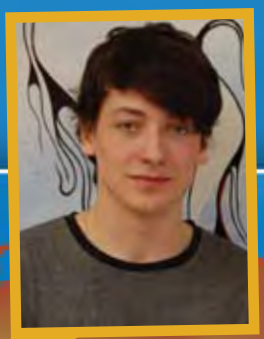
Spring 2010

M.A.S.S. Journal

The official magazine of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents



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This special section, which is illustrated on our cover, features stories from young people who hail from around the world but now call Manitoba home. Their inspirational stories of life in other countries and life here in Canada can be found throughout this journal. On our cover is Lin Ruttan (top left), who was born in Canada, is Métis, Chinese and Vietnamese; Wenlan Nyenon (bottom left), who is from West Africa; Gleb Gutsol (top right), who is from the Ukraine; Mojgan Heidara (middle right), who is from Afghanistan; and Arsisadin Gobena (bottom right), who is from Ethiopia.

Stories From Newcomers: An Introduction

This issue of the *M.A.S.S. Journal* features something very special—stories from young people who come from around the world but now call Manitoba home. Dispersed throughout the journal, these stories share their personal thoughts about their past, present, future, hopes and dreams, and experiences in Manitoba's education system.

The stories are from students at Gordon Bell High School, where, over the past three years, a group of teachers and students have embraced the diverse range of student experiences in the school. Under the name Many Voices, One World, students have come together to explore the similarities and differences in their lives. The student stories found in this journal represent some of the work they have done to recognize the value of each other's experiences as they take on the responsibility of adult citizenship.

Crossing divisions of culture, religion and class, these students have come to realize they have a common inheritance of resilience. By telling their stories they hope to inspire their classmates and community to move beyond tolerance and embrace diversity. They have also been featured in the documentary "The Storytelling Class" which can be ordered via: storytellingfilm@mts.net.

A special thank you goes to Marc Kuly, a consultant with Manitoba School Improvement Program, who was one of the teachers who initiated Many Voices One World at Gordon Bell High School in Winnipeg School Division. Kuly was instrumental in collecting these stories.

The students' stories can be found on pages 13, 19, 31, 35 and 37.

Nancy Allan

Minister
Manitoba Education

Ministre
de l'Éducation
du Manitoba

A Message from the Minister

With another school year beginning to wind down, I would like to take this opportunity to commend the members of the Manitoba Association of School Superintendents (MASS) for your leadership and commitment to quality education and the well-being of students across the province.

I recognize the support you provide, not only to our students in general, but also to new students of immigrant families as they begin to make Manitoba their home. You are important role models in setting the truly welcoming tone these new students need if they are to find their places in Manitoba schools and Manitoba society.

Our province is proud of its rich cultural diversity. Working together, we can continue to make important strides in expanding the inclusiveness, innovation and responsiveness of our schools. My department staff and I value our working relationship with MASS. We look forward to further collaboration with your organization to meet the present and future needs of all Manitoba students.

Message de la ministre

Une autre année scolaire tirant à sa fin, je profite de l'occasion pour féliciter les membres de l'association des directeurs généraux des écoles du Manitoba (MASS) de leur leadership et de leur engagement en ce qui a trait à une éducation de qualité et au bien-être des élèves dans toute la province.

Je reconnais le soutien que vous fournissez non seulement à nos élèves en général, mais plus particulièrement aux nouveaux élèves provenant de familles d'immigrants alors qu'ils commencent à s'établir au Manitoba. Vous êtes des modèles importants lorsqu'il s'agit de créer l'environnement très accueillant dont ces nouveaux élèves ont besoin pour se sentir à l'aise dans les écoles du Manitoba et la collectivité manitobaine.

Notre province est fière de la richesse de sa diversité culturelle. Ensemble, nous pouvons continuer à faire des progrès importants dans l'accroissement de l'inclusivité, de l'innovation et de la réceptivité de nos écoles. Mon personnel et moi apprécions énormément nos relations positives de travail avec votre association. Nous sommes heureux de poursuivre notre collaboration en vue de répondre aux besoins présents et à venir de tous les élèves du Manitoba.

Manitoba

A Message from the President

Sandra Herbst
Assistant Superintendent
River East Transcona School Division

I am the daughter of two immigrants. My mother came to Canada as a child after the Second World War and my father entered this country as an adolescent in the 1950s. What they experienced as newcomers are the stories of my childhood; they paint vivid pictures for me of what it was like to work, play and learn in a place where, at first, the language was incomprehensible, where everyday life was unusual and where connections to the community were few. And then, just recently, I spoke with a middle years African-Canadian student who told me that he and his mother and brothers had walked for three months from their home to a refugee camp before making their way to Canada. He, too, spoke with carefully crafted words about a language that still is at times incomprehensible, about daily routines that still seem unusual and about connections to the community that are growing slowly with each passing day. And I am struck by the similarities in these stories, though they have occurred decades apart.

What also strikes me is that a common underpinning of all of their stories is hope—that essential element to which we often refer in public education. However, it is not only about a hope of making a better life for oneself or a hope to reach one's potential. It is also rooted in a deep seated hope that public education will not only provide equity of access, but equity of opportunity and justice and fairness.

We may need to ask questions about inherent advantages and injustices that are embedded in the social and power arrangements in our schools, our language and our policies that may place, however unintentionally so, newcomers outside of their community.

These are ideals that we champion in our *MASS Statement of Beliefs in Public Education.*

If our schools are to be communities of hope for all of our students, we must, as in our previous journal, carefully consider Margaret Wheatley's contention of "turning to each other" to figure things out. And in this volume, colleagues from across the province are making their practice public, so that we can "turn to them" and listen to their stories of welcoming and working alongside newcomers in and through public education. These are the stories of how they are providing hope to their newest community members.

And as you read these articles, I encourage you to read with appreciation, for it is often easier to read with opinion—*This would never work in my school*, or *I would not have done it in this way.* Read with a stance of thankfulness that doesn't question what another is doing, but invites us to ask questions of what we ourselves our doing. And in that spirit of inquiry, we can look once again to the work of Robert Starratt.

