAL curriculum and

instructional materials used. During the audiotaped interviews, taking notes would provide back-up information and enhanced rapport with the four teachers.

“Even when an interview guide is employed, qualitative interviews offer the interviewer considerable latitude to pursue a range of topics and offer the subject a chance to shape the content of the interview” (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 104). The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed for some guidance yet different responses were evoked from the participants. I wanted the participants to tell their stories and I encouraged them to share their observations and ideas about their roles.

### **Participant Selection**

I selected four participant teachers in four different elementary schools, based on the criteria that they were all specialist teachers within my school division, had taught for more than three years in their current positions working with EAL students, and I had introduced myself to them in the previous year. Both out of necessity and because I wanted to learn about their specific roles as specialist teachers, I had initiated contact with those four teachers. The following year this increased to five teachers (within the elementary system only). Since the role of the specialist language teachers was similar, the potential for bias was not an issue. Naturalistic inquiry was a fit as I wanted to honour their stories; I wanted to allow them to share their successes and their concerns. This research study broadened my knowledge and gave them opportunities to speak, from their perspectives as specialist teachers in urban schools.

I felt that it was more important to be able to listen individually to the four specialist English language teachers, though collective responses might have been an option, if time had allowed. The time spent observing might have been limiting and the research took place in December. Students would have adjusted to classroom routines since September, and it might

have been ideal to observe in September, as teachers were establishing classroom procedures and beginning units of teaching. Since EAL classrooms were somewhat of a novel idea, especially within the two neighbourhood schools, students were very comfortable with visitors in December. This might have been different in September; not being able to return to observe further in the classrooms has limited the details within this manuscript, as observations were limited and established within a specified amount of time.

I have used pseudonyms for these teachers: Gail, Brenda, Walter, and Larry. The pseudonyms protect the anonymity of participants in any research study.

### **Data Collection**

Observing program delivery, management of students with diverse language backgrounds, use of computer technology, arrangement of desks and materials, and other practices were my primary reasons for spending time in these other classrooms. This opportunity to see other students receiving EAL language support would expand my repertoire of skills, and ultimately allow me to become a more culturally responsive classroom teacher. Through participant observation of both the teachers and the students in their surroundings, I would be able to take field notes and conduct fieldwork (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 3). The setting for the research would allow me to gather descriptive data, from the classroom interactions that I watched, in addition to reading the transcripts from my interviews with the four focus teachers, which allowed me to hear the stories from their perspectives.

I was able to glean a snapshot of the learning and teaching in their environments. As I watched students in four different types of classrooms, I was trying to see what the teacher was doing, trying to capture the mind and the voice of the student, and imagining myself as the teacher. Questions were floating in my thoughts: Were these four teachers in different schools



creating similar classroom environments? Would I be able to detect similarities and differences in their approaches? How keen were my observation and writing skills? How effective would these teachers be, in educating their students to learn English? And what level of social and academic English had these teachers expected their students to learn? These questions parallel those that one asks as a quilt maker. *What were the designs and dimensions in these quilts? What materials were used in these patchwork quilts, and how were the intricacies of the designs actually created? Would I be able to dialogue with the designer and learn specific instructions that I would be able to implement in my next quilt?*

I was excited to be allowed into their classrooms, to be able to see the diverse group of students who had arrived in this province, to watch the interactions that would occur between these teachers and students, and to try to imagine what I, as a classroom teacher, might have done, or could do, using some of the same pedagogical practices. Initially I took very detailed notes, and upon further reflection, I realized that visual observations might be equally relevant. As I attempted to tether my thoughts, it became clear that my first impressions held more meaning than I had originally believed.

I felt it was important to ensure the integrity of the data collection. I tried to give my full attention to the teachers during the audio recording for the interviews, as they guided and controlled the pacing of the nine questions. "Qualitative interviews vary in the degree to which they are structured. Some interviews, although relatively open-ended, are focused around particular topics or may be guided by some general questions" (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 104). I was already somewhat familiar with the role of these specialist EAL teachers yet I still wanted to be able to understand their point of view regarding their role and their personal attachment to this role.

Prior to the interview, I also took brief notes during casual conversations before the recording device was activated. I wanted to remember the classroom posters: the placement of student and teacher materials, the physical arrangement of seating provided for the students, the resources available to students, the number of computers, particular messages on posters, and any other details that I felt would contribute to my analysis. Visual observations of both the students and their classroom environment provided me with data, in correlation to the dialogue and teaching instructions that occurred. All these sources were included in my environmental mapping of the space. My analysis of the responses from the teachers revealed a reasonable amount of common beliefs. After observing these teachers with their students for most of the day, the interviewing procedure allowed for the culmination of rich data that supported my observational field notes.

### **Data Analysis and Naturalistic Inquiry**

The analysis of the data involved the process of systematically searching and arranging the collected interview transcripts, field notes, documents, and artifacts to come up with findings. Analysis included working with the data, organizing it, and breaking it into manageable units, coding it, synthesizing it, and searching for patterns. In sifting through the data, I used Cummins and Krashen's theories of second language learning as a filter, Dewey's and Vygotsky's views on social learning, and the global circular figure that I created on effective teaching. Data analysis and interpretation moved me, the researcher, from the rambling pages of description to thoughtful interpretation, analysis, and coding of themes.

The framework for this study was *naturalistic inquiry*, a qualitative methodology, which relies on the assumption that meaning-making activities constitute forms of realities as meaningful, or more meaningful. Qualitative researchers go to a particular setting under

study because they are concerned with context. Action such as teaching can be best understood when it is observed in the setting in which it occurs. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p. 4)

For the most part, at all schools, the groups of students in meaningful settings (classrooms) consisted mostly of beginners. It was also interesting to see the cultural milieus that became the classroom groupings. The students enjoyed seeing each other and their interactions with each other were generally positive. Their focused approach to learning English was definitely observable; out of necessity, the students were learning to speak, read, write, and listen in English. The culturally responsive teachers, who were gifted in their ability to engage the students, had created an optimum learning environment. Educating teachers to accommodate a culturally diverse group of learners “requires a commitment to a society that is both democratic and multicultural and it requires us to look carefully at what knowledge, skills, and attitudes today’s teachers will need to teach tomorrow’s children” (Ladson-Billings, 1991, p. 194). Ladson-Billings’ views challenge teachers.

To fully address the skills and attitudes that effective teachers will need to meet these challenges in teaching in multilingual schools, it was important to understand that our identities have been shaped by our relationships with others. In the classroom situation, we have developed our personal and professional knowledge through interactions with others within the social environments, sharing our storied experiences. These interactions help us to make sense of our learning, as we reflect upon the knowledge and experiences we gain. These interactions form “a deep experiential process that lives at the heart of the relationships researchers and participants negotiated” (Huber, Clandinin, and Huber, 2006, p. 211). Previously, Clandinin and Huber (2002) wrote: “Thinking narratively, for us, is thinking within a metaphorical three-

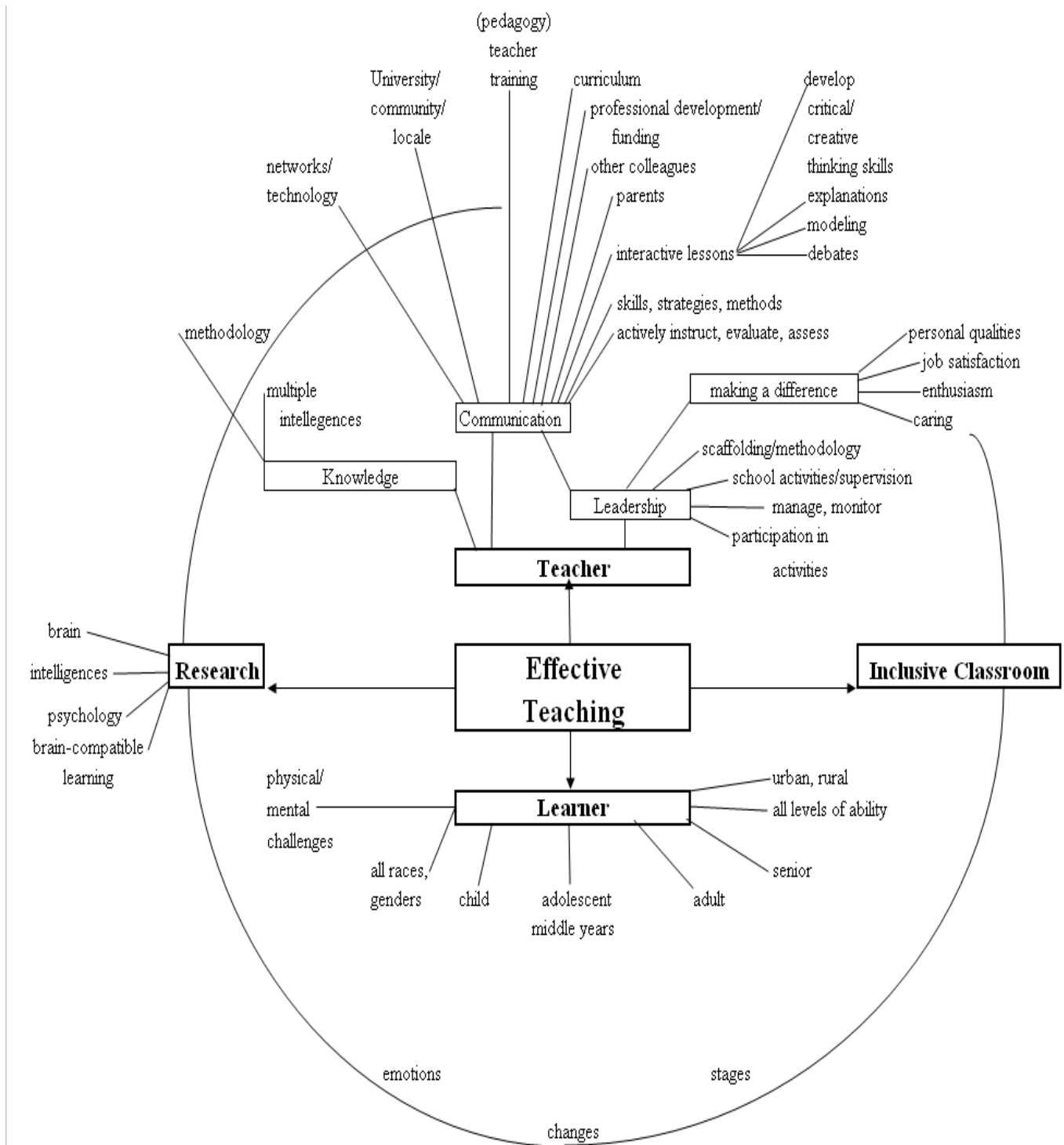
dimensional inquiry space. Dewey's work forms our foundation for thinking about narrative inquiry" (p. 162) and "our stories are shaped in places and lived in places" (p. 161). To further support the role of teachers in the context of social environments in which we live, Clandinin and Connelly (1998, 2000) believed in the importance of personal narratives and storytelling, as a means to understanding our experiences narratively. *As I tethered my thoughts about EAL and program delivery, I was trying to anchor my own thoughts, as I reflected on my daily practices in the classroom.* With ongoing self-reflection and making meaning of my observations, I was anticipating being an observer in the EAL classroom. With introspection, I could analyze the materials I was using and make changes.

Stepping inside four different classrooms, specifically set up to engage learners in a multilingual classroom, allowed me to view an ordinary day in the English language support classrooms for immigrants with varying abilities in communicating in English. Not only were EAL students learning English as an added language, but through immersion they were learning about western Canadian culture.

I value storytelling and personal narratives, and I wanted to encourage the four EAL teachers to share storied teaching practices with me in the natural setting of their classrooms. I felt that their experiences would be meaningful for me, as I reflected on the conversations I had with them the previous year. I observed the teachers working with EAL students in a specific program, to determine if their strategies were effective and culturally responsive methods in educating English language-challenged students who needed additional support beyond their classroom. During this time, I continued to reflect metacognitively as I researched my own daily teaching practices with all my students, "and questioning how I was making adaptations. For

me, teaching is research - - looking and looking again” at the stuff of our classroom lives (Class Notes, ERES 800, 2007).

To provide a framework for the inquiry questions, I developed a definition of effective teaching: effective teaching creates students with a love of learning new things, being able to transfer that knowledge to other areas in their lives, by drawing on their past knowledge and unique cultural experiences (2009). This definition assisted me in developing an image, representing the concept of effective teaching (See Figure 3.1). It portrays a global image, representing the cultures of the world, constructed with the knowledge and ideas that I have been able to gather as a classroom teacher. Culturally relevant teaching, which is effective teaching as an ideology, provides a framework of understanding the process of integrating and implementing a particular curriculum through diverse teaching strategies. This image represents the lens that I have used in this research. The figure is circular, representing the concept of continual adaptation, change, movement, and growth; observations and collective thoughts are interpreted through the four main subject areas in the image: teacher, learner, inclusive classroom, and research.



The research process of observing four participant EAL English language specialist teachers was facilitated through this diagram, as it formed the lens with which to make qualitative observations within the classrooms.

**Figure 3.1: A Global Constructivist Approach. Based on the Definition of Effective Teaching, March, 2007**

## Consent

The local school board required me to submit an *Application Form for Permission to Conduct Research* (see Appendix A). Initiating qualitative research required that the Behavioural Ethics committee at the University of Saskatchewan would grant approval. *This could be compared metaphorically to assembling all the materials needed to make a quilt, including the fabric still on the bolts, spools of thread, various scissors, a tape measure, patterns, resource books and preliminary sketches of the design and possibly even the size of the finished project.*

A *Letter of Consent for Participant/Teacher* was completed (See Appendix B), which indicated the details of the research study. I used a compilation of reflective journal writings, field notes, and visual observations in the classroom, personal teacher reflections, and interviews and audio-recordings for the four specifically identified EAL literacy teachers. The focus remained on the teachers, not the students; this was minimal risk research, since students were not interviewed and their academic work was not studied.

The *Letter of Consent for Release of Transcripts* allowed me to provide a smoothed copy of the transcribed information. Each teacher was given the opportunity to have the audio-recording device turned to *off*, at any time, for any reason. The interviews were conducted in a quiet environment in the school setting, free from any distraction (See Appendix C).

Before the classroom observation occurred in the four schools, a *Letter of Consent for Classroom Observation* was sent home with the students (See Appendix D). The letter indicated to the parents of the students in all respective schools that the research project had been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board and that there were no known risks.

The conversational interviews were semi-structured, designed to convey a rich understanding of the teacher participants' way of thinking. With my nine guiding questions (See Appendix E) and a maximum time limit of sixty minutes, I listened to the teacher's voices, individually learning about how these four specialist teachers experienced teaching EAL students. It was the teachers' prerogatives to advance to subsequent questions at their discretion, although time was a limiting factor. The audiotaping technology allowed me to later transcribe the dialogue, gaining insight into their responses, specifically to capture the details they provided. During the interviews, I also was attempting to use jot notes to assist my transcriptions, and also as a backup, in case there were technological malfunctions. I analyzed the ways that these teachers matched the pedagogical styles and organizational arrangements of literacy learning with immigrant children's language and cultural values.

### **Procedures for Confidentiality**

I provided all participant teachers with individual forms to complete, and the audio-recording transcripts are securely stored by my advisor, for a period of five years. The local school board and local administrator, at the school level, have signed copies of their approved form; the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board had provided a certificate of approval for the research to be completed.

### **The Next Quilt to be Made**

Upon further reflections, I have been able to expand my repertoire of teaching practices, creating culturally relevant teaching and learning opportunities for all students. The multifaceted elements of the quilt could metaphorically represent the multidimensional aspects in our multilingual classrooms, and the opportunities for educators to incorporate the many gifts and



attributes of all students. The role of educators in multilingual classrooms cannot be understated as they strive to meet the needs of all students.

The Global Constructivist Model (See Figure 3.1) which supported my definition of effective teaching has been an opportunity to look at who I am as a teacher, to examine the global implications that can result from the choices I make. I have referred to the metaphor of creating a quilt on numerous occasions, and as a Home Economist with a major in clothing and textiles, this aligns my personal interest in sewing, quilting, knitting, stitching, and creating new designs.

With my vested interest and the paperwork finalized, I entered the four schools, quite oblivious to the classroom I left behind, for a short period of time. I was ready to observe, to listen, to make notes, and to involve myself in the dynamics of another environment that allowed me further opportunities to learn about myself and others. I would observe the four specialist teachers, noting their materials, and how they delivered various aspects of the curriculum. I would be asking the research question: How could these four teachers of pullout EAL students inform my teaching practices? I believe this research was important and timely for both classroom and EAL teachers in my jurisdiction.

## Chapter Four

### Results and Analysis: The Colourful Quilts Emerge

It is with open eyes and inquisitive mind that time spent in four similar EAL classrooms would allow me the opportunity to explore my research question: How could four English as an Additional Language teachers inform my classroom practices? In December, 2008, I was able to glean a “snapshot” into the teaching practices of four EAL teachers in different elementary schools within my district. Initially, this research sounded exciting and intriguing, and I really desired to enter those multilingual classrooms taught by the specialist EAL teachers. As I watched the interactions between these skilled teachers and their students who came from many culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, I gathered data in the form of field notes, and I made observations regarding the interactions I saw between the teacher and the students.

*Returning to my analogy of the quilt, I was able to see other quilts being stitched, designed by different artists with specific skills and experiences, which would represent their abilities to create their personal blankets.* Entering the four EAL classrooms allowed me the opportunity to observe and record instructional practices used by specialist teachers in combination with their delivery using culturally relevant teaching materials.

In this chapter I provide an overview of the school district's goals for the EAL program, including the program delivery model regarding English language support for EAL students. I present the fundamental ways that the school divisions have coordinated the external and internal supports to provide the teaching of social language to newcomers. I discuss the neighbourhood program (providing EAL language support within the neighbourhood school) in contrast to the pull-out program (in a designated school in close proximity) involving an intricate network of pickups and deliveries throughout the school, using taxis. For this research, the data were

gathered in two areas: the interview process with the teachers, and the actual pedagogical methods and the variety of ways in which these teachers helped their students learn. I present data, drawing from the existing literature to provide support for their practices. In blending the integrated and communicative teaching styles of the four participant teachers, I will present the information gathered from the interviews and my observations of these teachers within the classrooms.

The primary focus for this research was four EAL English specialist teachers, Brenda, Gail, Larry, and Walter, pseudonyms to protect their anonymity. Three of these teachers provided English language instruction in a regular sized classroom which could accommodate their students, and one teacher who provided instruction in a much smaller yet functionally furnished rectangular room. This particular school was increasing its enrolment on a weekly basis at the time, due to high numbers of immigrant families settling into the neighbourhood area. Gail and Walter were teaching in a neighbourhood school with sufficient numbers of immigrant and refugee students, as well as students within the vicinity who lived in close proximity to the school. There was no need for students to be transported by taxi to the school. In contrast, Brenda and Larry received their students by taxi, in half-day segments, various times during the week, and their schools were centrally situated and designated by the school division to be schools providing EAL support. An intricate system of taxi pick-ups and deliveries was organized to ensure that students arrived on time. These teachers were my primary focus. *The colourful quilts that would be stitched together over time would reflect intricate patterns and designs shown by the complexity and diversity of the strategies used by the four teachers that reflected the interactions within their classrooms.*

### **Providing EAL Instruction**

In response to attempting to meet these needs and provide support in education, school districts are responsible for identifying standards that indicate gaps and strengths in both written and oral language abilities. The district's goal for the EAL Program was for students to receive English language instruction in order to develop social language or BISC (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills). The resulting survival language and conversational fluency would form the basis for emotional and academic development. These primary skills expose students to familiar content, and include face-to-face conversation, high frequency vocabulary, simple sentence structure, and immediate help to communicate their basic needs. The social language can be developed within the first two years (Cummins, 1996, p. 58) in an immersion environment in which EAL students interact with native speakers.

In learning a first language Cummins (2000) argued that students have already acquired a set of skills and implicit metalinguistic knowledge that can be drawn upon when learning English as an additional language. Cummins called this linkage between languages a common language proficiency (CUP). Both languages are outwardly distinct but are supported by shared concepts and knowledge derived from learning and experience. A change that takes place in one language has a beneficial effect on the other language(s).

In contrast, students' CALP (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency) is developed over the next five to seven years, with the support of the regular classroom teacher. To acquire CALP the students would need to process more cognitively demanding language, which would be more abstract, including less familiar content, increasingly complex vocabulary, and be decontextualized. Students would need scaffolding and on-going support in all subject areas,

including additional background knowledge, specific teaching of relevant vocabulary, and individualized instruction, to enable them to learn the more advanced cognitive skills.

The reality of today is the presence of the multilingual classroom, with students who speak many different languages. The multicultural classroom celebrates the languages of origin that the students bring, and it provides meaningful educational opportunities for students to learn the language of English in formal and informal situations within the social spaces of schools.

Brodkin (2006) described Katrina, a preschool student whose English understanding and vocabulary have increased considerably in a few months, yet she has difficulty communicating in English. "The dilemma is how to enable children to make friends and fit in, while at the same time retaining pride in their national/ethnic origin...But they need their parents' permission and guidance to feel loyal and respectful to do so" (p. 23). Schools often pressure language minority students to assimilate to the regular language. A discourse of subordination often characterizes the treatment of minorities in the wider society and in most conventional school contexts. The discourse practices in the school often reflect an ideological assumption that linguistic and cultural diversity is a problem instead of a resource to be developed by all minority students as they participate and achieve at school. Cummins (2006, p. 4) wrote: "the absence of coherent policies within schools in relation to the increasing linguistic and cultural diversity of the student body risks compromising principles of equity to which all Canadian schools are committed."

Delpit (1988) described the relevance of educational movements in their struggles to educate "children of color" (p. 282) and the conversational disparity that existed between "white and non-White respondents" who felt "passionately about being left out of the dialogue." Regarding the "skills/process" debate, she suggested that even when direct teaching of skills occurred, multicultural students (non-White) could remain feeling alienated and misunderstood,

a concept that the “white” teachers did not understand. Delpit’s views connect this idea to a complex theme that she refers to as “the culture of power” and this delay creates “the silenced dialogue” (p. 282). Her solution to the language that is privileged is “that the school provides their children with discourse patterns, instructional styles, and spoken and written codes that will allow them success in the larger society” (p. 282), as well as involving parents of these children (in marginalized or poor communities) in discussions about best instructional practices in schools.

In support of Delpit, it seems that culturally responsive teaching would help to bridge the differences between their realities in their lives compared to the academic structures and discourses that are part of schools. Teachers need to use direct and indirect teaching strategies through demonstration, modeling, and step-by-step instructions, which help students develop their visual literacy skills through listening and viewing comprehension. In these “critical moments,” students would develop “knowledge in the making” which would empower them to learn. The culturally diverse students in classrooms need varied and specifically targeted teaching strategies to learn to communicate using the English language.

The students I observed were engaged in their own learning, which was evident in their visual and auditory interest with their teachers. The students, forming strong attachments to their teachers, were capable of demonstrating understanding through their eager responses and visual attentiveness. Nieto (2006) suggested that all teachers support student literacy practices, promoting daily personal reading for all students, in either the students’ native or English language, regardless of ability level in English.

In my observations, the participant teachers demonstrated a “passion for social justice” (Nieto, 2006, p. 459). Because they were creating opportunities for their students to read books,

to share stories with their peers, to be involved in the academic and social learning spaces within these classrooms, students brought their knowledge and eagerness to learn. *They became part of the social and academic fabric of the classroom, building knowledge and participating in their learning, with their teachers.*

To facilitate listening and speaking development, a specialist EAL teacher might include these specific instructional behaviours: modified teacher talk, a slowed-down rate of clear speech, slight pauses strategically placed, repeated familiar vocabulary, paraphrases, and fewer idioms and colloquialisms throughout the rhythm of the daily activities. Curtin (2005) wrote, “(teachers) were empathetic; used non-verbal cues of students to guide their instruction; understood the cultural differences and learning styles among students; developed techniques to work specifically with ESL students; tried different teaching strategies, and focused on concept and curriculum content as quickly as possible in the lesson.” (p. 39)

In dialogical teacher-learner events, students would speak, responding with one or a few words (Krashen, 1983), while immediately receiving positive feedback in the form of praise. Using relevant instructional materials (Krashen & Terrell, 1983; Solomon & Franklin, 2006) and providing “comprehensible input” are important.

These participant teachers, using repeated vocabulary, using praise and positive feedback, and using relevant instructional materials had been able to create pathways of learning with their students, helping them to independently become more capable in both academic and social learning.

In helping children to learn another language, teachers also need to guide their students into daily personal reflections about what they are learning. Emergent literacy, which is the idea that “children learn to reflect on language as they develop toward conventional literacy” leads

students to develop a “conscious awareness” of the function and structure of both speech and language, as they are learning the language of print (Dixon-Krauss, 1996, p. 19). Students receiving English language support gradually merge their prior knowledge with their new knowledge acquired through activities which engage them in both reading and language activities.

Through observations within the four classrooms, teachers used relevant teaching materials, and provided diverse instructional strategies with their students. With engaging books and materials, students wanted to be involved in their own learning. Using their prior knowledge, students were able to add to their learning; they were gradually using more cognitively demanding language.

As students continue talking and learning to read, they need on-going support. There are many ways to support literacy through talk and oral storytelling, celebrating the contributions that EAL families and their students bring to classrooms and communities. *Through dialogue with parents and an honest approach in educating students, both regular and EAL teachers can stitch pieces of fabrics together to make quilts, to connect the ideas and voices of children from all cultures.*

### **Supportive Agencies**

As newcomers have continued to settle into communities within Saskatchewan, support agencies have tried to provide assistance to these families in various ways. Partnerships have begun to be formed as school districts have collaborated with organizations to ease the transition of immigrant and refugee families into Canadian culture. Teaching children who live in the community in which an EAL program has been established has many advantages, which include being able to attend cultural gatherings, feasts, parent evenings, winter carnivals, and regular



weekly events for parents or children to come together in their community. These social events have been primarily organized by the Salvation Army, the Saskatoon Open Door Society, and the Global Gathering Place, in conjunction with the SSWIS program, in coordination with the school administrators and staff.

The Saskatoon Settlement Workers in Schools program is a school-based (Catholic and Public School systems) outreach program that connects newly arrived families to services and resources in the school and community. It also promotes settlement and encourages student achievement in multilingual schools. While the mission of the Saskatoon Open Door Society is to welcome and assist refugees and immigrants to become informed and effective participants in Canadian society, and to involve the local community in their hospitable reception and just acceptance, The Open Door takes a holistic approach to service delivery and provides services and programming in the areas of settlement and integration, language training, and employment services. Global Gathering is another immigrant settlement agency that provides sufficient resources for new families to help them in the initial adjustment period. This agency has worked closely with schools and has arranged for translators to facilitate the interaction between home and school, improving communication with teachers and parents.

Other agencies, like the public libraries, have also tried to respond to the growing numbers of immigrants' needs, providing English language support to families. The Toastmasters Club, TLC Branch (Talk, Lead, Communicate) is an educational study group (2009), which advertises through the Open Door Society, the International Students Lounge, and some apartment buildings; it is focused on helping adults who are learning English to speak confidently in public, allowing a forum for cross-cultural perspectives. These settlement

agencies rely heavily on volunteers to coordinate services and funding needs have been stretched in the past few years.

Through the research conversations I was informed that the Salvation Army often provided the teaching of English as a support for the parents in one neighbourhood school in the evenings, and enabled families to build communities with other families and communicate more effectively with their children who were learning English at school.

### **Pull-Out Programs: As a Service Model**

In this district the service models of EAL instruction have been changing for more than twenty years as increased immigration has mandated different instructional and organizational approaches. This research involved observations and analysis of data specifically in the elementary school setting, including students who ranged in age from 5 to 14 years, receiving education from Kindergarten to Grade 8.

Providing an EAL program that will meet the needs of English-challenged students is a complex, growing task, as the location of settlement of these many immigrant and refugee families is uncertain; school districts have tried to be prepared, both in urban and rural centers, where the material and human resources have limits. Administrators, teachers, and support staff attempt to cope with the increasing demands placed upon them, to provide an educational system that will accommodate the diversity of individuals and families

In deciding how to accommodate and educate the students and families of different languages and cultures, school districts make those decisions independently, based on practices followed in other provinces, by informing themselves of the current literature available, and by being innovative with new models of instruction. Sufficient resources need to be available to meet both the academic and social needs of students requiring English language support, as they

bring their life experiences and limited abilities in English to classrooms and as teachers provide ways for students to be empowered in their learning.

More than a decade ago, the service model provided English language support to students, in a home classroom in a neighbourhood school. With an itinerant EAL specialist teacher traveling to four schools per day, for example, twelve per week, servicing immigrant and refugee students was a difficult situation to manage. Itinerant specialist teachers were deployed, providing service and language instruction based on numbers. Immigration trends were then not as rapid, and the model, at that time, met the needs of those students. English-language challenged students who were identified as struggling in communication were removed individually or in groups, or pulled out from their regular classroom, and a small space within the school was transformed into an EAL setting. This model was a feasible and workable approach in providing service to students, because group numbers remained between five and ten. Students remained in their neighbourhood, and received language support, similar to the model of providing resource-room support.

Since that time, there have been adaptations to this service model of delivery of English language support that provided support for immigrant and refugee children. At the time of this research, the pull-out model was provided in five neighbourhood schools (an additional school had been added, six months following this research), geographically divided in the urban environment. The children came to the classroom by taxi, primarily from outside of the neighbourhood. In so doing, the taxis created a complex network of pick-ups and deliveries throughout the school. The cost of transporting students by taxi was under budgetary review, and the teaching time lost in minutes was evident. Most recently, the increasing demands placed

on these teachers of these classes became high, because the numbers of immigrant and refugee families was rapidly increasing.

Other children who lived within a five-mile radius of these schools received free transportation by taxi to attend, to receive English language support. They were removed from the school in which they were registered, and spent 2 or 3 half days at the designated school, for up to a maximum of three years, depending on the level of English support that they required. They entered these classrooms with all the gear that they would need for the day, and they stayed there for either a morning or afternoon. It was becoming more difficult to provide language instruction when the groups became greater than thirteen. The total numbers of students receiving support exceeded 40 and 50.

There were both advantages and disadvantages to this model. For this research, I was able to observe and dialogue with two of the five specialist teachers, Brenda and Larry, pseudonyms, which protect their anonymity.

In addition, the pullout model also referred to the situation whereby designated students were retained in the neighbourhood school in which they had been registered. In this research, two schools were included. The EAL population of students in the neighbourhood was so high that the need for an EAL specialist teacher in these two schools was urgent. In these schools, students received additional English language support within their neighbourhood school, yet still were pulled-out of their regular classroom within the same school. They came to this classroom with a pencil. This program has been referred to as the “neighbourhood” program, in contrast to the “pullout” program.

The EAL program was an integral part of these schools, and the specialist teachers remained in the school, in a home classroom. The two participant teachers in these

“neighbourhood” schools were Walter and Gail (pseudonyms). One teacher commented, “I’ve seen my numbers climb from about 20 in my first year to 33 in my second year to over 50 now, so it’s been a growing job.” As a group, they valued the richness in cultures and individual languages brought by their students, and they were concerned about accommodating the students. In summary, four participant teachers were included in this research.

For Brenda and Larry, the “pullout” teachers, there was an on-going entrance and re-location of students who were designated to a particular location for their EAL language instruction. In many cases the EAL classroom was outside their residential boundaries. In the fall, when numbers of families were settling, the EAL enrolment in both Brenda’s and Larry’s classroom changed on a weekly basis, which interrupted the continuity, as well as helping students settle into the new Canadian culture.

Over the course of the year, the specialist EAL teachers all said that they were trying to deliver a quality program to an increasing number of students requiring EAL English language support, and the numbers were impacting their program in significant ways. As staff was deployed in September, this trend of increasing numbers of EAL students had been an on-going challenge. In some schools, the Resource Room teacher had been playing a greater role, providing support to the regular classroom teacher, and to the EAL specialist teacher. It had been an interim solution in some schools. Though the communication processes between the regular and Resource Room teachers were enhanced within the building, it placed greater demands on their teaching time.

The influx of both immigrants and refugee students and their families is definitely having an impact on the educational system in Saskatchewan, and school districts have been creative in presenting various service delivery models to meet the needs at that time. Even as this document

was being written, further changes had taken place regarding the service model of delivery of English language support. Currently, there are almost twenty itinerant specialists who are providing EAL support to students in elementary schools in the division. All students are “pulled out” of their regular classrooms, and only the teachers are moving to other schools, as needed. I discuss current trends in Chapter Five.