Starratt (1991) speaks of the ethics of critique, justice and caring. It is within these three perspectives that we may examine what our schools and systems do to, for and with our newcomer citizens.

The ethic of critique is "aimed at its own bureaucratic context, its own bureaucratic mindset." We may need to ask questions about inherent advantages and injustices that are embedded in the social and power arrangements in our schools, our language and our policies that may place, however unintentionally so, newcomers outside of their community.

The ethic of justice "demands that the claims of the institution serve both the common good and the rights of the individuals in the school." We may need to ask questions about how our instruction builds just relationships between people of diverse experiences or about how our present assessment and evaluation practices can benefit all students, not only those advantaged by language or intuition.

The ethic of caring "places the human persons-in-relationship as occupying a position for each other of absolute value." We may need to observe closely in ourselves and others the underlying motivation for our conversations, the language used in newsletters and other communiqués, and the pictures of students and work that line our hallways. What evidence do they provide us of what we value and celebrate?

Several years ago, I had the chance to ask the lieutenant governor of Manitoba, Yvon Dumont, this question—*What do you hope for the students of our school division?* He hoped that all students who passed through our doors would be able to see themselves in the faces of others in our schools. I did not take his response to only mean physical attributes, but to include the reflection of experience, of idea, and of story. This powerful answer of hope can serve as a metaphor for what we work to do in schools every day.

Through our colleagues' articles and through the use of the Starrat's framework of ethics, the conversations that we have with ourselves and others can help us to think more deeply about whether what we do puts up roadblocks to hope or whether what we do generates hope for those citizen students new to our communities. I also trust that your reading, reflection and conversation leaves you with the indelible and unforgettable feeling of hope—in public education, in your system, and in yourself.

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For more information on MASS, go to www.mass.mb.ca!

Translating Vision Into Practice: Toward EAL Learner Success

By Diana Turner

Following is a composite picture of students who are learning English as an Additional Language (EAL) in Manitoba.

Rachelle's mother is a nurse recruited to work in central Manitoba. Rachelle, in grade 4, arrived in December. She had good schooling in her own country and was beginning to learn a little English, but she will need help with some differences in curriculum, learning academic English, and acclimatizing to living in a small community where the other students have been together since kindergarten.

Daniel, age 15, arrived in Canada a year ago with his mother and four younger siblings. They fled their own country five years ago after their father was killed, and spent time in neighbouring countries and finally a refugee camp, before arriving in Winnipeg. Daniel and his siblings speak three languages, including some French, but no English. They had little opportunity for schooling and thus could not read and write in any language. He would like to be a doctor someday and help his people back home. His teacher tells him that education is his first responsibility now, but he knows his family needs him to help support them. School is very difficult, although his teachers encourage him; he also worries about his younger brothers who are hanging out with the wrong people.

Henry, age 10, moved with his family to Winnipeg from a remote First Nations community that uses a mixture of its Aboriginal language and English. Henry's teacher in Winnipeg wonders if he has a learning disability or is just having trouble with the academic language and literacy demands of grade 4.

Katrina, age 13, moved with her family from Europe to a small town in rural Manitoba this year. Her father is a welder who was employed upon arrival. Her mother is a homemaker for their growing family of seven children. Katrina was not in the university-bound stream back home. Strongly-held family and religious values have influenced many decisions about education, and her family worries that Canadian schools will work against those values. As the second-oldest daughter, Katrina helps her mother with the household chores and childcare and sees herself following a similar way of life in the future.

Lee Jung-Su, an only child, came to a small community in Manitoba six months ago. His parents work long hours in a local industry that recruited them. Lee Jung-Su misses his friends and living in a large city. He knows his parents sacrificed a great deal to take work in Canada with the hope that through the educational opportunities here, he will be able to enter a respected profession.

Born in Canada, Ajeet entered kindergarten in September. Ajeet's parents both worked and attended English classes, so she was cared for much of the time by her grandmother who maintained the family language. In just a few months, Ajeet learned to hold her own in English on the playground and now uses English most of the time with her older brother and sister at home, to the detriment of her first language.

As Manitoba experiences its highest immigration rate in 50 years, public schools are on the front line of that growth and change. This article will set some background, summarize some elements that promote success for EAL students, and highlight a few promising practices across the province.

With over 12,000 arrivals in the last year, Manitoba is well on the way to the government's goal of 20,000 new immigrants per year. Of these newcomers, approximately 40 percent are age 20 and under. A significant feature of Manitoba's immigration success story is the tripling of immigration growth in rural Manitoba over the last five years, resulting in over 40 percent of K-12 EAL students now living outside Winnipeg. As well, a growing number of children like Ajeet are born in Canada to immigrant families and will likely enter school as learners of English. Within the last three years, over 10,000 new EAL learners have entered Manitoba public schools

There has also been a shift in source countries and contexts for immigration over the last decade. Approximately 71 percent of recent immigrants come through the Provincial Nominee Program with skills identified as needed in Manitoba. Although the Philippines, Germany, China and India are the major source countries, immigrants have come from over 150 different countries in the last several years. Individuals arriving through refugee sponsorships today often have experienced more severe and longer disruption in their lives than those in the past.

As a result, many Manitoba school divisions that had a relatively stable population for the last several decades have slowly and steadily or, in some cases, quite suddenly gained new cultural and linguistic diversity. As well, even those school divisions with a long history of educating newcomer and other EAL learners are seeing new backgrounds and needs among their students. These changes require professional learning, planning and development of policies, practices and resources to effectively meet learners' needs. Manitoba school divisions and schools are at different stages of growth in their capacity to serve the new population, but across the province we can see many examples of promising developments.