### **The Light in their Eyes**

Within each classroom, a diverse group from many cultures and backgrounds is evident, and they seem pleased to be in the classroom. EAL<sup>1</sup> (English as an Additional Language) students come from a variety of countries in the world and receive instructional support for learning English in addition to their elementary/high school classroom/subject instruction. Based on conversations with the four specialist research participants, students in Saskatchewan schools have come from countries including Argentina, Bosnia, Chile, China, France, Germany, Iran, Japan, the Philippines, and Sudan. The students belong to one of two basic groups: immigrants or refugees. A third group could include international students, who arrive in Canada to study English and may remain as permanent residents. EAL language support might or might not be available in a particular school division, depending on economic and human resources.

### **Building a Cultural Community: Walter, Teacher Mentor**

I observed Walter using the morning announcements as a forum for his students in an advanced group to demonstrate their understanding of various details in the message. He encouraged fluency among the students, as they were seated at circular tables, and also as they were partnered to complete information in a calendar. To assist in an intermediate grouping of students' learning of fractions in mathematics, he had five students agree to move to the front of

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<sup>1</sup>In this thesis the term EAL is used in the school district as a replacement term for ESL (English as a Second Language) and ELL (English Language Learner).

the room, as he provided oral examples for the others, indicating that three of the five students were wearing black pants. Students were using their bodies, as well as their minds, in learning new concepts (Silver, Strong & Perini, 2000). They described the five students in a variety of fractional terms.

Using handouts in the students' folders, Walter helped another group of intermediate students as they continued to learn about simple and compound sentences, independent clauses, subjects, and verbs using a formula pattern or a stem sentence. With a younger group, Walter had followed his previously written plan on the board. (a) SSS – see, say, spell. Students reviewed previously taught vocabulary from a huge poster. (b) Sentence reading. Using direct instruction, students took turns reading sentences, parts of which were color-coded onto strips, deciding the correct order for logical understanding. (c) Vowel study. Focusing on specific vowels, they were led by Walter, who reviewed the “r” sound, controlled with blends like ir, ur, er, our, and car.

It was obvious the students wanted to please him, and also pleasing themselves. He was relaxed, he encouraged his students with positive feedback, he smiled, and he invited students to ask questions. He valued and recognized each child's individuality (Rigg & Allan, 1989). Walter had taken time to get to know his students, and they responded eagerly with his many invitations to learning.

Walter's students excitedly greeted him in hallways on their way to EAL classes that day. He jokingly talked about skating with students on a field trip, about sipping frothy hot chocolate drinks afterward; about traveling by bus with senior students to see interactive displays, a collection of stuffed animals, a museum, and well-known buildings. He had students write in personal journals after. Creating opportunities for language and learning experiences is

a critical component for EAL instruction; students celebrated their memories of the activities by writing about them, solidifying their learning, and drawing on prior enjoyable sentiments.

In accord with both Krashen (1981, 1984) and Cummins (2006), Walter was able to both build and scaffold instruction and use students' background knowledge as comprehensible input and to engage students in their own learning. The research indicated that scaffolding, the process of teaching new information to supplement what the student already understands, enriches student's knowledge, by recognizing and validating the knowledge that they bring to the classroom.

Samway and McKeon (2007) supported the idea that grammar, spelling, and vocabulary teaching are relevant, if they are taught and then used in the students' own writings. "Actual writing for read audiences and real purposes is a vital element in helping students to understand that they have an important voice in their own learning processes" (Delpit, 1988, p.288).

"Giving opportunities for students to write from their own experiences, and recognizing the content value and giving it due credibility, are important in giving these children "the language of power." Delpit (1988) wrote: "This does not mean separating children according to family background...but ensuring that each classroom incorporates strategies appropriate for all children in its confines (p. 286). She continued, "To deny students their own expert knowledge is to disempower them" (Ibid). Delpit was an advocate for using direct instruction in teaching children, yet she insisted that this method was not enough. In a supportive environment, positive relationships among students enhance students' academic performance, according to Sumaryono and Ortiz (1994).

The EAL students are trying to understand the behavioural and learning expectations of the classroom. In reality, these students need to *border cross*, which is to shift conceptually,



culturally, and linguistically, from one way of understanding the world (the home community) to another (the school community). Giroux and McLaren (1994) wrote: “students would study their own ethnicities, histories, and gain some sense of those complex and diverse cultural locations that have provided them with a sense of voice, place, and identity” (p. 51). Validating their own histories and cultural backgrounds, students bring their voices and identities to the classrooms, stepping out of comfortable borders, into another setting. Giroux's words challenge teachers to allow their students to cross borders. With 15 students in the classroom at one time, possibly for one half-day, students were attempting to cross borders in various areas: language communication provided the greatest challenge for students.

With younger students in the classroom, Walter used a picture book (York, 2008) about the Bus, with a tape and pre-recorded story (Cummins, 2006). Picture books are dual texts, strengthening the students' abilities in both viewing and listening. Dual texts have both words and visuals, which support meaning from the text and create meaning for students. Walter initially led the students as they visually viewed the unfolding plot, and they simply “read the pictures” with limited vocabulary, as in a picture walk. This direct instruction helped students to develop their visual literacy skills, especially in sequencing a pictorial story. The second time, after reading and checking for understanding of key vocabulary, they listened to the story, the first few pages, as the tape-recorder played. Rereading is critical for EAL students, because they are developing sight vocabulary and reinforcing the meaning of the story. Providing step-by-step instruction in this activity directly guided students to a process that is prevalent in schools, which is modeling. This instruction is a critical strategy in EAL language instruction. The young students were able to identify with the story in pictures, and they were able to bring their prior knowledge to the lesson.

As a concluding activity, Walter invited the young beginner group of students to play a game similar to “fish”, using patterned questions like, “Do you have a ...?” and the students gave up the card or told the person to go “fish.” He engaged students by tapping into the students’ background knowledge (Dong, 2006) and growing awareness of English. The students were socially constructing language as they consolidated new vocabulary and expanded their linguistic options with short sentences, such as “I have a dog.”

Walter’s approach using visuals and accompanying word cards was a significant strategy for EAL students learning English. For example, when a student sees “dog” as a visual representation, the familiar recognition in their memory allows them to transfer the prior knowledge of *perro* (Spanish), *gou* (Mandarin), *kutte* (Urdu), *hund* (German), or *cobaka* (Russian). The student realizes that the visual that they know is now represented by the spoken word “dog” in English. It is important to recognize the intellectual and social competencies of our students and to provide them with “comprehensible input” (Krashen, 1983) from the first day, adding on new knowledge in understandable pieces, visually first and then followed with a label.

With a larger group of intermediate students, Walter began with a read aloud (York, 2008) of a picture book, “Hat Trick Hockey,” noting key ideas like Gretzky being #99, Beliveau #4, and what a “5 hole” means, through direct explanation. By tapping into his students’ familiarity and enjoyment of the sport of hockey (Dong, 2006), he was able to discuss the relevance of numbers and to scaffold his students’ knowledge. He passed out counters for each student, who rearranged their counters to match the phrases offered by other students, and he realized that all students needed a review of key terms relevant to learning fractions. Walter was integrating both language and mathematics, allowing for cross-disciplinary knowledge

between subjects. It is important for teachers, like Walter, to use materials which are motivating, especially with older students.

He used pictures and word cards, along with appropriate gestures; and he developed vocabulary with the students using huge, colourful posters; played Bingo and integrated math manipulatives when teaching students about fractions. The value of using manipulatives allows students to engage their physical body (hands) to organize tangible pieces, while cognitively sequencing their steps. By themselves, manipulatives have no inherent meaning, since the teacher's role is to make this meaning explicit. In this way, students will build connections between the concrete materials and the abstract symbols that they represent.

In mathematics, abstract concepts are essential to understanding and performing computations. Abstract concepts are also a source of difficulty for many students who struggle with mathematics, many of whom find even basic mathematical concepts difficult to understand. The use of manipulatives is a key foundation of EAL teaching, because they are used to make visual patterns and/or create tactile arrangements. These arrangements enable students and teachers to represent concretely the abstract concepts that they are learning, and to link these concepts to prior knowledge. They are used primarily in the elementary grades, and are becoming gradually more prevalent in high schools. They offer a useful means to introduce new concepts to EAL students of all grades.

Physical pieces, or manipulatives, are concrete items, allowing students to visually and physically use them to represent their understanding. However, with the advent of the World Wide Web, there was a new category of manipulatives, that is – virtual world. Virtual manipulatives are basically digital “objects” that resemble physical objects that can be manipulated, usually with a mouse, in the same ways as their authentic counterparts such as Base

10 Blocks, Cuisenaire Rods, and Tangrams. Children learn by doing (Rea and Mercuri, 2006) and their learning provides meaning for them that is transferable to new learning. Almost a century ago, Dewey (1916) referred to this learning as experiential learning, and Silver, Strong, and Perini (2000) supported the concept of brain/body as an experiential connection to more fully engage students in all subject areas, and across all grade levels.

One of the commonalities in this varied group of virtual approaches is that students were eager to learn, just as acquiring a good education was a high priority for immigrant and refugee families. Hence, behaviour and management concerns were minimal. Walter was able to work with his students, giving them the individual attention required, allowing the students to work cooperatively with each other or independently, as in computer math games.

Regular classroom teachers need the human and/or material resources to cope with the increasing numbers of students needing additional EAL language support. There were a substantial number of EAL students in the upper grades in the mainstream classroom diagnosed with intensive needs (IS), including language. Struggling to meet many of their emotional needs and providing a safe refuge for them, the school decided that provincial government funding was needed. An EA (Educational Assistant) provided support to the regular classroom teacher. This particular EA was also available to assist the EAL students in the classroom, at times, and yet did not compromise the needs of the IS students. The two additional teachers, in both classroom and EAL, have created an improved working arrangement for the benefit of the students.

In rural Saskatchewan, there have been school districts that have provided EA (Educational Assistant) support when there are five immigrant students in a mainstream classroom. In Walter's neighbourhood, classrooms of thirty students are the norm, with up to ten students needing English language support. In all areas of the province, school districts are

making efforts to respond to the many growing areas of need in schools in our province, based on budgetary constraints, human needs, and material resources.

Teaching in this neighbourhood school, Walter's schedule required flexibility to accommodate the large numbers of students he was teaching. Walter's frame of reference was that the older the student was, the more language-challenged he/she was, and the greater need and time for language support for them. Since the time was short and the gap was wide, the student with the greatest need received the most minutes in the week for English instruction. The youngest students in the school received the next largest amount of time, because their needs were also great yet they did not have the same time pressures. As well, the primary classroom in the school was a language-rich environment, with literacy for life initiatives being promoted.

Walter's physical space in his classroom was small and his schedule was full, he had to change time classes every 45 minutes, or even every 30 minutes, following the timetable that provided for flexibility with most classroom teachers. Walter was able to plan and collaborate with classroom teachers during non-instructional times within the school, and was able to see his students participating in recesses, school lunches, and assemblies, which strengthened the teacher/student relationships he had begun to establish. The relationships that teachers form with their students will facilitate the manner in which students can begin to respect and relate to their teachers.

### **Gail's Story**

In contrast to Walter, Gail's enrolment of EAL students was fairly constant. Gail tried grouping students with similar abilities together and adjusted to teacher schedules within the building, positioning herself as a subject teacher, as the music or French teacher might do: pulling students as needed in small blocks of time. This method was not workable for Gail,

because insufficient time was given to beginners, and students from different levels came from one classroom at a time. It accommodated classroom teachers, but did not work for her. To streamline her teaching, Gail grouped her students into half-day blocks, scheduling them in as beginners, intermediates, and advanced. Within each week, the beginners came for three half days or more, the intermediates came three or more half days, and the advanced group came twice.

Gail's students began the day by individually silent reading, while she circulated, greeting each child, asking for their home reading log and journal. The journals indicated the date, the title of the book, the reason the student liked the book, the author, and a rating scale. Having students complete sentence stems containing specific syntactic structures and vocabulary allowed them to experience success in small yet significant ways. Drucker (2003) supported students choosing interesting and appropriate texts at their reading level. The students chorally read sentences, after being gathered to the front of the room, while observing a large picture. With choral reading, students were invited to participate in an anxiety-reduced environment, in social learning spaces that created a comfortable environment. If they were intimidated by speaking aloud, they had the option of simply mouthing the words, because reading along or listening to the text being read aloud is a critical strategy. Students were able to take higher risks, showing their growing confidence in their language skills and communicative abilities. Individually they copied new vocabulary, and each student suggested one sentence, which Gail copied onto chart paper. At a later date, these sentences were mounted on sidewalls. They chanted vowel sounds on bright cards taped to the front board, and blended consonants visually grouped together (e.g., sh, ch, ng, wh, and qu).

Music was integrated into the activities. Students sang a song about baking a cake. Gail asked for clarification of vocabulary; showed various ingredients like sugar, eggs, and flour; physically manipulated these items; and demonstrated motions like breaking an egg. Using gestures added to the overall interest and comprehension of the cake-making procedure. The students returned to their desks, and copied the *ake* and *long a vowel* sounds, including ten words generated by students, which were copied onto chart paper by the teacher. Hansen-Thomas (2008) wrote about the importance of writing critical new vocabulary on word walls and white boards, which are more permanent than chalkboards. Words that are prominently displayed become dictionaries for young spellers who are incorporating new words into their writing. Instrumental music was played in the background, which seemed to create a relaxed atmosphere. An anxiety-free environment is ideal, according to Dragan (2005), who said that anxiety “closes students to comprehensible input” (p. 23). Krashen (1983) wrote about the negative effect of anxiety in learning, and suggested various ways to eliminate it. Inviting the students to speak when they felt comfortable was a high priority, as well as creating an environment that was relaxing, established by using soft voices and slowing down speech and instructions. While I observed in Gail's room, a softly lit Christmas tree in the corner added to the ambiance.

Gail told stories, used puppets, played Bingo, used felt as a manipulative to sound out syllables in words, and changed activities about every thirty minutes. Puppetry is an effective tool to blend drama and visual elements, along with showing character development through actions and speech. Most children enjoy playing games, which allows for social and linguistic interaction among peers; and incorporating hands-on activities using felt to represent numerical responses involves children by engaging their bodies and their minds congruently.

Gail provided instruction to her students regarding voice intonations in the English language, with voices going lower at the end of a sentence. She encouraged students to pronounce clearly; using puppets and modeling, Gail provided the example for the question and answer, then students reciprocated. "What did you do in school today?" was followed by "I made a picture in school today" and others. Students initially practiced with partners, and then shared with the larger group. Substitution exercises (where words are replaced in the sentence with other meaningful additions), practiced orally then in writing, created modeling, which engaged students and enhanced their learning, in an anxiety-reduced environment. Working with a partner met their needs for social learning (Vygotsky in 1962; Vygotsky in Dixon-Krauss, 1996; Dewey, 1916).

In a large-group format, students demonstrated their knowledge of school vocabulary, placing word cards adjacent to the picture on the front poster. After a Bingo game to reinforce vocabulary, the students used felt pieces to identify syllables and sound within words. These were based on "Empowered Beginnings", by Marg Averill (1998). Averill, who had specialized knowledge in speech therapy, believed that developing early reading strategies for young students was dependent on their ability to produce mouth and lip sounds created with tongue placement (Averill, 1998). For example, in the word **baking**, there were five sounds: **b, long a, k, short i, and ng**. Students would place five pieces of felt in front of them, on their table, showing they understood the syllables and sounds in that word. Gail created an opportunity, to allow her students to visually represent their acquired and newly forming knowledge to be represented by tangible, concrete pieces of felt.

Following recess, Gail read aloud a book about the Christmas story and on the chart paper nearby was written the question: "What *did you see* on the Christmas tree?" as well as the



response," *I saw a gift on the Christmas tree.*" After listening to the story, students began chanting the answer and rhythmic clapping with hands on knees, after the teacher asked the question (McCauley & McCauley, 1992, in Drucker, 2003). Chanting and body percussion were key elements in McCauley's writings. Questioning patterns and patterned responses provided a model for students; with low risk, they were invited to participate and listen to each others' responses, as emergent speakers and readers beginning to understand literacy and the path to reading. Gestures and actions helped students clarify meanings. Students placed small square pictures of the items on the larger tree displayed at the front area, individually, after they were able to illicit a response. Gail encouraged all students and they all were able to put a square image of something on the tree, followed by a Bingo game to reinforce vocabulary.