As a society, it is important to view newcomers through the strengths they bring, rather than the English language skills, cultural knowledge and other areas that they may not have. Like the historic waves of immigrants who helped build this province, today's newcomer children and their families have a variety of skills, experiences and personal qualities to contribute to their new home. They bring the world into our school communities, allowing us to increase our own intercultural competence and to develop multilingual citizens. And practically, when overall school enrolment is declining, the additional students help keep classrooms open and programs available.

The role of schools in the lives of newcomer families cannot be stressed enough. Local schools serve not only as centres of education, but community places where children develop identities, citizenship values and networks of relationships that they often draw on all their lives. Most newcomer families hold high respect for education and expect that schools will "take good care of" their children.

Ensuring that our new students can thrive requires all parts of the education system to work together to promote their learning and sense of belonging. Since any change must occur within the context of the other needs, principles, community interests, and constraints that influence local decision-making, there must be a vision for our EAL learners that provides direction and coherence.

To that end, after extensive research and consultation, the Department of Education released a Kindergarten to Grade 12 ESL/EAL Action Plan in 2005. This plan has guided a number of developments designed to improve programming and supports for EAL learners. It included significantly enhanced EAL funding for school divisions (over $8.5 million in 2008-2009) and the development of a K-Grade 12 EAL Curriculum Framework of Outcomes, along with teacher and programming supports. At the core of the document is a strengths-based vision for EAL learners, signified by the shift in terminology to English as an Additional Language.

Translating the vision into effective practices is the challenge for all of us over the next few years. A 2009 research report from the Council of Great City Schools, *Succeeding with English Language Learners: Lessons Learned from the Great City Schools* (available online at http://www.cgcs.org/) identified patterns found in several school districts across the U.S. that experienced significant improvement in the achievement of their English language learners. By looking at snapshots of recent developments across Manitoba, we can begin to see directions that school divisions here are finding helpful:

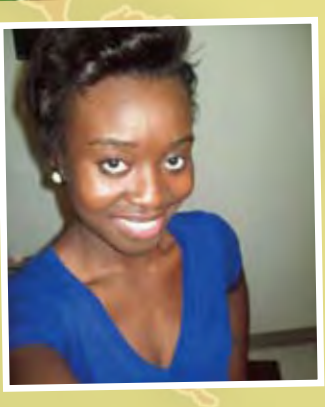
- Common to the "successful" U.S. school districts was a shared vision at all levels, with active leadership and support for change from the district office. In Manitoba, a number of school divisions of different sizes have made EAL learners a priority in divisional strategic planning. This impacts the allocation of staffing, resources, professional learning and other supports.
- Divisional leadership has often encouraged and supported the formation of EAL networks and facilitated opportunities for EAL professional learning and communication. Most school divisions with a significant EAL component have now established a consultant or curriculum support teacher position to build their capacity.
- Louis Riel School Division adopted a division-wide approach to the reception and support of newcomer students, including, but not limited to, the René Deleurme Centre.
- Several other divisions, e.g., River East-Transcona, Brandon and Hanover, have established other welcoming reception protocols and ensure immediate connections with families, usually with interpreters provided.
- When Beautiful Plains learned it would receive a sudden influx of newcomer students, it proactively sought out professional learning and

had even translated school documents before the students arrived.
- Several school divisions, including Garden Valley, have sent teams of teachers to a large conference on K-12 EAL held in Toronto every year.
- Several school divisions actively seek teachers and administrators who reflect the diversity of the children in their classrooms and teachers with EAL expertise.
- Hanover School Division, through the efforts of and support for its EAL Curriculum Support Teacher, has established individualized EAL education planning for all students, extensive supports, resources and professional learning opportunities for teachers, and translated forms.
- Western School Division brought the voices of parents, students and the community into their divisional EAL planning process. And newcomer students play hockey!
- Several school divisions, including Winnipeg, Seven Oaks and River East-Transcona, offer day or evening adult EAL classes that parents can access.
- Several divisions, including Winnipeg and Hanover, work closely with cultural liaison workers or other representatives from ethnic communities.
- A number of school divisions, including River East-Transcona, Winnipeg School Division and Pembina Trails School Divisions, have developed ongoing professional development for teachers.
- School divisions such as Western and Hanover have experimented with a co-teaching model in some settings, in which the collaboration of an EAL specialist and a classroom teacher benefits a range of students.
- Four school divisions, including Winnipeg, Louis Riel, St. James-Assiniboia and River East-Transcona, have established intensive programs to meet the literacy, academic and language needs of older EAL students with limited prior schooling. Borderland, with just a few literacy students, met these needs in a more informal, but effective way. Several other school divisions are also working to provide additional supports for these students.
- The Division scolaire franco-manitobaine has established a program of its own to develop French literacy skills and add English for an increasing number of students from African Francophone countries. Additionally, about 70 students benefited from a seven-week summer program in 2009.
- A number of school divisions, including Southwest Horizon, Western, and River East-Transcona, have begun to use the EAL Stages from the provincial Framework for assessment, planning, and reporting. River East Transcona has developed simple visual EAL progress reports for parents.
- Collaboration and partnerships among school divisions, government, non-governmental organizations, ethnocultural organizations, communities, and the post-secondary institutions are improving the range of supports available for students, families and schools. Settlement and EAL cannot be separated.

These snapshots are just glimpses—to capture all that is happening across the province in EAL would require a motion picture. Sometimes the transformation is rapid and sometimes it requires careful, incremental growth, but it can make our schools a home for the children who are becoming the tapestry of Manitoba. As these changes occur, the words of Ben Rempel, Assistant Deputy Minister of Immigration at the Manitoba Settlement Conference on February 12, 2010 remind us that "part of the journey is changing ourselves."

The keynote speaker at that same conference was John Mayom, a Manitoba high school graduate who arrived in 2004 as a 15 year old refugee who had never been to school. John stressed the important role of his first EAL teacher and stated, "what you do for the little kids will come back. . . One of them might even come back as the Minister." This is our history. ■

Diana Turner is the English as an Additional Language Consultant for Manitoba Education.



Stories From Newcomers: Wenlan Nyenon

I was born in West Africa, Liberia and lived there until I was eleven years old. I remember it was a Sunday morning just after my mom left me in the bath house to get ready for church when I first heard gunshots. I knew that there was war in my country but we lived in the city, Monrovia, and now it seemed that the war had arrived.

My mother got me from the bath and we ran out into the street. I remember seeing men with guns and red clothing running towards us. We ran towards the American embassy. On the way there we were caught in a fight between American marines and the armed men in the streets. My Dad took us into a parking garage and we hid there. I remember seeing the bullets flying past us. Because I was young my Dad tried to cover my eyes with his hand but, because I was young, I kept trying to pull his hand away. I wish I had not been successful. In the garage I saw a soldier as he was shot right through his head.

We eventually made it to the embassy and were able to stay there until the April 6th war ended. After the war there was trouble for my family. My father was a journalist and my mother was a secretary to the Vice-President. This meant that we were in danger. My father managed to get a visa to the United States. Not long after Dad left, my Mom was arrested. She was released from prison but she knew we couldn't stay in Liberia. The first place we went to was Cote D'Ivoire. That was difficult because we didn't speak French. The next place we went was Ghana where we had to live in a refugee camp.

Life in the refugee camp was hard but my family held onto the hope that we would be able to get to the United States and see my Dad. We went through all the application procedures and interviews, and were finally cleared to go. We even had a date when the plane would take us away. However, that was the fall of 2001 and when the twin towers were bombed, the United States closed its borders. We were crushed. Eventually though, Canada accepted us. I didn't even know where Canada was but my mother was happy so I was hopeful.

In Winnipeg, I was finally able to go to a normal school. I wanted to leave it all behind. I made friends and had to work very hard in school. Running from Liberia to Canada I missed two years of school and so reading and writing were really difficult for me—they still are. I tried to stay positive and present myself as the dancing, excited girl my friends knew me as. I was scared that if I told my friends about my past they would judge me. I wanted to be their friend not some poor refugee girl from Ghana or Liberia or Cote D'Ivoire. I didn't want to be seen as less valuable. I wanted to leave it all behind but you can't leave it all behind.

Despite my best efforts to pretend I was okay, I had nightmares every night. In fact, up until recently I never slept more than a couple of hours at a time. I couldn't get the picture of that soldier out of my mind. Gradually opening up to my friends and hearing the stories of my classmates helped me gain the courage to tell my story. Now that I can talk about it I realize that this is who I am. My nightmares have slowed down and I can sleep better. I now understand that I didn't do anything wrong. And now my friends understand me more. They understand why I do the things I do and why I get so frustrated when people don't take the opportunities they have seriously.

This past year has been an exciting and challenging one for me. I finally became a citizen and so, after eleven years apart, I finally got to travel to the United States and see my Dad. I am working now and trying to make it through my first year at university. I also talk to school children about my experiences. Hopefully they will see how everything can disappear in a second and live their lives with a purpose.

New Opportunities: Providing Newcomer Families a Safe Haven in River East Transcona School Division

By Jan Smith, Kim Campbell and Kristi Brandstrom

She lived through war and the death of her parents. She fled in search of a safe haven and started school in a language not her own. Some days, she could not go to school because it was too expensive. Then she started to lose her hearing and she fell behind. A promise of a better life and a reunion with her siblings brought her to Canada. When asked about the highlights of coming to Canada, this 15-year-old said, "getting medical care and going to school every day."

Newcomers often arrive in Canada with feelings of both trepidation and hope. Anyone who has changed schools, started a new job or moved to a different community can relate to some of the feelings a newcomer student may experience. Along with a new teacher, a new environment and new friends, the student must adjust to a new culture, a new language and a different way of doing school.

Schools need to decide how to respond to newcomers. Is it best to bring them into school as quickly as possible, or is it better to prepare for the special situations these students face? As the number of refugees and immigrants continued to grow in River East Transcona School Division (RETSD), it was decided it was best to take the time to plan for a good beginning for these vulnerable students, to provide them with a safe haven and positive opportunities, enabling them to succeed in their lives.

Newcomer reception

Several school divisions have recognized the importance of receiving newcomers in a systematic, welcoming way and gathering the information needed to plan for the success of these students. Leaders in RETSD looked at several models for doing this and chose

one that fit the unique needs of the community.

Geographically, it was difficult to find a central location that would be easy for newcomers to access. It was decided it would be better for someone meet the families at their local school.

In 2008, a newcomer reception facilitator (NRF) was hired. When newcomers arrive at the school, the NRF is contacted and arrangements are made for her to meet the family at the school. If needed, an interpreter is hired to attend this initial reception meeting. When the family arrives for the meeting, they are given a welcome bag that includes information about programs in the division. The process and purpose of the meeting is explained. Registration paperwork is completed and the necessary documentation is gathered. The paperwork can be confusing and overwhelming to a newcomer, so it often helps to have someone to guide the family through the forms. Families are encouraged to ask questions.

The NRF then goes through a questionnaire with the family. It is based on the "English as an Additional Language Initial Reception Template" provided in the Manitoba Education draft of *English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Literacy, Academics, and Language (LAL) Kindergarten to Grade 12 Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes.* The document was "developed to assist teachers in developing a profile of student background information and gather the relevant information" (MECY, 2006, 104). It provides important clues about previous education experiences, trauma and special needs. It also considers who the students are, including questions about favourite subjects, hobbies and ambitions.

Students complete English and mathematics assessments during this initial meeting. Based on assessments used in Louis Riel School Division, the English assessment includes oral, written and reading components. In cases where the student has no English ability, a basic written assessment in the first language may be completed. These assessments remove the errors that may be made based on assumptions.

There are differences in skills and experiences within families. The grade completed in another country is not necessarily indicative of ability, as students learn different information at different grades throughout the world. A student's oral English is often not reflective of their ability to read or write in English. The assessments provide important information for programming and placement.