With direct instruction, Gail's students were actively engaged. In many ways, they were constructing new knowledge together. Ellsworth, writing about critical pedagogy and racial discrimination in education (Stone, 1994) wrote that "...the literature implies that students and teachers can and should engage each other in the classroom as fully rational subjects" (p. 303). Gail was allowing her students to share their knowledge openly, and she listened critically and creatively to what they were able to share with her, thereby honouring their contributions, however small. Ellsworth referred to this as "learning in the making." Modeling was also used in many activities, and the students seemed to enjoy all the different activities.

Teaching approaches seemed to encompass those used by regular classroom teachers, and they met the needs of individual students. Gail showed patience, cared, and created opportunities for all students to feel competent and successful. However, the ratio of students to teacher in the EAL classroom is much lower than the ratio in a regular classroom and the most fluent English speaker was the teacher. In a regular classroom, there might be thirty students,

and many fluent individuals speaking English, in addition to one or several EAL students needing additional English language support.

With direct instruction, the teacher guides the students through a complex problem in simple steps. Then the students are given, one by one, the simple steps to solve the problem on their own. Finally, the students are given one or many sample problems to accomplish on their own. Indirect instruction is a learning-centered strategy, which promotes student involvement in the learning process and fosters learning for understanding. With indirect instruction, students observe, draw inferences from the previous teacher-led examples, and from their own examples. Gail guided her students through the process of copying sentences into their notebooks. The students assisted their peers with copying new sentences and recipes into their books.

Instructional Approaches (Teaching-Learning Strategies, 2010) are indicated on the website of the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education. Basic objectives for English Language Arts include the strands of listening, speaking, reading, writing, viewing, and representing. The objectives are related to facilitating language learning by helping students connect with the world, and integrating the above-mentioned strands. In this district the models of EAL instruction have been changing for more than twenty years as increased immigration has mandated different instructional and organizational approaches. This research involved observations and analysis of data specifically in the elementary school setting, including students who ranged in age from five to fourteen years, receiving education from Kindergarten to grade eight. On-going support helps each student achieve while fostering independent learning.

### **Larry's Role – Students beyond Borders via Taxi**

The pullout teachers, Larry and Brenda, were both receiving students in half-day groupings through taxi arrangements, and they grouped their students by age, not ability levels,

because their needs were different. Research done by Collier (1987) as presented in Lessow-Hurley (2003, p. 35) indicated that students between ages eight and eleven made greater gains in language acquisition than those between ages five and seven. The young age provides support to the model, which maintains that students in younger grades, those below grade three, are too young to be removed from their neighbourhood schools to receive EAL language support at another location. As well, Vygotsky's zone of proximal development (Richard-Amato & Snow, 2005) indicated that there is an optimal time for learning. Children who have been in school and corresponding social settings have been exposed to academic and social language. As social beings, children are able to make connections with new information, because they are able to draw on prior experiences and build new knowledge. Developmentally, children at eight years of age become very competent at learning and building a broad knowledge base, as meaningful activities and situations are presented to them.

For Brenda and Larry, the two pullout teachers, the complex task of creating timetables was exigent, as beginner groups initially required more time for language instruction per week than intermediate or advanced students. The teachers used age grouping their students, as students in older grades prefer to be with their peers.

Larry had previously written the full morning schedule on the whiteboard: attendance, introductions, celebrations, Candy Cane, Read-Aloud, DVD of "Frosty's Winter Wonderland", and Hangman. He led them in a question/answer format regarding similarities between Christmas and Halloween. In looking at similarities and differences between two celebrations, students were practicing the act of classification, and comparing and contrasting the particular details. Students would be inundated with both secular and non-secular traditions in December,

and he was providing opportunities for students to transfer their own language knowledge to English (Dong, 2006) as well as interact with text.

The students learned about the origin of the candy cane, which they each received, then listened to instructions about how to make a craft mouse, heard a read-aloud story on "Twas the night before Christmas", and discussed word associations and rhyming patterns. They created a craft mouse, cooperatively working in smaller groups, each including younger and older students, following direct instructions regarding supplies and assembly procedure. His groupings of similar ability level, not age, created an appropriate learning environment; the students participated actively in their small groups. At the end of the morning, students played another game, "Hangman", using guessing strategies (Krashen, 1983) for various letters to determine the word, reindeer, and reinforcing vocabulary presented from the movie.

Regarding both student achievement and social relationships, students are likely to learn and encourage each other to work together when they are placed in cooperative groups. The four participant teachers used cooperative groupings at various times. Cooperative grouping lets students organize their thoughts in a less anxious context than whole-class discussions, and prepares students for sharing their thoughts within the class. Small-group work is one way of ensuring active participation of students. Group work enables students to move more readily from receiving knowledge to generating knowledge as they elaborate on ideas within the group. Through talk, students are able to personalize this knowledge and scaffold their thinking processes and understandings. For EAL students, these organizational groups would enhance English language acquisition and retention of vocabulary and other language phrases. Making the craft mice together in small groups appeared to be a pleasurable activity for all students.

Walter, Gail, Brenda, and Larry were all able to teach and scaffold the beginning language development for their EAL students. With a smaller number of students at one time in the language classroom, and with smaller instructional clusters between twelve and sixteen, these students would be more comfortable providing feedback to their teachers. Furthermore, the teachers could gradually adjust their explicit teaching over several weeks and months. The four participant teachers also agreed that seatwork (e.g., grammar, spelling, writing stories, identifying vocabulary, individual reading time, and partner conversation) was provided during the day.

Related to interactive activities and small groups, crafts required the students to collaboratively produce a product (a felt mouse, crafted with a candy cane), in which a small group practiced relevant vocabulary. “The school is a social world because human beings live in it” (Waller, 1932, p.1, as cited in Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, p.11). Social learning includes the many physical and digital resources available to students to support their interactive learning, with each other, with their teachers, and during both instructional and non-instructional times. Larry's students had many social learning opportunities during their half-day.

### **Brenda's Story**

Brenda, one of the two pullout program teachers, was like the other specialist EAL teachers who had used many interactive activities with the students. For example, as five of her students worked individually on *The Rosetta Stone* program with headphones, the teachers used indirect instruction and modeling with a smaller group, reviewing basic greetings (e.g., good morning, good afternoon, good evening, have a nice day, see you again). Other activities were allotted for independent student writing time for these phrases, and cooperative-pairing groups to practice speaking these phrases to each other. When Brenda modeled these activities, students

were able to see appropriate social-cultural norms and procedures, how to take turns, and how to relate to other children and the teacher, respectfully.

All four participant teachers used the socio-cultural approach (Richard-Amato & Snow, 2005), which included elements of the behaviourist approach, such as drill and practice and feedback. The opportunities for students to discover their own learning defines the constructivist approach. Brenda gave her students information about prepositions, students partnered with each other to practice, and teacher modeling provided visual cues for the students. The new information acquired helped schema building (Taylor, 2004) and created meaning in the students' minds. Children learn by doing (Johns & Torrez, 2001; Rea & Mercuri, 2006). With further interactive activities among students, the teachers become shared participants in the learning. Teachers are able to discover the best in their students (Tomlinson, 2003) when the students are given opportunities, through guided instruction and a welcoming environment, to learn about each other, their teacher. Positive relationships are built during such activities. The learning culture and community are being built within the school (Nieto, 1999, 2005), as social learning among peers provides a nurturing, supportive environment for students. The students are engaged and they invest their learning when the instruction affirms their identities (Cummins, 2006). The more positive experiences they have, the greater are their capabilities in taking further risks in their own learning. As culturally responsive teachers with experience, these four teachers have been able to use their cultural lens to view the students' behaviours (Levin, Nolan, Kerr and Elliott, 2005) to create engaging opportunities within the classroom to build bridges to learning, beyond BISC and moving into CALP. There are high expectations for students, and the teachers have hope and faith in the students, in their own abilities as teachers, and in their profession. Teachers, including regular classroom teachers who create engaging opportunities

with diverse teaching strategies, have the attitudes and skills needed (Nieto, 1993), to search beyond the visible, and to strive to see *the light in their eyes*, which Nieto refers to.

All participant teachers used visual learning as a teaching and learning style in which ideas, concepts, data, and other information were associated with images and visual techniques. It is one of the three basic types of learning styles that also includes kinesthetic learning and auditory learning. Brenda, and the other three teachers, enjoyed playing Bingo with their students. By reviewing previously taught vocabulary related to the school classroom, students were able to play the game and make connections between the spoken words and the accompanying visual images mounted on the board. Thereby, the game solidified relevant knowledge through practice and student involvement in a game and social context, experiencing the fun factor.

I observed Brenda reward her students in the last thirty minutes by showing a DVD cartoon about sharing and giving presents, followed by conducting a teacher-led discussion about the story details related vocabulary, and the characters' relationships with each other. Social interaction through listening and speaking was used to develop BISC and to help students' thinking processes become more developed.

During a spelling test with another group of students in the afternoon in which Brenda led a review of the long *a* vowel, everyone laughed together after one student shared her hint for remembering how to spell and pronounce the word, *marmalade*, by saying, "Mama, you're late." The words in their spelling test were: made, wade, blade, fade, spade, shaded, grades, lemonade, and parade. The next test included: had, dad, add, sad, glad, admit, Adam, tadpole, hadn't, daddy, shadow, and ladder. Teaching word families and phonics provided scaffolding for students' learning (Dong, 2006). The long and short *a* vowel sounds being taught strengthened

the students' reading abilities, and Brenda's direct instruction engaged the whole group. A previous week's spelling test included thirteen words with high usage: did, are, will, went, two, then, sister, over, off, most, made, just, and I. Brenda gave hints to the students when students requested them, and she used these words in context, providing an anxiety-reduced environment for her beginner group.

Later, students worked on individual handouts taken from workbooks, practicing certain concepts in a very structured manner. For example, Brenda taught prepositions and students were learning about on, under, beside, above, and in. Pictures showed various objects that were placed on boxes, with corresponding words below. Brenda suggested that later on, students would be creating their own writing samples, and sharing these stories with a partner. The students seemed to enjoy the worksheets, which Brenda would keep in individual file folders in the classroom.

Brenda shared that students liked using nursery rhymes, especially when learning the past tense of verbs. There were many pictures, the text was quite short, there were rhyming phrases, and students could learn them at home. Nursery rhymes included repetitive phrases, which helped with sight vocabulary, and they were simply very interesting and entertaining as illustrated picture books, creating favourable memories as younger children.

Units chosen to teach changed each year, depending on student and teacher interest. Brenda also used fairy tales, because they were very popular with children and there were so many variations and adaptations in these books. Since many students were familiar with some variation of fairy tales, Brenda was able to tap into the interests of the students and to enrich students' language, providing many opportunities for students to learn new words. By scaffolding instruction, she helped students easily grasp new concepts. Brenda directed students



to word walls in various locations, as she read from a picture book. As an experienced teacher, Brenda knew the importance of schema building, and using assessments to inform her teaching (Solomon and Franklin, 2006) to build student community.

Brenda also used direct instruction, teaching students about prepositions as they completed a handout. She had prepared a cloze activity, helping students to identify key words, and by guessing “contextual inferencing” (Krashen, 1983). Students used semantic (the meaning) and syntactic (formation of letters, rhyming patterns, similar roots in words) cues, and then confirmed the prediction by looking at the phonic (arrangement of letters, sounding out the words) cues. When students are required to learn new information by building on past knowledge (Taylor, 2004), their learning is optimal.

### **The Delivery of the EAL Curriculum**

There was no official curriculum guide to follow in teaching EAL students. For EAL teachers, some of the basic vocabulary to be taught immediately through direct instruction (referred to as “survival vocabulary” by Brenda) included the alphabet, one's address, phone number, home address, school name and address, days of the week, months of the year, seasons, and numbers. Additional primary goals included basic sentence structure with subject, verb, direct or indirect object, verb tenses, pronouns, asking questions using who, what, where, when, why, and how. Teachers worked to help students in communicative language to express personal needs such as hunger, thirst, pain, illness and bathroom needs.

EAL specialists know that the best predictor of learning to speak, read, and write in English, is a student's knowledge of vocabulary. A student's receptive vocabulary is the mental storehouse of words he/she recognizes when listening to others speak. His/her expressive vocabulary is the bank of words he/she can say, read, and write with accuracy. (Linda-Wason

Ellam, Personal Communication, 2010). Expressive and receptive vocabulary growth involves skills in six interrelated areas of listening, reading, speaking, writing, viewing, and representing. Hearing the word allows the student to represent it with crayon and paper, thereby demonstrating comprehension of new vocabulary; viewing the picture card also allows the student to verbalize their oral representation. Visuals are vital elements for EAL students, because they have the capacity to transcend the words. In English, there is a saying, “A picture is worth one thousand words.”

In planning for the EAL curriculum delivery for older groups of students, teachers generate vocabulary from Social Studies or Science curriculums that will build knowledge about thematic content in certain grades. For example, volcanoes, earthquakes, and tectonic plates are key units of teaching in grade six and seven, so a portion of time in the content reading skills and comprehension strategies, combined with spelling and vocabulary, might be introduced with a group of ten, eleven, and twelve year olds. Younger students might show great interest in this unit, have prior knowledge about these natural phenomena happening in our world, and learn specialized vocabulary (through context, direct explanation, analogies, or classifying) that will scaffold their knowledge (Dong, 2006). By specifically involving students in relevant topics, students' interests can be expanded as they learn about themselves and their world in social settings. As well, Brenda mentioned her interest in teaching nursery rhymes to students, simply because so many students bring prior knowledge about them to school, in some format, regardless of their background. Responding to the interests of students was a priority for all four teachers.

Keeping the students actively engaged and motivated, and being a model has been difficult for all teachers. Larry, for example, knew his students: “they need a lot of attention,

they need to be engaged, and they need a lot of practice speaking, general conversation” and he knew that over time, these students would gradually become more competent in their social language acquisition (BISC). Then they would be able to act as role models and supportive partners with their classmates as well, guided by the teacher's directions. Over the years, Larry had seen “a tremendous growth in students, in their language and socially.”

This growth in students in language can be attributed to using smaller groups, the methods used in their language teaching, their physical environment, and their immersion experience in the classroom. As well, the impact of technology in the regular and EAL classroom has been evident. Specifically for the EAL classrooms, in the year of this research, five new computers had been provided, and the purchasing rights to the *Rosetta Stone* online computer program had been made. The Rosetta Stone Program is a comprehensive online language learning and interactive computer program used for individuals, organizations, and schools. It is foundational to the EAL program in the school division of this study. On the web page, it is promoted as: “The fastest way to learn a language. Guaranteed.” It is a levelled program and a student moves progressively through it, as more advanced vocabulary and sentence structures are understood. Using headphones, students can respond by visual cues, matching the spoken and written English language to the appropriate picture on the screen. Up to thirty languages can be learned on this site.

In the computer programs, the material became increasingly more complicated, and allows students to practice more advanced conversational English patterns and vocabulary recognition. Using visuals to correspond with auditory listening capabilities creates a multi-textual experience for these students, and as many students arrive in schools with interactive hand-held computer dictionaries and gaming features, iPhones, PS games, and laptop computers,

they are digitally and visually experienced in manipulating a mouse and touch-pad. Each student would be required to select the picture that matched the sentence. (For example, four pictures are divided in quadrants, accompanied by a sentence: The yellow bird is in the cage beside the tall woman wearing the red hat.) As students' knowledge and abilities in communicating and reading in English increased, they become more proficient in writing. In French and Spanish language instruction, it has been my experience that listening and viewing is most important initially, followed by speaking, then reading and writing, and finally representing. As toddlers and very young children learn to acquire language, the pattern is similar.

The teachers said that the computers provided them with other alternatives during the day, opportunities to work with smaller numbers of students at one time, and could have been a realistic solution to handling the ever-increasing numbers in their EAL classrooms. Furthermore, digital learning is more enjoyable for students as they are more graphically interesting than worksheets. In addition to the increasing number of EAL sites on the internet that are available to teachers and students, computers have provided teachers with excellent websites to improve their language instruction (See Appendix F). Cummins (2006) advocated that technology offered powerful tools to engage students. As an activity to reinforce vocabulary and to help students with verb tenses or learning prepositions, the computers have some merit. They are not a panacea to produce learning to speak because they do not engage students in dialogical conversation, yet they are still useful in EAL classrooms. Because computers were not available to EAL students before, this change was appreciated by the specialist teachers. As a technological tool for teachers, there are more than 121 instructional self-directed strategies available online, arranged alphabetically, through the On-Line Learning Centre, with SPSD (2010). These strategies include author's chair, book talks, brainstorming, cloze procedure,

compare and contrast, concept attainment, cooperative learning, creative problem solving, debates, and drill and practice. For any teachers needing similar support, these strategies and a brief description are available.

Brenda spoke about the importance of creating a website for specialist EAL teachers. This provision has since expanded considerably. Student registration information is accessible online, for both regular classroom and EAL specialist teachers. Using these data would allow specialist teachers to be able to access the progress reporting documents of classroom teachers and enhance communication with the teachers and families of these students.

As EAL students have moved to the high school setting, some of the same concerns regarding the delivery of the curriculum and meeting the needs of these students have remained. At the high school level, fifteen students might be registered in the specialist class, and with different levels of abilities with these students, this project simply becomes a tutoring session for the fifteen students. This dilemma can be a very difficult teaching situation, which has caused teachers and students to feel overwhelmed. International students are under pressure to complete their studies within age requirements. In both high school and elementary settings, the challenges for mainstream and EAL teachers are evident. Some of the responses to these ongoing concerns have been presented in chapter five of this document.

Tomlinson (2003) wrote about teachers that needed to be adaptable in their teaching methodology. Managing the many levels of students was the main priority for all four participant teachers. Giving the students skills to take back to their regular classroom was crucial, helping them to become more independent, and helping them to become problem solvers to find their own answers. Challenges for the EAL teacher might be greater than for the regular classroom teacher. It takes much more time to develop solid relationships with students, because

their ability to communicate is limited in the beginning stages, in spite of the lower student/teacher ratio in their classes. *According to Nieto (1990), her metaphor, the "light in their eyes," refers to that glimmer of interest and enthusiasm, of engagement, when students decide that they will invest their time in their own learning, as a response to a caring teacher, who shows interest in them. It created an image for me that recognized the uniqueness of every individual.*

### **Teacher Planning and Organization**

The specialist teachers demonstrated extensive planning to support student literacy practices, and they promoted daily personal reading for students. One teacher had a year plan, in chart format. The subjects for the year included survival vocabulary, specialized thematic vocabulary, cultural celebrations, oral communication skills with terminal objectives, written communication skills, reading skills, spelling and phonemes, assessment for learning, and comprehension strategies. Each month these topics would be implemented. Furthermore, independent pleasure reading by students was promoted and expected, regularly.

To complete required assessments and to plan instructional tasks for students, all four teachers had decided on a particular half day during the week, their built-in preparation time, to facilitate improved instruction and collaborate as needed.

Assessments for all participant teachers were on going, established for the improvement of instruction, as well as for progress report information, and completed when students were not blocked into the schedule, or during planning time.

For Brenda and Larry, planning and arranging collaborative time together to meet with other specialist teachers in another school was possible. In the neighbourhood schools, this half-day was an integral part of the planning process with the mainstream classroom teacher within

the same building. An advantage of the neighbourhood EAL program model was that conversations could more easily happen with the classroom teacher due to their proximity at school. As well, other staff within the school knew the specialist EAL teacher and working relationships allowed for conversations during breaks and non-instructional times. The specialist teacher was a visible presence in the school.

### **Physical Environment**

Pictures serve as a universal language, one that is accessible regardless of one's native language. In viewing pictures, EAL students trans-mediate. This is recasting or translating meaning from one sign system to another. Trans-mediation is a powerful tool for thinking and learning.

In all specialist classrooms, there were visual, digital, and textual resources available. Larry and Walter believed in visually and artistically welcoming their EAL students and had large posters on their door or walls: "ESL: English is a Super Language" (Nieto, 2005) and "Welcome, Bienvenue, Bienvenidos, Huan ying, Dyrri-nyurra, Irashaimasu, Isten Hozta, Karibu." Books, games, handout materials, and PWIM (Picture-Word-Induction-Model) posters were placed strategically at the front area of the classroom. As well, buckets of books were available on shelves and countertops to give students access to materials. Bulletin boards were regularly changed, as new units were presented.

In Walter's small room, a rolling cart near the door held all supplies, including math manipulatives, notebooks for different groups of students, and flashcards of numbers and vocabulary words. Larry's classroom was also rich in colourful posters on walls. These posters identified specialized vocabulary, such as clothing, food, or methods of transportation. The written word was everywhere, including charts, posters, and labels on desks and counters! A

Christmas tree with LED lights, and instrumental music drew the students' attention in Gail's classroom. For all four specialist teachers, verbal instructions seemed to be positive and clear, somewhat slower, mellow even-toned voices; detailed guidelines, expectations, and a warm and caring approach were evident (Nieto, 2005). The rules in Larry's classroom were clearly posted: "1. Be Kind. 2. Respect. 3. Be Gentle."

The regular classroom teacher was also trying to create a multi-lingual/multicultural classroom, recognizing the languages and knowledge that students brought, based on their life experiences in other countries. In an existing neighbourhood school, the students would be mostly English-speaking, and there would be approximately twenty five to thirty students in one classroom, rather than thirteen.

### **The Challenges: Some Broken Threads**

The four teachers were aware of the challenges they faced regarding the needs of students. Since economic resources had been limited, there were insufficient materials and limited access to computers. Larry commented, "...invaluable support in terms of paints, supplies, an annual budgetary allowance to buy necessary materials is really appreciated; to place additional staff to teach these students is still seen as the biggest challenge – people resources." The four teacher participants were each provided with a budget in September to purchase necessary materials, which would enhance their programs. They appreciated these resources, and spoke about the lack of resources that many families deal with in their lives, such as having no access to telephones and computers. The four teachers used the computers that were provided in their classrooms, and were grateful for the opportunity to create smaller groupings of students. Five students could independently work online.



Brenda explained that the half-day pullout situation has been advantageous, in one sense, as a block of time to work with immigrant or refugee students, and allowed students to meet each other and build community. Nieto (1999) advocated that learning was socially mediated and students benefited by interacting with each other. Children saw their friends at the EAL classroom. However, students often struggled with separating their need for socializing, and the teacher's need (Brenda) to teach social and academic language. "They (the students) enjoy coming together in a group to see each other... They feel comfortable here and sometimes it becomes too much of a reunion. They want to use this as their social time." At the same time, they have been exposed to social learning in groups with their peers.

Through partner learning, idea circles, book sharing, and picture coding, they would be developing the necessary skills that would help them to merge back into the classroom setting and to develop those higher cognitive academic skills, to advance in higher grades. Older students sometimes resented coming to another school to receive EAL English language support. As Brenda said, "Some kids are trying so hard that they've got a whole heap of homework to try and catch up from classes that they are missing when they come here; they start resenting coming here." As classroom teachers are able to understand the distinctions between BISC and CALP, they may possibly reduce the homework load and provide sufficient supporting and scaffolding to the students as they attempt to merge back into their mainstream classroom.

### **Engaging Language Opportunities**

Gail and Walter talked about the challenges in striving to meet the academic and social needs of their students during the busy day. Within a few days, sample activities included:

1. group oral reading
2. reviewing the previous day's vocabulary and specifically taught reading structures

3. reviewing the math lesson
4. providing time for students to independently read books at their level
5. establishing one-on-one dialogues with students about their knowledge gained from books read the previous night
6. helping students on the computer with the online learning language program
7. writing sentences on the board and asking students to complete the cloze activities
8. performing small scripts and drama activities
9. dictating a spelling test, asking students to demonstrate their written knowledge of plurals
10. use of manipulatives in one format (Bingo game, mathematics representation)
11. small group activities
12. whole group activities, using direct instruction and modeling

Creating language opportunities with social time, within the context of the classroom space, engages all learners, including those requiring EAL English language support.

### **Students as Gift**

For these EAL specialist teachers, each day was a special invitation for their students to become a part of their learning environment. Within the multilingual classrooms of the four teacher participants, students demonstrated eagerness to learn, active listening, and visual and tactile engagement in the numerous activities presented to them. These teachers affirmed that the highlight of their teaching experiences have often come from those “critical moments in time” when students have spoken a few words, possibly a complete sentence, shared a joke with their teacher, or insightfully responded in a journal or to a question posed to them. Primary teachers have shared with me that teaching students to read by themselves has been some of their greatest moments. For these EAL language support teachers, their greatest gifts also seemed to

be centered on seeing their students read, write, speak, listen, view, and represent effectively using the English language. Being able to speak a few words or phrases also brought much satisfaction to the four participant teachers.

*Within the borders of the four walls in each of these classrooms, personal borders have expanded, as students have allowed their peers to influence their ideas, as they have together interacted with one another in social spaces. Friendships were developed, and the many pieces with those delicate and sometimes fragile stitches have been blended and stitched together, resulting in a strong yet colourful quilt, filled with interesting patterns and threads. Each of the four quilts, created by the four participant teachers, would have been individually designed and stitched together over a period of time. The quilts I was able to see were not fully complete; that would take the remainder of the school year.*

Larry's experiences in teaching EAL students over the past two decades has allowed him to connect with adult students, who have successfully established themselves into the community, with careers and families. With fondness, he remembered a student with learning disabilities, who was mistakenly placed in an EAL situation, and who approached every day with a positive attitude. Loyal families have made private arrangements to ensure that siblings and friends would receive EAL instruction from Larry, and have even changed housing to make this happen. Larry's impact upon these individuals is impressive; and Larry still remained very humble and gracious. All participant teachers were humble and seemed assured in their roles.

### **Goals of Teachers**

Gail and Walter wanted their students to go beyond BISC; they wanted their students to attain a level of CALP. Gail stated: "They will be my dentist, my doctor, my mechanic. I want them to have the skills." Walter and Gail have been able to reduce some of their students to

having three half hours of English instruction per week, and they maintain contact with these students through the classroom teachers, keeping the students for up to three years as needed, part time. They have chosen to take on the responsibility of ensuring CALP would be developed within the successive few years.

Larry, Walter, Brenda, and Gail wanted their students to have self-esteem, dreams, and academic and social skills to ensure that their personal life goals would be met. The EAL teachers have been able to use the students' home language as a bridge to further learning (Ladson-Billings, 2000), and the regular teachers will need to continue this language support. "The research shows that, whereas students are often proficient in conversation and the use of day-to-day language within a year or two, they need several more years to develop academic language" (Ontario Education, 2005, p. 50). By recognizing their students as bringing relevant life and cultural experiences to the classrooms, these teachers gave their students the confidence to believe in themselves, and the regular classroom teachers' challenge is to do the same. These teachers have had high expectations for their students, as well as hope and faith in their own abilities as teachers (Nieto, 2003).

### **Additional Thoughts**

At local, provincial, and federal levels of government, officials have been realizing the impact of immigrants moving into Canada. Though it is an exciting time, with an availability of materials on the internet, the mosaic of Canada is becoming even more diverse. This diversity brings unique characteristics and challenges. Educating EAL students in the best possible manner includes evaluating which programs or models will be used; placing specialist teachers in these crucial roles; and planning for the future education of families as they arrive in our province. There is extensive research to support the concept of culturally responsive teachers

creating a multilingual classroom that celebrates diversity. (Ashworth, 1988; Banks, 1977; Coelho, 2004; Cummins, 2006; Fu, 2004; Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2000; Linan-Thompson & Vaughn, 2007; Nieto, 1997, 2000, 2002, 2006; Solomon & Franklin, 2006; Tomlinson, 2003; Yoon, 2008)

During a brief conversation with a colleague from another school, a regular classroom teacher spoke about the seven students from Germany who had arrived in the past few months in that year of my research, and the pull-out model was removing senior students from the classroom for a significant amount of instructional teaching time. Asking the Resource Room teacher to take on an additional seven students (and these are only from one classroom in this school) was an unreasonable request. To cope with this loss of instructional time for these students, the teacher provided instruction during recess and after school for the EAL designated students, and asked them to do extra homework, maybe creating further anxiety for everyone, in a classroom in excess of thirty students. How does this regular classroom teacher provide curriculum content to adequately prepare all students for their future? Many conversations did occur that year between the itinerant specialist teacher and the classroom teacher, and the students completed their grade seven. There is no easy answer. In the successive weeks, new students continued to arrive, from Germany, and from other countries. Knowing how to effectively cope with these challenges takes time, experience, patience, and more conversations.

I can empathize with my colleague and talk about the changing model of service delivery, and acknowledge the importance of providing social language and “more than surviving skills” in EAL instructional time. Schmoker (2001) emphasized the importance of teachers being able to share and help to refine each others' strategies, which leads to improved teacher relations. Together, we can support each other in sharing culturally relevant teaching strategies, and ideas

that have worked with students. Throughout my journey, I have been continuing to analyze the teaching methods and practices of these four specialist EAL teachers, to see how their ideologies and interactions with students matches and informs my own teaching practices as mainstream classroom teacher. I believe that sharing this information is indeed relevant.

In Chapter Five, I discuss changes that have occurred and the trends and issues that still seem prevalent in providing English language support to students in schools.

## Chapter Five

### **Completing the Research: We are all One People**

The role of the teacher has been to provide a quality education for children, using instructional strategies and individual teaching styles to correspond to the children's first language abilities, cultural values, and backgrounds of their families. With the cooperation and support of families, teachers attempt to solidify understandings and assist children in blending their home and school experiences in meaningful ways. In the province of Saskatchewan, the increasing immigration patterns and settlement of families from many countries has created both challenges and opportunities for teachers. Children have arrived in schools with non-existent and varying abilities to communicate in English. As a result, programs have been developed to try to accommodate these children, who have required EAL (English as an Additional Language) support to be successful in school.

The multilingual classroom is a reality in today's classrooms. For this research my question was: How could four English as an Additional Language teachers inform my classroom practices? In the context of social learning, I observed the educational resources that supported student-centered interactive learning. I wanted to see how the teachers created classroom communities of learners in social learning spaces. Using narrative inquiry as a qualitative methodology, I interpreted the research data I gathered in the form of field notes and interviews of my observations within the EAL classrooms.

School districts, communities, and families are all stakeholders collaboratively woven together. The stakeholders influence policy makers to decide what program models to use, which will support the education of EAL students. Emerging from my research was a secondary question that focused on how school districts will pilot new EAL programs, what models will be

used with various groups of students, and how existing programs need to be revised. Ladson-Billings (1991) stated the challenge: "The challenge for teacher educators is not unlike that of classroom teachers. We must meet the students where they are (*vis a vis* multicultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes) and help them move to where they need to be" (p. 187). These students, coming from culturally diverse backgrounds bring a set of skills and knowledge reflecting both their social and academic experiences. Teachers must help them learn how to communicate in the English language and to share their knowledge.

Regular classroom teachers have a key role to play because they receive EAL students into their classrooms, allow them to be removed for additional English language support, and continue to provide scaffolding for them for five to seven years. Working collaboratively with EAL specialist teachers will ensure that the classroom teachers promote the success of our English-challenged students.

Cummins (2006) presented the challenges that exist for the regular classroom teacher when he wrote:

The assumption that only ESL teachers are responsible for ESL support is clearly problematic in view of (a) the timelines required for ESL students to catch up academically, and (b) the fact that even beginning ELL students are likely to spend only one or two periods per day with the ESL teacher, while the rest of the time is spent in the mainstream classroom. (p. 5)

### **Adaptability of EAL Students**

As a graduate student taking classes part-time, and while working as a regular classroom teacher, I had felt a sense of satisfaction, being able to read and learn so much more about various aspects of curriculum studies. Yet after one full year of classes, I still had not decided on



my thesis topic, or chosen my research question. I have mentioned the young Chinese student in my multi-grade middle years classroom, fall, 2007, and candidly he was the impetus for my research. Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam had approached me in that first research class that fall, and after I had shared with her my feelings of inadequacy and lack of adaptabilities to use teaching this boy, her response was, "That sounds like a research question to me."

I knew that I would need to adapt in the approaches in teaching Michael. With high hopes in adapting what I had been doing, I was determined to learn strategies that would benefit all my students and Michael in particular. The essence of the research had begun with the initial contact of the four specialist English language teachers. These teachers were teaching in four distinct schools, based on demographics of designated EAL students requiring English language support. The formal research that actually happened more than one year later provided the final details that would enable me to finish this project. In that year, there were five specialist teachers, an increase of one. In the years following, those specialist teacher numbers would more than triple.

Immigrants have adjustments to make. Language is the most obvious learning task and ideally students reach their potential when they are able to assimilate the giftedness in their first language and culture and blend it into their new culture. The curricula have historically been Eurocentric and could even be described as having a unique Canadian style, especially in the Social Studies curriculum at the elementary level, in which students learn about provinces and territories, the Riel Rebellion, the history of the railway, and the many well-written historical novels. The breadth and depth of Saskatchewan Curriculum allows for rich program development and delivery of material to enrich the lives of all students. The technological resources also available to teachers further facilitate English language instruction in a

multiplicity of areas. Teachers have many opportunities to engage students and respond to their educational and emotional needs.