In most cases, students are placed in grades according to what is age appropriate. While students in kindergarten through Grade 4 are placed in regular classes, one placement option for students in grades 5 to 12 is an EAL program. In RETSD, there are two EAL programs at the high school level and two at the middle years level. If a student needs assistance with English language and falls within Stages 1-3 of the Manitoba Education EAL curriculum, it is recommended they attend one of these programs. For high school students who have interrupted schooling, or who fall within the Literacy and Academic Language stages, there is an Intensive Newcomer Support Program.

Some of the benefits of the programs include having teachers who are experienced in helping students adjust to school in Canada, receiving instruction at appropriate skill levels, being with other students who are going through similar experiences, and learning the vocabulary needed to succeed in regular classes. These benefits are explained to parents and they decide if they want their children to take advantage of these programs.

An appropriate placement is integral to establishing a good start, and the initial meeting between the family and the newcomer reception facilitator helps make the decisions clearer. The student mentioned in the introduction was placed in a program designed for students whose schooling was interrupted. She is part of a class where the students share similar experiences and the teachers know how to help them succeed within the Canadian school system.

The NRF summarizes the relevant information from the initial meeting and passes the assessments, questionnaire, and summary on to the school. She meets with an EAL contact person at the school. That person may be an administrator, guidance counsellor or EAL teacher, and together they discuss the assessment and any concerns or issues that may have arisen during the meeting. The contact person shares the information with the appropriate school staff.

Taking the time to learn about the student's needs, abilities, likes and dislikes allows schools to prepare for the student's entry into school. Instead of meeting an unknown entity, teachers receive a snapshot of the new student before they begin attending class. They can learn how to pronounce the student's name in advance, prepare appropriate materials and avoid making rushed or faulty assumptions. The student knows his or her voice was

heard at the beginning of the process, and both the student and teacher can be more at ease on the first day. Since that first day may become a lifelong memory, it is important to plan for a successful beginning.

Neighbourhood immigrant settlement workers

Seeking a new beginning in Canada takes courage, determination and knowledge. Newcomer families are often resourceful, but settling in a new country is not easy. A family that is having difficulty adjusting to life in a new country may not be able to help their children study for a test, address school concerns or navigate the Canadian school system. Since family is vital to a student's success in school, the needs of the family as a whole should be taken into account. To address the needs of a family during the settlement process, they are referred to a neighbourhood immigrant settlement worker (NISW).

NISWs help newcomer families access the appropriate community resources. The division began with one NISW, a position funded by Manitoba Labour and Immigration. With the increased numbers of newcomers, the number of NISW positions within RETSD has grown to 3.5 positions, based out of three local schools.

When an NISW receives a referral, she visits the family at their home and brings information the family may find valuable. Often families are looking for someone who has time to answer their questions. They may want to know where they can take EAL courses, how to find a doctor or where to find their traditional food. The NISW connects them with the proper agencies, businesses and programs. She also facilitates connections with school programs. She may even be asked to help the family identify which papers from the school are important and determine if any action is required. A relationship of trust is built and the newcomer has found an ally in Canada.

The settlement team also runs programs specifically designed for newcomers. They hold family portfolio evenings, developed in association with the Centre for Education and Work, which bring families together for a meal, an activity and an opportunity to share their culture and learn about Canadian culture. The settlement team also holds a computer class which helps adults acquire some basic computer skills, and a "Mother and Daughters Connecting" program, which uses crafts to strengthen family bonds. One of the NISWs adapted a "Kindergarten Readiness" program to use with newcomer families on home visits. These programs provide opportunities for newcomers to adjust to life in Canada.

Community based language classes

When they arrive, one of the most pressing needs for some newcomers is to find an English language class. In the past, there were not many opportunities for parents of young children to learn English. The language barrier could lead to isolation, as well as difficulty communicating with schools and making connections in the community. This need was recognized by leaders in RETSD and, in partnership with Manitoba Labour and Immigration, community-based language classes were established. These beginner and intermediate English classes are offered at two local schools in the mornings. Free childcare is

available for children over one year of age. The schedules of school-aged children are also taken into account. Class times allow mothers to be at home in the morning to send their children off to school and to be there when they come home for lunch.

During the classes, settlement issues are addressed while English language skills are developed. The classes are held in schools, allowing families to become more comfortable in the Canadian school environment. Classes plan potlucks, clothing exchanges, cooking sessions and field trips, all of which help build a sense of community and enable families to make connections with other newcomers who may be going through similar situations.

While their parents are in class, children in the child care program gain exposure to the English language. They learn to play with others, to chant and sing nursery rhymes and to follow expectations of a learning environment in Manitoba. They also make friends and gain independence, which helps prepare them for school.

McLeod Education Centre

Daytime English classes do not work for all parents. Many adults work full time but still need to continue to develop their English skills. By the time they have finished work, it is too late for them to attend classes held in downtown Winnipeg. In order to support those families, the Department of Labour and Immigration entered into a partnership with the RETSD Adult Education Program to hold evening classes at McLeod Education Centre. Currently, there are three levels of classes held each Monday and Wednesday from 6 to 9 p.m.

Adult participants appreciate being able to take classes in their home community. It is convenient and enables them to make connections with other students who live nearby. During class, there is considerable focus on neighbourhood resources. In certain instances, adults are improving their English language skills in order to continue their education.

For some this may mean completing high school credits towards graduation or in preparation for college or university. Both options are available at McLeod. For others, their schooling may have been interrupted earlier in their lives and now they are looking for the opportunity to improve their reading and writing, basic math and computer skills. This too, is possible at McLeod.

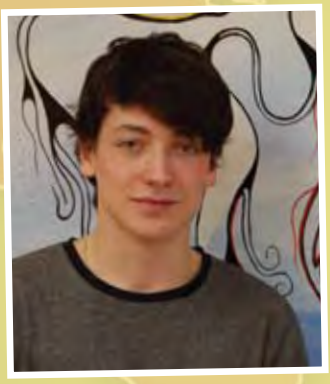
Conclusion

As newcomer students and their families continue to arrive in Manitoba, schools must be prepared to help them succeed. It is important to recognize that newcomers often arrive with a wealth of knowledge and experience. Providing a safe haven that addresses their needs will make it possible for them to share their gifts and skills. ■

Kristi Brandstrom is the Newcomer Reception Facilitator, Kim Campbell the Manager of Community Initiatives and Jan Smith the Director of Adult and Continuing Education in the River East Transcona School Division.

Reference

Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (2006). *English as an Additional Language (EAL) and Literacy, Academics, and Language (LAL) Kindergarten to Grade 12 Manitoba Curriculum Framework of Outcomes Draft Version.*



Stories From Newcomers: Gleb Gutsol

I was born in a place called Kramatorsk in Ukraine. Like for so many immigrants and refugees, leaving home was hard. Nobody knew my family was leaving. We had a relative in Winnipeg who had helped us with the applications to enter Canada but the whole thing was so risky and so hard to imagine that we were worried it wouldn't work. We didn't want people to know in case it didn't work. It did work and what was once so crazy an idea became reality very quickly. I didn't get to say goodbye.

I might be a little different than other teenagers my age because I think about the government a lot. I know that Canada is a democracy but sometimes I wonder. I mean, it is nothing like Ukraine was where, after communism fell apart, it was like we had no government at all. But still, when it is time for Canadians to vote and few people do and nothing seems to change I wonder how different the two places are.

I know what it means to have no government. Many times in my town things were very bad. I remember there being empty stores and empty stomachs. One day my parents would go to the store with their pay and find out that bread cost more than they had been paid. The next, they would be paid a hundred times more only to find out that the bread had increased the same amount—or that there simply wasn't any. Somehow, we managed. My Grandparents lived in the country so we had potatoes. But that was all we had. Fried potatoes, boiled potatoes, baked potatoes—breakfast, lunch and supper.

One of my fondest memories is of a special kind of bread that was the sweetest thing I had ever tasted. At least I thought it was special. There was a big building in my town that was used by government inspectors. When the government fell apart some people turned it into a kind of bakery. My mom lined up there with me one day and we actually got some of the bread they were making. On the walk home I ate half of the loaf myself. I was pretty young then but I still remember how sweet it tasted.

When I was older that building actually turned into a real bakery and we got some more bread from them. I was so excited because I wanted to taste that bread again. But when we bought some, it didn't taste the same as I remembered. I asked my mom why and she explained that the bread made there wasn't special. The reason it had tasted so sweet to me was that I hadn't eaten in days.

I'm happy here but that doesn't mean that I don't have my bad days. It also doesn't mean that Canada won't have its bad days.

Immigration: Responding to the Challenge in Garden Valley School Division

"A welcoming and inclusive multi cultural school is one in which students and parents of all linguistic and cultural backgrounds feel welcome, valued, and included." Coelho 2004

By Debra Loewen

These days, when you step through the door of any school in Garden Valley School Division, you are as likely to hear German being spoken as English. In the last 12 years the EAL population in the school division has grown from approximately 160 students to 1,276, currently representing thirty percent of the total student population.

What is it that has contributed to this changing demographic and the growth in the overall student population when so many school divisions in rural Manitoba are seeing declining enrolments? How did Garden Valley get to where it is today?

Demographics

Garden Valley School Division, with a student population of 4,100, is located in the heartland of industrialized south central Manitoba. The city of Winkler is the industrial hub of the division and home to the division's administrative office, high school and four of its seven primary/elementary administrative units.

Garden Valley School Division is no stranger to immigration. It has long seen the return of "Kanadier" Mennonites who had, at some point in the past, left the area to settle in parts of Mexico and Central and South America. Winkler's recent immigration boom however began in 1997 as a concerted effort to pursue and support immigrants to come to the area to satisfy economic and human resource needs. At the same time as this local initiative was taking shape, the province was working with the federal government to develop what we now know as the Provincial Nominee Program (PNP). Bringing these two initiatives together resulted in a pilot project which saw a large number of early and successful PNP arrivals to the Winkler area.

Now 12 years later, Winkler's population has grown to 12,000, making it one of the fastest growing communities in the province. The last five years alone have seen 1,800 newcomers arriving in the area. Predominant groups of new arrivals in the Winker area include Russian-Germans (German nationals who had repatriated to Germany from the Soviet Union), others from Germany, and Mennonites from Central and South America. For many of them, Winkler offers not only employment, but also familiar linguistic, cultural, and religious affiliations, as well as geographical similarities to the areas from which they came.

The students

Given the background of many of our newcomers, one might assume a common language and, to a large extent, that is true. There are, however, considerable differences in the language, literacy levels, and schooling backgrounds among the students arriving from Europe and the "Kanadier" Mennonite and even greater differences for those students arriving from African countries. These differences impact the ease with which students become familiar and acclimatized to a new school setting.

Students arriving from Germany speak High German and usually have some experience with formal schooling. In Germany, students generally enter school at age six and school is compulsory until age sixteen. Grades 1 to 4 are considered basic instruction and are the same for every child. At grade 5, the education system directs students into streams. Ultimately German students have three types of public school certification: Gymnasium or University

Immigration is an experience that some psychologists compare to bereavement. Even for newcomers who arrive as part of a planned, voluntary process, immigration is a significant dislocation.

Entrance, Realschule or Vocational, and Hauptschule for those students who do not choose either stream.

Students arriving from Mexico, South and Central America come with a very different school experience and different expectations of what school should be. There are three main school systems from which Mexican Mennonite students may come to Canada. These are the Old Colony, EMC, and General Conference Schools.

Old Colony is the largest group of Kanadier Mennonites and these schools have remained fairly unchanged over time. Rote learning is the most common form of instruction. Most schools still use slates and after the teacher has checked the assignment, it is erased and students do the next assignment.

The Old Colony school year runs for six months. Girls attend from age 6 to 12 and tend to drop out at the onset of puberty; they then remain at home and learn housekeeping, cooking and childcare skills. Boys attend from age 6 to 13 and then stay home to work with machines and to farm with their fathers.