Making an effort to include aspects of each child's culture in the classroom on a regular basis has always been good practice. "Some simple actions each teacher can take include learning to pronounce each student's name correctly, finding out where each student is from, and gathering a little background information about each one" (Miller & Endo, 2004, p. 789). These basic practices are crucial. Regarding the immigrant student's first language, Miller and Endo stated that: "we recommend that teachers encourage their immigrant students to use their native language, whether at home or in school" (p. 789). In the writing situation, students could be asked to complete journal writings, responding to various topics. Being able to write in their own language allows them to keep their language alive and to know that it is important and valued by teachers here. Students have recently been encouraged to have a pleasure reading book, also in their own language. Within the last five years, I believe, classroom teachers did not encourage EAL students to read books in their first language; research in this area has helped teachers become more open-minded.

Teachers also need to welcome parents into the classroom and school as a valuable resource. "The parents of immigrant children can visit classrooms to talk about their cultures and display items from their countries...can also serve as interpreters and mentors for other students' parents" (p. 791). From the information gathered from the participant teachers, these are a few comments from Brenda:

...Coming here is an enormous step for some parents... A lot of the Chinese ones make the effort and come and they're not intimidated. They get here early, and I find that a lot of other family backgrounds, cultures, don't make as much of an effort to come to

interviews and communicate with teachers. Some of it is cultural, and some of it is the language, and for a few it's that they just can't get here because they don't drive a car, can't find a translator to help them.

Families need to be aware of school procedures and expectations. The Saskatchewan Ministry of Education provides *A Handbook for Recent Immigrants* (2008), a 44-page document. As the immigration trend increases, more school districts will need to respond to the growing numbers by providing relevant information to families regarding their children's education.

As I began my research and continued to read the available literature, I saw that what the four teachers were doing in their specialist classrooms included so many of the strategies that effective teachers use. One of my key questions became: Would it be possible to do what these teachers were doing, in my regular classroom? Furthermore, could I integrate their methods and instructional strategies with what I was already doing? Were there any strategies I could learn by watching and observing them with their EAL students? What were the implications for future research? What was being done in the local school district regarding benchmarks and assessments of EAL students? These questions have begun to be answered.

As a regular classroom teacher, I was doing many things that a culturally responsive teacher would do. Successful elementary or high school instruction for the classroom teacher included these directives, from Canney et al (1999):

1. learn as much as possible about each student's culture
2. encourage students to share their history, culture, language with the class
3. invite the parents of all students to take an active role in their child's education
4. keep the EAL students in their home room classroom, or at least in their neighbourhood school, providing language support as needed

5. use the same literacy teaching strategies used with the rest of the class
6. use various grouping structures
7. make use of relevant computer technology and websites
8. use multiple measures for on-going assessment, in addition to anecdotal observations.

Effective teachers demonstrate patience, persistence, and a genuine respect for each student's history and culture. They seek ways to adjust the curriculum while maintaining high academic standards. Finally they create opportunities for LEP students to participate successfully in meaningful class activities. (Canney, Kennedy, Schroeder, & Miles, 1999, p. 543)

Based on my research, I can assert that these four teachers were effective culturally responsive teachers. They were implementing many diverse strategies with their language-supported students, their students were whole-heartedly engaged in many activities, and they seemed eager to be in those classrooms. The participant teachers had formed bonds with their students; various grouping structures were used throughout the day; the use of computers was an integral part of all classrooms; and on-going assessment and anecdotal records were kept by these teachers.

In my view, these teachers were teaching with their HEARTS: **H**ands-on learning, **E**ngaging their students, **A**ctivity-centered, with action, **R**einforcing vocabulary and making things real to the students, and **T**eaching the necessary vocabulary and language structures needed to make the activities relevant. Through their adaptations to provincial and local curricula, the teachers were delivering and assessing programs which were helping their EAL students to be engaged in their own learning.

Using an inquiry approach in their teaching, the teachers asked *Why? How?* They introduced activities, used direct and indirect teaching, asked their students to think critically, to make personal connections, and reinforced and provided scaffolding to the knowledge that the students brought to the classroom from their prior life experiences.

All four participant teachers encouraged their students to read, and individual reading time was available for students on a regular basis. Teaching phonics and word families were also a regular part of daily teaching. Avery (2005) wrote: "We all know that words are the foundation of learning how to read. The meaning of words can be taught through a number of language-supportive ways... There are children's books, however, that can put some fun into what may have been a rather laborious group of lessons" (p. 53). She continued to explain: "The illustrations in all three (books) are wonderful because they paint a picture of a child's literal interpretation as compared to the actual word's spelling and meaning" (p. 53).

Avery (2005) mentioned books written by Brian P. Cleary, which would provide teachers with creative and innovative children's books to teach grammar structures. (See Appendix G). She names other authors and books, saying that they "are all equally clever and remove some of the doldrums from learning the parts of speech" (p. 53). Many of these books were readily available in the local library. Avery had other suggestions to ease the transition for new students in the multicultural classroom: "...giving your new students a picture dictionary and a class folder of 'survival' vocabulary. Pair your non-native English speaker with a reliable student" (p. 53). Her suggestions could be implemented by regular classroom teachers.

Brenda spoke about teaching students "survival vocabulary": "We just teach to the needs of the students. It's at the EAL teacher's discretion regarding what topics we use. Of course, there's survival language, and things like plurals, apostrophes, and all those kinds of grammar

things that students need, and you can teach whatever you need in content.” (Interview, December 2008). Brenda continued:

They should know their alphabet, their address, and their phone number. They should know language for home and school, all the things around them; they need to be exposed to that language. They need to know basic sentence structure, verbs and pronouns, how to ask questions, and how to respond to who, what, where, when and how. A lot of those things would be beginner level. (2008)

Brenda and the other three participant teachers used a Checklist of Learning with outcomes for Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced Levels. These were developed by early specialist teachers. This checklist illustrates early and progressive criteria for immediate assessment of students. Each school district has the prerogative to decide what benchmarks will be established. The Ontario Curriculum provides realistic and achievable benchmarks for students.

To facilitate direct instruction and during indirect instructional times, an adult was available, in one school, to assist with one new student who had just arrived. In another location, two work education students were available for part of the afternoon to help a student read. One morning, various students in the role of peer tutors took turns helping a new student to learn basic vocabulary about animals and to respond to basic questions. Additional assistance in the classroom could be beneficial, depending on individual teacher preferences and circumstances within the school.

In all classrooms, the five new computers were being used almost on a daily basis, to facilitate instruction for smaller numbers of students on *The Rosetta Stone* program. *The Rosetta Stone* software uses a combination of images, text, and sound; and which incorporates the use of

increasing difficulty levels as the student progresses, in order to teach various vocabulary terms and grammatical functions intuitively, without drills or translation. The program begins with words and pictures then words become phrases and eventually full sentences. Ideas and concepts begin to replace simple objects and actions. Through pattern recognition, more and more of the language is understandable. In this way, students are becoming self-directed learners.

Programmers of The Rosetta Stone call this the "Dynamic Immersion Method". The goal is to teach languages the way first language is learned. However, this program needs to be used in conjunction with other resources and materials since it is a computer program and not language immersion. Interactive conversation needs to occur for early language acquisition skills. In recent conversations with EAL specialist teachers, it was suggested that 15 minutes per day would be appropriate using *Rosetta Stone*.

Cummins (2006) added: "How can we harness technology to amplify student voice and promote sustained literacy engagement?" (p. 7) Teachers will need to be creative to make wise choices with the gift of technology and supplement their teaching strategies with technological aids that support students' learning.

For each half day that I observed students, some time was spent with students individually working in pairs, with a small group, and with the whole group. In these settings they wrote sentences or words, manipulated materials to show knowledge, spoke together, spoke individually, received instruction from the teacher during the group lesson, helped one another, and moved to different places in the classrooms. For all observation half days, students appeared engaged, interested, motivated, and challenged to do their best. The teachers had many activities planned for the students, and provided scaffolds in their learning.

My research had limitations, because it was specific only to a given time period. I was able to observe these students four months after the school year began. The students' abilities grew more developed in both linguistic and conceptual assessments. I was not able to return to their classrooms, to follow up on their progress. Qualitative research has its own limitations and possibilities. For instance, analyzing the results and synthesizing the themes was limited by my own experiences, the literature I read, and time.

Similar to my regular classroom, expectations, routines, and procedures were established in September. My research took place in December, and students demonstrated language capabilities that showed that they were being successful, and they were generally pleasant in their demeanour. The students seemed to be comfortable with visitors, and as a researcher in the classrooms, I was introduced to the students and was able to interact slightly with them at the beginning of the day. Prior to my visit to each of the schools, a letter had gone home with all students, indicating that a graduate student would be observing in the classrooms.

### **Effective Teaching Strategies: The Strongest Quilt**

My role as classroom teacher has not changed; I am required and encouraged to use teaching techniques that are designed to enhance overall participation and achievement of my students, regardless of their language capabilities. The challenge to meet the needs of immigrant or refugee students is embedded in that role: use content-area curriculum, support my students, help them to adjust to the school and a new culture, and be aware of methodology and the classroom climate I create. Shore (2001) summarized strategies that will help to ensure the success for all EAL students. Students need to be assessed and partnered with various classmates in a "buddy system" to foster a developing sense of belonging. Students can be taught key words through read-aloud books, and in small groups students will be provided



opportunities for success. "Sheltering techniques" (p. 30, 31) used by the teacher include a slowed down speech, repetition of key ideas, and use of pantomime and gestures as needed. Through the use of portfolios and audiotapes, teachers can keep track of language progressions and create positive language learning opportunities in both academic and social aspects.

There are multitudes of resources available that outline strategies that teachers could use when teaching students who are learning English. Law and Eckes (1990) further supported Shore's strategies, while adding more: "talk slower, use less idioms, use the active voice, short phrases, key words, visual cues, act out, contextual clues, hands-on activities, increased wait time, feedback, stress-free environment, encourage participation, model as a teacher, listen, don't grade" (p. 60 – 69). For both experienced and inexperienced teachers, these are strategies that could ensure greater success with all students.

Herrell and Jordan (2004) further identify strategies that have been established by TESOL for enhancing instruction through planning. They mention visual scaffolding, advance organizers, language-framework planning, skills grouping, realia, predictable routines and signals, and language focus lessons (p. 15). The basis for these effective teaching strategies can be supported through students' introductory writing:

You must support their understanding with realia, visuals, and contextualized language.

It is vital to emphasize vocabulary, fluency, and building background knowledge for comprehension. Students must be actively engaged to benefit fully from instruction.

They must be given opportunities to demonstrate their growing skills in authentic tasks and in a non-stressful environment" (p. xi).

Instructional strategies, which can be found online through Saskatoon Public School Division (2010) are available for all teachers, creating opportunities to engage a diverse group of

learners and thereby model how to be a culturally-responsive teacher. In conjunction with culturally relevant materials, which are at the students' levels, effective strategies will ensure that EAL students' educational and social needs are being met.

The participant teachers advocated reading picture books to students, which are dual texts: scripts blended with images. As well, regular classroom teachers have opportunities to use picture books with their students in care partner groupings with younger classes in thematic activities, such as teaching friendship. I used the book, *The Rag Coat* (Mills, 1991) as a read-aloud with my combined multigrade 6/7 multilingual classroom and their Grade 3 care partners. *In a small mining town, the little girl is wearing a multi-coloured quilted coat made by her mother from the rags of clothing that other children's families do not want.* The students empathized with the little girl who wanted a coat so that she could attend school, related to the anxiety that she felt when excluded by friends, and emotionally connected with the girl when the other students realized that the individual fabric pieces sewn into the coat were gathered from their worn-out and too-small garments. Weaving together the students' memories, together with their background knowledge about slavery, the underground railway, pioneers and early beginnings in Saskatchewan, both the older and younger students were able to create their own stories as a culminating activity.

The book, *The Red Book* (Lehman, 2004) was promoted at an in-service recently as a read-aloud in both high school and elementary classrooms to inspire and motivate students to write from their own perspectives. Using available technology to project the images on a wall, as big-screen viewing, students can create their own scripts and dialogue based on their prior knowledge. There is an abundance of teacher materials available, limited only by a teacher's creativity and willingness to expand their repertoire of teaching pedagogy.

## **Models of Delivery**

The model that was being used in many of the schools in Saskatchewan was the English-monolingual-plus-ESL program (Honigsfeld, 2009). The EAL students were identified, placed into mainstream classroom programs, and removed or “pulled out” of their classroom or neighbourhood school (if they were eight years of age and older). As Honigsfeld explained, the EAL program may take several formats: “Most prevalent are the “pullout” or “push-in” programs...The ESL specialist might develop a curriculum closely aligned with the mainstream curriculum” (p. 168). The specialist teacher would adapt the specified grade level curriculum for the student, trying to build relevant vocabulary. Working with the regular classroom teacher would ensure that program objectives would be met, over a gradual time period. This model allows for flexibility in instruction, and necessitates on-going communication between teachers who are interested in helping to meet the needs of their students.

Honigsfeld (2009) continued: “...ELLs (English Language Learner – a term still used in the United States) benefit from small group instruction and the unique adaptations to the mainstream curriculum that the ESL specialist is able to offer” (p. 168). The specialist teacher would have more individualized time to work with the EAL student, allowing for more one-on-one coaching and correction as needed. Over the course of the year, the main concepts could be taught using simpler explanations, related picture books; and individualized teaching apart from the mainstream classroom could ensure greater retention of vocabulary.

There have been various programs in the past four decades to provide English language instruction and support to EAL students, and within Saskatchewan, changes have been made to improve the model within the last few years. Regardless of which model is implemented, small group instruction has been utilized, as opposed to thirty students in a multilingual mainstream

classroom, depending on human and material resources allocated by a school district.

(Honigsfeld, 2009, p. 167) Pulling students out of regular classrooms continues to be the initial procedure. Later on, specialist teachers have a choice to team-teach within the regular classroom, if this method will continue to meet the needs of the EAL student(s).

### **Challenges in the Model**

Two of the greatest issues regarding the EAL pullout program or the in-school language support model are initial benchmarks to assess an individual's need for the program and intensive language support, and assessment to indicate if the student no longer needs the support provided by attending the program. Classroom teachers in the neighbourhood might want the student to stay longer in the program, if the regular teachers indicated the student was still struggling with content and comprehension. CALP will continue to be developed for the subsequent seven to ten years, depending on scaffolding and support by classroom teachers. Classroom teachers will need to be aware of language acquisition and assessment that will be reasonable, just and fair, as EAL students merge into programs that will demand cognitively higher language capabilities.

School districts will need to ensure that teachers and administrators are well equipped to deliver quality educational programs, meeting the needs of EAL learners. Parents might have put increased pressure on the school to keep the student in the program, or the opposite, to release the student from the program. Attitudes regarding EAL programs and their delivery will need to reflect a unanimous approach for the success of our students. Entrance/exit issues were definitely a concern and a challenge regarding the EAL support language program. Both within the neighbourhood and pullout programs, growing numbers and attempted groupings for students

pose challenges. The students in schools arrived with limited or no English capabilities; some children are emotionally struggling from culture shock.

The increasing numbers of immigrant students needing English language support is under scrutiny and the discussions which have needed to happen have been on-going. School districts are grappling with many details regarding the most efficient way of teaching English to EAL students. The program delivery models have been adjusted and modified, to ensure that children would remain in the neighbourhood school in which they were registered. The idea that taxis would displace their children for three half-days per week created parental anxieties, although they understood and were grateful for the opportunity for their children to receive additional language support.

The key elements to decide the type of model might include the following: the type of instruction that is provided, the type of curriculum and methods of instruction to be used, the language of instruction, and the desired outcomes. Honigsfeld (2009) had some concerns about the pullout programs. "Is the desired outcome for ELLs to become bilingual or to exit the program and be mainstreamed?" (p. 167). She also questioned, "Will the ESL teacher and the mainstream teacher collaboratively plan and carry out the instruction following one of several possible co-teaching models?" (p. 167)

The instructional philosophy of the district or school forms the framework regarding the program delivery of EAL English language instruction. Specifically she questioned, "Are mainstream teachers and ESL specialists encouraged to collaborate? Are they given common preparation periods to plan together?" (p. 168). The role of the specialist EAL teacher and the collaboration with the mainstream teacher are vital to the success of the children. More directly,

she spoke about the classroom space and availability of EAL support personnel who would have the expertise to take on the role of specialist teacher.