The **Kleine Gemeinde** (EMC) group of Mennonites has recently begun significant changes in their schools. In 1992, an agreement was made with Mennonite Central Committee to produce some textbooks (readers) for grades 3 to 5 and this has encouraged these schools to improve other courses as well.

Students in this system attend school for nine years, until the end of junior high. The education generally includes Spanish subjects and teachers have been trained to provide good instruction.

A few students also come to the Winkler area from **General Conference Schools**. These schools are the only fully accredited schools recognized by the Mexican Department of Education. They meet the minimum requirements of instruction in Spanish and follow state curriculum in all subjects. Subjects at the elementary level are similar to ours. The secondary level includes English as a Second Language programs and some computer courses. Teachers in General Conference schools have completed secondary school and many have some post-secondary training.

Supporting our newcomers

As a school community, it is important that we are aware of how other school experiences differ from ours, the family expectations of new arrivals, and the impact that immigration has on the students who arrive. Immigration is an experience that some psychologists compare to bereavement. Even for newcomers who arrive as part of a planned, voluntary process, immigration is a significant dislocation.

No matter what the circumstances, newcomers of all ages tend to go through a predictable sequence of stages in adjusting to their new circumstances. Within the same family, siblings and different generations may pass through these stages at different rates and with varying responses, depending on a variety of factors, such as their knowledge of English, opportunities for social inclusion, interactions with the larger community, and whether they experience success at work or at school.

As a school division, we are called on to provide a welcoming and supportive environment for all of our students. To that end, many of the schools in GVSD hold welcome barbecues, picnics, and information nights. Newsletters, report cards, and phone messages are frequently translated into other languages and translation is available for parent information evenings and parent conferences as well.

GVSD also has a strong tradition of employing Home School Liaison Workers to support new families to transition into the school community and make the adjustment to Canadian schools. This began some twenty years ago when the first Home School Liaison workers were hired to work primarily with the "Kanadier" Mennonites. In recent years, this liaison role has grown to involve support for all newcomer families and additional staff

has been hired so that all schools in the division are able to provide this service. These School Liaison workers are able to converse with the new families in their own language and frequently make home visits, often establishing connections that remain strong for years.

A very strong partnership with the local Settlement Services organization (Regional Connections) has also been established in the last few years. This organization works closely with the division to provide information on families settling in the area. In addition to the many other tasks involved in helping new families settle in the area, they assist with school registration and transition, and provide some background information on what parents and students might expect from Canadian schools.

Instructional model and staffing support

As the number of EAL students continued to climb steadily within the school division, EAL began to be identified as a divisional priority. Shortly thereafter it became a major initiative on the Board's Strategic Plan. While many informal supports were in place and some schools were using educational assistant and teacher time specifically for EAL instruction, it was recognized that a more comprehensive and formalized approach to programming and support was needed.

An EAL committee was established to look at programming models and instructional support that took into account the changing face of the student population. While the staffing formula began to reflect the need for specific EAL teaching time, it also became apparent that it was not feasible, nor research based, to have the EAL teacher provide the bulk of instruction for all the newcomers. A two-pronged approach, where language acquisition and academic learning needs would be supported through EAL programming both in and out of the classroom, was called for and the divisional theme became "Every teacher an EAL teacher".

In this model, which is outlined in a divisional EAL protocol, EAL and classroom teachers are encouraged and supported to work together to address the needs of the newcomer students.

The classroom teacher's role is to:

- Provide information to EAL teacher on units, themes, and content being addressed in the classroom.
- Provide direct explicit vocabulary instruction for EAL learners (subject specific vocabulary).
- Encourage and provide opportunities for students to participate in classroom activities in their home or first language.
- Celebrate diversity.
- Collaborate with EAL teacher for reporting.

The EAL teacher provides programming support to the classroom teacher as well as direct student support. The EAL teacher's role is to:

- Provide initial assessments and place students on the English Language Proficiency Continuum.
- Make recommendations for programming placement according to stage of learner and grade level.
- Collaborate with classroom teachers to support and provide classroom based programming ideas (team teaching/ resources) and for reporting.

- Coordinate and provide some direct instruction for EAL learners (with support from Educational Assistants).

The programming model takes into account the grade and language stage of the English language learner and provides for more direct instructional support in the early stage of language acquisition. As the student moves through the stages of language learning, more of their support is provided in the classroom setting.

The kindergarten to grade two program is primarily classroom-based with in-class support. The protocol recommends that students at these grade levels have some intensive, small group EAL instruction outside of the classroom as well, to a maximum of one period a day. For students in Grades 3 to 8, and in the very early stage of learning English, pull out programming is provided for half the day until the students are ready to exit the first stage on the English Language Proficiency Continuum. The focus of the out of class instruction is on BICS: Basic Interpersonal Communications Skills. Some pull out programming continues to be provided for Stage 2 to 4 learners for a portion of the day with a focus on Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency.

Support in Grades 9 to 12 is provided primarily through EAL and E-Credit courses. Currently, Senior Years students have the opportunity to take three levels of EAL courses (EAL 11 G, EAL 21G, EAL 31G). All the core courses are offered in E-Credit format at Grades Nine and Ten. In addition, the course "English as an Additional Language for Academic Success", is also offered for students. As much as possible, new students are scheduled into these and other courses where the language demands are not as high.

In 2008-2009, through the strategic planning process, the Board approved two initiatives that will have significant impact on EAL instruction in the division: 1) a change in the staffing formula to allow for additional EAL teacher time and 2) the hiring of an EAL coordinator for the division. The EAL coordinator provides support to schools through the EAL teacher, models effective strategies, and provides information on resources. The coordinator is also asked to be the contact with Manitoba Education on issues specific to EAL.