From my research, I found that specialist teachers were in high demand, because the numbers of students registering in neighbourhood schools were steadily increasing, and this trend was expected to continue, as provincial and federal initiatives support and increase immigration policies. The pullout model, removing students for specialized language instruction, accommodated many students. In the year of my research, five different schools were identified to receive students by taxi, in addition to the neighbourhood students who resided nearby. In these schools, space was limited, and the EAL classrooms were full, each having fifteen students and their teacher.

Planning and collaboration time between the classroom and the specialist teacher could theoretically happen, due to close proximity of both individuals. My research suggested that the role of EAL specialist teacher is no less demanding than for the classroom teacher. Among these four teachers in my study, planning units and getting together for meetings was challenging, as shared in the interviews by the teachers, and did not happen without advance planning. Communication was precipitated by either the classroom teacher or the specialist EAL teacher, yet time delays were inevitable.

The neighbourhood model, in contrast to the pullout model, allowed for on-going communication among teachers. With the EAL classroom and specialist teacher both situated within the school, students came prepared for their lessons, and returned to their classrooms. There were fewer disruptions in this model, taxi arrangements were unnecessary, and students remained in their neighbourhood.

Since this study was completed, one teacher specialist who was supporting EAL students in a neighbourhood urban school setting provided language instruction in the Kindergarten classroom in the morning, and remained in the classroom to meet the needs of EAL students in the afternoon. I thought that this was an ideal arrangement: visuals on bulletin boards, reading corner, math corner, baking area, puppet play area, word walls, plastic fruits and vegetables, and other tangible items in the store area, complete with a cash register. Manipulating tangible items and hands-on experiences for students facilitated their social action as they used basic social and cultural knowledge (BISC) that would be retained, practiced, used, and assessed. I also found that the increased demand for specialist teachers continued, as the numbers of immigrant students rose in both urban and rural centers.

The program delivery model in the school division where I teach has recognized the importance of keeping students in their neighbourhood schools, and the majority of specialist EAL teachers are currently deployed as itinerant teachers. They move to different schools on a daily basis; coordinating these teachers with the changing demographics has been challenging, since locations where families may settle is unpredictable. Generally, it seemed that families from the same countries were attempting to locate housing in similar areas, especially in the urban setting; this also was not consistent among all families. In a previous EAL model, the students were moved; the present model involves the movement of teachers, which is really a profound change. As more families and students are registered at neighbourhood schools, placing staff to accommodate these students becomes more challenging, and re-arrangements of staffing will need to be monitored effectively.

Transportation of students has been eliminated, since specialist teachers are being deployed as itinerant teachers. This effort is also helping the school division to be more fiscally

responsible to their stakeholders. To receive support from the Ministry of Education for immigrant and refugee students, the process of electronically being able to enter the numbers of students requiring EAL English language support into the computerized system enables them to be part of a developing tracking system. This tracking system provides evidence regarding necessary funding that will support these students in their language and educational needs. Providing different benchmarks for assessment of students is needed, because not all tools provide the best indicators for English language support.

School districts and school divisions have made adaptations to accommodate the growing numbers of students and families settling in our province, and they will continue to monitor the educational system as needed. As different levels of governments are involved the process becomes more intricate, demonstrating a stronger level of commitment to the needs of immigrant families. Classroom teachers need to be prepared for their diverse group of students. Teachers are dependent upon the school districts to establish solid programs that can they can administer. Both regular and specialist EAL teachers need to be prepared to make the commitment to provide the best service to students.



Nieto (2009) explained her view about the longevity of teachers in their careers:

“My experience has shown me that a number of conditions sustain teachers’ energy and commitment to keep going. These include policies and practices at the school and district levels and attitudes and actions on the part of teachers themselves” (p. 9). Cummins (2006) wrote, “excellence must be defined by how well a teacher can teach science or math to the students who are in his or her classroom, many of whom may be in the early or intermediate stages of English language acquisition” (p. 6). Will these classroom teachers be prepared to take on this role, of providing extensive support to the EAL student? This commitment will be part of supporting EAL students for a minimum of five more years, so I believe that the role of the mainstream classroom teacher is clearly transparent.

Through this research, I found that there are no easy solutions to the data collection, planning, piloting, administration, supervision, delivery, and assessment of a model for EAL English language support that will accommodate the needs of students, teachers, administrators, and policy makers. The research experience has enabled me to take a critical look at the program delivery models that are currently being used in my school division, and the advantages and disadvantages in their delivery of English language instruction.

### **Welcoming New Families**

As new families and students arrived in neighbourhoods, they were informed of designated schools that provided EAL language support as needed; and after initial language testing, a suitable program for the student was coordinated with the neighbourhood school, including taxi arrangements, then EAL English language instruction began. Sometimes, parents of the EAL students lacked adequate communicative skills (BISC or CALP) in English to be able to understand the arrangement that was being made for their child(ren). Some parents had

difficulty understanding the taxi arrangements, and some families did not have telephones at home. Being able to communicate via electronic means was non-existent. To ease their reception at the school, the SSWIS worker often provided a translator as needed for the families, following a request by the classroom teacher.

According to Brenda, "Since the EAL classroom is outside of their neighbourhood, even parents coming was an enormous step for some parents." As Samway and McKeon (2007) wrote, parents were honest in their reasons for not coming to schools: "lack of fluency in English, not feel welcome, needing child care, transportation to evening meetings is a problem, cannot read English, have to work or might lose pay to put food on the table" (p. 163). Helping to alleviate fears of parents in coming to schools is a repeating theme, one in which improvements are being made, primarily with the SSWIS workers who are easing this transition time for families. According to Brenda, Asian families were an exception. They seemed to have little concern coming to the school, regardless of whether the school was out of area or not. They made the effort to get to know the classroom and in Brenda's words, "were not intimidated." Larry believed that parents were "overwhelmingly appreciative of what you're doing for their children" and he said that this was "one of the most rewarding teaching assignments that you can get." Current immigrant families may be intimidated by unfamiliar language experiences involving their reception at schools, so easing their transition into a new culture would create opportunities for dialogue and interactions that would facilitate their adjustment as families.

Reception of families requiring English language support was problematic, at times. A package of material is now available from the website for Saskatoon Public School Division, including standard school registration forms, EAL support, SSWIS, EAL centers and teachers,

and reception/registration procedures. The ongoing advances in technology now provide available web addresses and information to immigrant families who will be able to access free services at public areas, such as libraries. Keeping communication lines open between the classroom teachers, the EAL specialist teacher, parents, and administration in schools has been crucial and will need to continue.

At the secondary level, there is also a common intake form in an attempt to collect pertinent information on students and their families, to better serve their academic and social needs, and to assist the Ministry of Education in future planning. Providing a central reception centre for families is an ideal situation, which could provide assessment, orientation, and direction to the necessary supports, in a timelier manner. Providing more appropriate programming for students with limited formal schooling is also being considered; refugee students arrive with different challenges, yet their integration is also very important. International students also have different challenges, and these three groups of students (immigrants, refugees, and international students) will continue to settle in our province, requiring English language support. The goal is to have them integrated into regular classes, as soon as possible. In this way, when a student graduates from the EAL program, he/she will have common understandings.

### **Supporting Literacy through PWIM**

As part of this research, specialist EAL teachers all attributed some of their success in teaching children using PWIM (Picture-Word-Induction-Model), because it supports the initial viewing and labelling of pictures, followed by using those words to generate sentences. As an induction model, it progresses from pictures to words, to sentences. With its historical background in the United States, this model of teaching that has been strongly supported by the

school division in which I teach has gained significant recognition. This model provides many resources and instructional strategies, which complemented the EAL program, according to the four participant teachers. It supports children as they individually and collaboratively generate vocabulary surrounding a particular theme, embedded in a large picture, full of detailed images. Students actively listen to their peers, and this process taps both their listening and speaking vocabularies, as they make vocabulary connections and letter recognitions simultaneously. This vocabulary establishes basic interpretations between the knowledge that they individually and culturally bring to the classroom, and forms the basis of learning to read with sound/symbol correspondence. The program itself has undergone changes and adaptations to accommodate the diverse learning needs of all students and the large posters are visually pleasing and easily identifiable in classrooms. Over the past few years, these posters have been changed in many classrooms to incorporate local pictures that tap children's prior knowledge.

Regular classroom teachers in the primary levels have used the PWIM model for several years. Different themes have been designated for each grade level, from kindergarten to grade three, as well as for the Read to Succeed program for students in grades four to eight who struggle with reading. This program has helped students improve their reading level by as much as one and one half years in a grade, within the year. By intensively working in small groups with literacy instruction and a strong inquiry approach by experienced teachers, students have been able to merge back into the mainstream classroom with both reading and writing skills that were closer to their grade level. Specifically targeted teaching strategies, such as the Inquiry Method, have also been implemented and teachers have participated in ongoing in-services to collaborate with grade-alike teachers and learn about current research practices which align.

For students in an EAL English language support program, the PWIM posters represent different cultural backgrounds, easing children's abilities to connect to their background knowledge. At times, however, this connecting ability might be challenged, and students' backgrounds may not match the depicted situation in the pictures. As students both listen and speak they are visually being able to focus on specific areas within the picture. In this setting, they are provided with an opportunity to engage in social groupings, sharing ideas, and ultimately being provided with background vocabulary that is used to generate sentences and paragraphs.

The importance of the varied teaching strategies, in consolidation with the availability of appropriate materials, facilitates the delivery of program information, curriculum objectives, and benchmarks, as teachers interact with their students in classrooms. Considering the backgrounds of many immigrant students, media literacy is so often a part of their world. I noted that from past experiences as a teacher in multilingual classrooms those students brought iPods, iPhones, digital vocabulary calculators which store up to one million English words in a dictionary, and compact digital hand-held games. As Siegel (2006) wrote, "We need only consider the ease with which children today can not only draw, sing, and dance, but also produce their own digital movies, master the intricacies of computer games, and participate in fan fiction or interactive websites, such as Neopet" (p. 65).

The social, cultural, and economics worlds of children require teachers to integrate "images, gestures, music, movement, animation, and other representational modes on equal footing with language" (Siegel, 2006), and these "multimodal transformations" are intrinsically woven into daily experiences within our classrooms. Children's literacy lives are changing, and

to meet the needs of students, teachers need to be competent in planning and sequencing their lessons while integrating these technologies.

Although these children may be strangers to the teachers initially, Cummins (1996) stressed the importance of L.1, the language of origin, the first speaking language.

Accompanying visuals with written text, and teacher modeling writing on chart paper or white boards, students will learn to read with both left to right and top to bottom directionality (which is the basic formative structure of print in our western hemisphere), and to use their prior knowledge to learn new vocabulary in synchronicity with images. Skills, ideas, and concepts that students have learned in their first language will be transferred to the additional language. In some ways, these students are learning in a new language but not learning anew.

### **The External Environment**

The importance of visuals in a regular classroom is key. Word walls, charts, diagrams with clear labelling, welcome signs, and posters creates an immersion experience environment for students, as they seek to grasp meaning for themselves using the English language. Visuals, gestures by the teacher, facial expressions, and auditory stimulation in the classroom will greatly assist the EAL language challenged students as they blend their knowledge through de-coding processes and begin to share them with peers. Seating and desk arrangements, or tables and chairs, can be physically changed to accommodate groupings of students, as they collaborate in social learning spaces. As students are able to interact with one another and their teacher, this dialogue will foster both cooperative and independent learning, and self-discovery, challenging students to learn to communicate in English. Vygotsky's emphasis on social and experiential learning and Dewey's (1916) position on "learning by doing" are all illustrated in these EAL settings.

Teachers have asked me for suggestions in helping to teach and work with their new immigrant students. The Resource Room teacher has also tried to assist teachers. Through this research, I have become more aware of the knowledge and gifts that all teachers within a building can share, with respect to providing EAL support. Working together, teachers can begin to share their knowledge about understanding the academic and social behaviours of their immigrant students. Reading books and becoming aware of culturally responsive and culturally relevant strategies as teachers, and beginning to form relationships with these students who have become part of the fabric of our classrooms today, will enhance their educational success.

### **A Bright Future: More Quilt Designs**

Related to professional development, classroom teachers at both the elementary and secondary levels need to have opportunities to begin to understand the tools and strategies for dealing with EAL students in their classrooms. Furthermore, a long-term plan is required that will support these teachers at the present time. Regarding processes, protocols, and programs, improvements and changes are continuously being made. Web pages are being created to assist educators and families about EAL resources; quick links for classroom teachers, parents, and students; and frequently asked questions. Often included is information about language learning, conversational English development, and Academic English. The information that is available on major search engines is also relevant.

I have included references of additional online websites for this growing area of EAL. With these resources (Appendix G), teachers simply need to add their initiative and personal goals. At the time of this writing, initial benchmarks are being developed and used. In Saskatoon Public School Division, the Woodcock-Munoz has been chosen as the test to measure Human Cognitive Abilities, for students who are newly registered in the school division at the

elementary level (not including grade one children). It will provide inferences about a speaker's listening and reading comprehension abilities and indicate a level at which the student is functioning. However, it is simply one tool, which provides some understanding of the English communicative ability of students. Anecdotal notations; regular assessment in listening, following directions, reading, and writing; and daily observations are all useful in providing assessment for learning. My school district has chosen established benchmarks based on the provincial recommendations in Ontario. Consistent benchmarks for assessment of students are valuable, because they provide common understandings for teachers. Specialist teachers need to try to accurately assess each student initially, according to a benchmark, and then plan an English instruction program accordingly, with similar groupings of students.

At the high school level, various benchmarks are also being used, depending on functional English language capabilities. Standardized tests do not always accurately reflect an EAL student's abilities, and they were not designed in this way. Other benchmarks are also being used, at the teachers' discretions. In seeking the best assessment tools for students, school divisions are demonstrating their responsiveness to cultural sensitivity and flexibility by recognizing that no single tool will provide all the information to assess and plan for the educational needs of students. A combination of tools will need to be used, to identify individual strengths and challenges.

The RTI Model (Response To Intervention), a new model for identifying disabilities in students, has provided a framework for some school districts. The needs of struggling students are identified and they are provided with focused instruction that they need, through varying levels of assistance ranging from the regular classroom to special education programs. As well, the Louis Riel School Division in Manitoba (LRSD) has been a useful resource for some of the



initiatives being developed in Saskatoon Public, in response to meeting the needs for immigrant students as they enter the school system. The LRSD has used The Ontario Curriculum (2001) as its frame of reference.

As Saskatchewan continues to establish guidelines for teachers, the Ministry of Education and local school divisions will provide resources for carrying out the initiatives regarding EAL education for students. Further research at the administrative, local, and provincial levels will dictate if procedures will be continued. Since 2009, school boards have been dissatisfied with the high cost to transport students by taxi services as part of the pullout model, as well as valuable teaching time; this model no longer exists.

The four participant teachers indicated that they would appreciate ongoing leadership to further guide them in their teaching practices, and more human resources to work with their growing numbers of students. In 2009, an EAL Program Leader was appointed to coordinate the delivery of EAL programming, at both the elementary and high school levels. SPSD distributed a set of Guidelines for EAL Students and Provincial Assessment for Learning to schools. This document provided four guiding questions for teachers, with EAL students who were to write provincial assessments. Schools would ask for further information. Such tools provide leadership and guidance for educators to enhance education for EAL students.

Preparation for all regular classroom teachers will be mandatory to assist in the delivery of culturally relevant instruction for EAL students. Presently, some school divisions are requiring specialist teachers for EAL English language support instruction to be trained, and have a recognized certificate, such as CERTESL or TESOL. Regular classroom teachers and Resource Room teachers need to feel adequately prepared to meet this growing need in educating

EAL students. Further in-service will need to be provided to support classroom teachers and specialist English language teachers.

“We are all EAL teachers.” This slogan was used at a recent in-service for teachers in the division. As a classroom teacher, I realize that the students who enter my classroom are adults of the future. With many cultures represented, teachers need to make preparations to welcome and celebrate the diversity that exists. Their welcoming demeanour and first communication will leave lasting impressions on the newcomers. These students will ultimately help create a society who will work with each other to make this country the best it can be.

*I believe that the Chinese boy in my mainstream classroom may have felt, at the beginning, like a fraying piece of material, unable to fit into the classroom pieces of fabric.*

Other students gradually formed their own relationships with him, accepting his uniqueness and individuality, and they created strong threads, which would eventually allow him to become part of the classroom quilt. He also learned about himself, and learned to accept and appreciate the diversity of other students in the classroom. Those things that were important to me, like helping him to feel welcomed and accepted, and to learn curriculum and also about life experiences in the school, were important to his classmates as well.

To teach students a new language is to help them to know its sounds (phonology), its words (lexicon), and its sentence formation (syntax and semantics). To help students learn content in a new language, we must use clear and concise articulation, make eye contact, use visuals, employ gestures/body movement/pantomime, use shorter and simpler sentences at a slower rate, use high-frequency vocabulary, and eliminate idiomatic expressions. We also have to model, scaffold, access, and activate students'

prior knowledge; provide cooperative learning activities; and differentiate instruction.

(Hill & Flynn, 2006, p. 2)

Culturally responsive teaching as a mindset is teaching to the heart and mind of the students. Students benefit by being validated in an environment that recognizes and supports their cultural environments. Potter (2007) suggested that “literacy as a means of social connection, self-expression, and exploration of a basic cultural tool – print is part of the scripts of children’s everyday lives” and “children who are born into a world full of print tend to have highly literate families who have literacy interwoven in the fabric of their lives” (p. 65). My goal, as a regular classroom teacher, is: *To be able to weave literacy into the fabric of my students’ lives, to use print, and to open doors of understanding for all my students, regardless of their cultural backgrounds.*

Education is a key tool to learn to be culturally responsive individuals, to create a quilt from many pieces of fabric, which is strong, colourful, and enduring time. *I began with the metaphor of a quilt, and I have kept it.* I have made parallel statements, creating comparisons of classrooms to quilts. I have told my stories, attempting to solidify my understandings, to continue to reflect on my classroom practices, developing those culturally relevant and responsive strategies that will allow students to communicate using the English language.

Unlike a blanket, which is uniform in color and texture, Canada is a mosaic: a representation of many individuals who have come from many nations, seeking to be interdependent, contributing gifts to one another, while maintaining their individualities. These many quilts that each of us create, as teachers, from pieces of fabric, will enhance the personal and social ties in Canada’s families, and her communities, and will celebrate her diversity in the world.

## **From Fabric to Quilt**

In writing this thesis, I wanted to tell my story, to use narratives, and to share the challenges and the frustrations, as I attempted to create adaptations in my teaching methodology with the young Chinese student in every subject area in the curriculum. I wanted to hear the stories of these specialist teachers in the EAL programs in their own voices, allowing them to reflect on their adaptations and methodology in curriculum.

Clandinin and Connelly (1988) wrote, "The metaphors by which teachers live, the way they construct their work, and the stories they recount, tell us more profoundly about what is going on in their lives as professionals than any measured behavior is likely to reveal" (p. x).

As a professional, I wanted to see what designs would be present in their quilts; I wanted to see if some of my designs and colors were similar to theirs: my participant teachers. Through the mutual sharing among educators, I was able to see where our ideas and our images blended. Our quilts were similar yet unique to our individual situations. These teachers were able to strengthen my confidence. This process has allowed me to take a deeper look into my own adaptations with EAL students in the classroom setting. I wanted to participate in this research and I wanted to learn more about teaching in a multilingual classroom.

Though the emphasis in these five chapters has been on the teachers and their effect on my teaching practices, I would invite you to once again read a poem, written by Neil Horne, titled, "I am an ESL Student." This poem can be found at the beginning of this document. I feel that it encompasses many of the thoughts and emotions of the students I have taught, as teachers, who have come to Canada as immigrants and strangers, and have remained here as Canadians and individuals. *They have become part of the fabric of our nation: they have evolved from snippets of fabric to quilt.*

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## **Appendix A: Application Form for Permission to Conduct Research in Saskatoon Public Schools**

Completed application forms are submitted to: **Coordinator: Research and Measurement**

Applicant:

Margaret Symon-Lungal

Telephone: (306)249-9010 home

683-7130 work

261-3230 cell

247 Briarvale Bay, Saskatoon, SK, S7V 1B8

Present position: Classroom Teacher, Gr. 6/7, Brunskill School/KCC

\* This study is a requirement for the Masters of Education Degree, major in Curriculum Studies.

\* Yes, this applicant will conduct the study.

**Description of proposed study: "Weaving a Quilt: Adaptability in Teaching ESL Students  
from a Classroom Teacher's Perspective"**

Please see the attached. The title, statement of problem, research question, significance are all discussed.

Research Methodology includes: participant observation of four classroom ESL teachers, maximum two times in each classroom, as well as individual teacher interviews, with audio-taping and transcribing, forty-five minutes duration for these four teachers.

Intended use of results: to be published as a Masters' thesis, in fulfillment for the requirements of the degree of Masters of Education, major in Curriculum Studies; anticipated date of completion, 2010.

**Participants:**

- Students in four ESL classrooms in Saskatoon, with their teacher, maximum 2 half-days each
- 4 classroom teachers, interviewed and audio-taped, 45 minutes each
- Proposed school sites: Greystone Heights, Lawson Heights, W.P. Bate, Brevoort Park (classrooms specifically designated for students requiring ESL support)
- Non-participant observation of students within the classrooms, no direct interaction with any students

**Time Frame:** Proposed Dates: Commencing, October/ November, 2008

Completion date: December, 2008

**Required Attachments:**

- Copies of consent forms ( Appendix A, Saskatoon Public Schools form, Appendix B for Teacher Participants, Appendix C for Audio-Transcribing, Appendix D for Parents)
- All above copies and appendices sent to school principal, Mr. T. Kikcio, and STF regarding the McDowell Foundation Grant
- Copies of interview questions for the teacher/participants (Appendix E)
- Signed letter or certificate of approval from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Ethics Board
- Information package provided to the ethics committee

**University Authorization:**

This application, the research design and instruments mentioned herein have been approved by:

Faculty Advisor's Name: Dr. Linda-Wason-Ellam, University of Saskatchewan

Faculty Advisor's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Commitment of Researcher:**

\_\_\_\_\_ I am willing to provide a final report of my study to the Saskatoon Public Schools.

\_\_\_\_\_ I am willing to provide a presentation of my research findings to schools and/or the school division.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to adhere to the ethical standards and procedures as outlined in my application package.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to seek permission to make any changes in the methodology outlined in this application.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to recognize the financial assistance of the STF through the McDowell Foundation Grant and provide their foundation with a copy of the research document.

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix B: Letter of Consent for Participant/Teacher**

I appreciate your participation in the research study, “Weaving a Quilt: Adaptability in Teaching ESL Students from a Classroom Teacher’s Perspective” identifying teacher’s adaptabilities in methodology and teaching practices. The purpose of the study will explore the necessary teacher adaptations with bi-cultured (ESL) students in each of four classrooms in Saskatoon, using both reflective journal writings, field notes, observations in the classroom, personal teacher reflections by the researcher, and interviews and audio-recordings of four specifically identified ESL literacy teachers. In order to protect the interests of the participants I will adhere to the following guidelines:

1. I will be observing in the classroom, gathering data such as field notes including seating arrangements, room layouts, writing my reflective journals to make sense of what is observed from my perspective. I will be listening to questions asked of students, their responses, and what I believe are adaptations made by teachers. I will observe your teacher interactions and dialogues, up to a maximum of two half days in each of the four classrooms in Saskatoon. I will not be observing the students as the focus will be on the teacher and best pedagogical practices. I will have previously presented a letter to be made available to the students in the classroom (Appendix D) to inform parents that the researcher will be present in the classroom, observing and taking anecdotal notes for the two half-days.

2. I will be meeting with you to discuss your perceptions of teaching ESL students in your classroom and specifically your adaptations which benefit these students. I will audio-record our conversations, for approximately forty-five minutes, using my brief outline to keep the conversations focused. (Appendix E) Your experience as an ESL teacher and the experiences you share with me will be important. I will create a favorable atmosphere for you to

share your ideas. \* If at any point you wish to have the recording device turned off, that request will be honored.

3. After the interview, the tape will be transcribed and analyzed for themes. I will present a smoothed narrative version of the manuscripts with false starts and repetitions removed to make it more readable. I will check with you orally about the audio-taped transcriptions. You may add, delete and change anything during this process so that it reflects what you wish to share. Afterwards, I will ask you to sign a Transcript/ Data Release Form. (Appendix C)

4. The data including audio-tapes, transcriptions, and field notes, collected for this study will be kept in a secure place for a minimum of five years at the University of Saskatchewan with my supervisor, Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam, in accordance with the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.

5. The confidentiality and anonymity of you/ the school/ the participants will be protected through the use of pseudonyms and the deletion of any identifying information.

6. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you withdraw from the mini-study, the tape recordings and interview data will be destroyed.

7. The results and interpretations of the study will be used to fulfill the researcher's requirements to complete the thesis and meet required standards for graduate studies. Except for the researcher in the study, your participation will remain confidential. Your name will not be used in the final report or in-class presentations. Pseudonyms will be used.

If you have any questions about your participation or your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Services at the University of Saskatchewan (966-2084) or you can contact me, Margaret Symon-Lungal at 683-7130, or e-mail me at: [symon-](mailto:symon-)



[lungalm@spsd.sk.ca](mailto:lungalm@spsd.sk.ca) or my supervisor, Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7578 (home 653-5844), or [linda.wason-ellam@usask.ca](mailto:linda.wason-ellam@usask.ca)

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I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand that this research project has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board, \_\_\_\_\_(date) and I agree to participate. I, \_\_\_\_\_ am aware of the nature of the study and understand what is expected of me and I also understand that I am free to withdraw at any time throughout the study without penalty. A copy of this form has been given to me for my records and at the end of the study I will receive a copy of the report.

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Researcher's signature

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-----  
Date

Ms Margaret Symon-Lungal

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Participant/ Teacher signature

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-----  
Date

## **Appendix C: Letter Of Consent For Release Of Transcripts**

I appreciate your participation in the research study, "Weaving a Quilt: Adaptability in Teaching ESL Students from a Classroom Teacher's Perspective", regarding a teacher's adaptations with bi-cultural (ESL) students in your classroom. I am returning the transcripts of your audio-taped interviews for your perusal and the release of confidential information. I will adhere to the following guidelines which are designed to protect your anonymity, confidentiality and interests in the study.

1. Please read and recheck the transcripts for accuracy of information. You may add or clarify the transcripts to say what you intended to mean or include additional comments that will be your words. You may also delete any information that you may not want to be quoted in the study.

2. The interpretations from this study will be used for me, the researcher, to fulfill the requirements to meet the standards for Graduate Studies, in completing my thesis. Except for the researcher in the study, your participation has remained confidential. Your name or any identifying descriptors will not be used in the final report or in any scholarly articles or presentations if you do not wish to have it used.

3. In accordance with the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board, the tape recordings, writing samples, and transcriptions made during the study will be kept with the researcher's supervisor, Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam, in a locked file until the study is finished. After completion of the study, the tapes and other data will be kept for five years at the University of Saskatchewan and then destroyed, according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.

4. Participation in the study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. If this happens, the tape recordings and interview data will be destroyed.

A copy of the transcript release form is provided for your records.

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Adaptability in Teaching EAL Students From a Classroom Teacher's Perspective

I, \_\_\_\_\_ understand the guidelines above and agree to release the revised transcripts to the researcher. A copy of the transcript release form is provided for your records.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

(Participant signature)

\_\_\_\_\_

(Researcher's signature)

## **Appendix D: Letter of Assent for Classroom Observation**

The consent form will be sent home with the students

December, 2008

Dear Parents,

I am a graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan working on a Master's of Education Degree. I am very interested in teaching ESL students and how I am able to adapt my teaching practices for these students especially. I have been a classroom teacher for many years and I will be observing in the ESL teacher's classroom, keeping the focus on the teacher during instructional lessons in the classroom.

When I finish the study, I will write about it in a paper to be presented in my graduate class so that more people will come to understand and appreciate the many ways that teachers can meet the needs of all students in their classroom, especially ESL students, who have additional challenges in learning based on language and cultural differences .

There are no known risks. This research project has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board, as of November 28, 2008.

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact me, Margaret Symon-Lungal at 683-7130 (work) or my instructor, Dr. Linda Wason-Ellam, Department of Curriculum Studies, 966-7578 (home 653-5844). As well, you may contact the Ethics Office at 966-2084.

Thank you for allowing me to further my studies.

Sincerely,

Margaret Symon-Lungal,

Graduate Research Student

## **Appendix E: Interview Questions – Audio Taping for all EAL Teachers –**

### **45 - 60 minutes**

1. Please describe your experience working as a classroom teacher, especially with EAL students at this location.
2. Please discuss the general backgrounds of students related to what countries they have come from, what languages they have for their language of origin, and the many reasons for these children to be in our schools.
3. What is the biggest challenge that you face in your present position teaching EAL students?
4. How do you specifically manage the many levels of students that you receive in this classroom?
5. What are the main adaptations that you have made as a classroom teacher in this setting?  
Please describe any of these.
6. Please share with me your happiest moments teaching in this EAL classroom and also your experiences dealing with some of the challenges you have overcome.

7. What goals do you have for these students? Do you feel that you have been given adequate support to meet these goals?

8. Please feel free to share any other information that you feel would be helpful for me to understand, related to your day-to-day teaching assignment.

9. Any other comments you have...

## Appendix F: Online Informational Sites

<http://a4esl.org> (word puzzles at different levels)

<http://iteslj.org/quizzes> (self-study quizzes at different levels)

<http://bogglesworldesl.com/> (crosswords/ find a words/ quizzes; good for elem.students)

[www.manythings.org](http://www.manythings.org) (good site for elementary)

[www.angelfire.com/on/topfen/tests.html](http://www.angelfire.com/on/topfen/tests.html) (practice tests / easy to hard)

<http://ena.freeenglish.com> (games for elementary students)

[www.eslconnect.com](http://www.eslconnect.com) (numerous links to ESL related sites)

[www.eslcafe.com](http://www.eslcafe.com) (idioms and slang)

[www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/pronunciation.html](http://www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/pronunciation.html) (pronunciation practice)

<http://l-language.com> (online games and quizzes)

<http://www.languageguide.org/english>

[www.culturegrams.com](http://www.culturegrams.com)

<http://www.superkids.com> (Educators rate new educational software each month)

<http://www.multiliteracies.ca>

<http://thornwood.peelschools.org/Dual/>

[http://thornwood.peelschools.org/esl\\_website/text/links\\_for\\_esl\\_%20site.htm](http://thornwood.peelschools.org/esl_website/text/links_for_esl_%20site.htm)

[http://specialneedseducation.suite101.com/article.cfm/response\\_to\\_intervention](http://specialneedseducation.suite101.com/article.cfm/response_to_intervention)

<http://www.learnlanguages.usask.ca>

<http://www.eslflow.com/Routinelessons.html>

<http://www.hsd.ca/curriculumsupport/esl/eslfaq.html> (Hanover School District, MB)

## Appendix G: Children and Young Adult Books

- Cleary, B. (1999). *A mink, a fink, a skating rink – What is a noun?* Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books, Inc.
- Cleary, B. (2003). *Dearly, nearly, insincerely – What is an adverb?* Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books, Inc.
- Cleary, B. (2004). *I and you and don't forget who – What is a pronoun?* Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books, Inc.
- Cleary, B. (2005). *Pitch and throw, grasp and know – What is a synonym?* Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books, Inc.
- Cleary, B. (2006). *A lime, a mime, a pool of slime – More about nouns.* Minneapolis, MN: Carolrhoda Books, Inc.
- Dahl, M. (2006). *If you were an adjective...* Minneapolis, MN: Picture Window Books.
- Dahl, M. (2006). *If you were an adverb...* Minneapolis, MN: Picture Window Books.
- Dahl, M. (2006). *If you were a noun...* Minneapolis, MN: Picture Window Books.
- Heller, R. (1995). *Behind the mask – A book about prepositions.* New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, Inc.
- Heller, R. (1997). *Mine, all mine – A book about pronouns.* New York, NY: Grosset & Dunlap, Inc.
- Kamara, M. (2008). *The bite of the mango.* New York: Annick Press.
- Lehman, B. (2004). *The red book.* Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.
- Mills, L. (1991). *The rag coat.* New York, NY: Little Brown and Company.
- Newberry House Dictionary: ESL Edition.* (1996). Rideout.
- Oxford Picture Dictionary.* (1995).



Rayevsky, K., & R. (2006). *Antonyms, synonyms & homonyms*. New York, NY: Holiday House, Inc.

Terban, M. (1993). *It figures! Fun figures of speech*. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company.