Support to teachers

With the large and increasing number of EAL students in each classroom, teachers have faced many challenges related to instruction and integration. They often struggle to communicate with students and their parents in the way they would like and are constantly seeking strategies that will allow them to become more effective in their instruction. Over the last few years the EAL committee has endeavoured to share pertinent information on language acquisition, including common myths and misperceptions, through individual school presentations. They have also created and developed a number of resources for teachers to use such as assessment packages, intake inventories, and language continuums.

Most of the schools have identified EAL as a priority on their School Plan and devote staff meeting time to this topic. Classroom teachers share strategies that they have found to be useful and EAL teachers provide information on resources and other supports available. Concerns and success stories are discussed.

The EAL Protocol was developed for teachers to have access to a great deal of information in one document and is reviewed with all teachers annually. It includes information on the intake and assessment process, the programming model, the type of student information classroom teachers can expect to receive when a new student enters their classroom, cultural backgrounds of students, language acquisition basics, and teacher resources. It is hoped that this document, along with continued professional development opportunities at both the school and divisional level, will be helpful to teachers as they continue to rise to the challenge of a changing classroom.

On-going challenges

There is no doubt that we will continue to face challenges as we grow. Understanding and assessing EAL students with special needs is an on-going concern. The challenge of being inclusive while providing much needed direct instruction in a sheltered setting is one with which we continue to grapple. Most of all, we continue to look for ways to be welcoming and to integrate students, something that is especially difficult when there are large numbers of students from a particular culture or country.

As we continue on our journey, we are excited to reflect on the successes we have had, the way in which many students have acquired skills in English and gone on to graduate with flying colours, and the knowledge all of us have gained about other cultures as we work together in a true spirit of welcome and cooperation. ■

Debra Loewen is Student Services Administrator and Assistant Superintendent of Garden Valley School Division.





Building a Peaceful Village:
Enlarging the Commons in Winnipeg's Inner City

By Alysha Sloane

Traditional school processes and structures such as parent teacher conferences, monthly newsletters and parent councils have had limited success in the engagement of newcomer youth and their families. Where are the new spaces in and around public schools for newcomer families to influence the aims, method, matter and manner of public education?

A program called The Peaceful Village opened its doors to students and families in October 2009 at Gordon Bell High School and Hugh John Mac Donald School. The name is symbolic of the program's aim to work in solidarity with newcomer families so all citizens in Winnipeg enjoy the same democratic rights and freedoms.

The force of an example

In 2009 a group of Gordon Bell High School students, parents and community members rallied together to claim the Broadway and Portage lot next to the school. The land was vacated by Midway Chrysler and, before a small but committed group of community activists mobilized to secure the lot as a green space for the school, it was purchased by Canada Post to house its new downtown regional headquarters. Rallies ensued, petitions were signed, blogs were created and pressure was applied to various decision makers. All of these lovely disruptions or acts of peaceful resistance to the continued "enclosure" of the lot were quite remarkable in many ways.

The importance of the commons

The acquisition of the green space is symbolic of the public school's role in the enlargement of the commons: the places, natural resources and knowledge that can be freely accessed by everyone in a community. Public schools are one of the few social institutions where children and adults gather together to become living expressions of the codified dreams and aesthetic judgments about what constitutes the "good life." Schools are the *in between* spaces where wisdom and natality fuse together to ignite the social imagination.

The activists who pursued the green space prized the development of a place for the community to gather and play over an efficiency model which would have imposed the addition of more bricks and concrete in the form of a Canada Post building. Student leaders involved in the process offered a "better" vision to improve life in their community.

Whether it is explicitly articulated or not, the public school emancipates particular assumptions and silences others. The decision to resist the continued enclosure of the lot created space for dissent and was a public affirmation that "a social movement consists, no less than the exemplarity of work of art, of its ability to set the political imagination in motion by virtue of an exceptional self-congruency" (Ferrara, 2008, p. 22). Gordon Bell "aims to develop citizens who are: caring, curious, open-minded, knowledgeable, active, resilient and respectful" (Gordon Bell Aims Committee, 2008).

In several accounts of the green space story one could observe parts of the community actualizing many of the aims of the school. Why should we care so much about this and other examples of self-congruency as it pertains to the enlargement of the commons?

The threat of enclosure

In many parts of the world the commons are under threat. The takeover of ecosystems by multinational corporations, the centralization of power into the hands of the wealthy elite, the movement to privatize everything public, are all alarming signals that the enclosure of the commons is one of our most pressing social justice concerns. When the physical and cultural commons are reduced, local decision making is usurped and a community's capacity to address social injustices is severely limited. In order for a community to renew itself, it must be able to access and benefit from intergenerational wisdom to enhance and sustain life.

Chet Bowers defines enclosure as "the process of limiting access, use and democratic decisions about what can be freely shared by members of the community; enclosure both of natural systems (water, forests, plants, animals, airwaves, etc.) and cultural practices and achievements (music, traditions relating to food, healing, entertainment, games, entertainment, craft knowledge, etc.) through the monetization and integration into industrial culture."

Now that Gordon Bell has successfully claimed the green space, the challenge will be to make sense of the victory within a larger pursuit to enlarge the commons in the inner city. Will the green space become a place that belongs to everyone in the community? Can Gordon Bell continue to be a healthy disruption in a climate where "local decision making is (often) replaced by owners and elites who are seldom members of the community and thus do not have to be accountable to their neighbours or live with the consequences of their decisions?" (Bowers, p. 5).

The potential inherent in Winnipeg's cultural mosaic

Gordon Bell families and educators must continually make sense of these and other complex questions in order to honour the school's promise to renew the community's collective understanding of what it means to live together peacefully in a democratic society. To actualize this promise the school mirrors a contested definition of what constitutes the "good life."

The reflection is enriched and intensified because many new Canadians join the school community each year. When you walk down the halls at Gordon Bell there is a consonance of languages and you become acutely aware that you exist in a community that is in a perpetual state of flux. In the hallways, cafeteria and classrooms, hundreds of young people and their families rebuild Winnipeg's cultural mosaic every year.

In Winnipeg's inner city, newcomer families must work hard to gain entrance to and participate fully in the life of the commons. Language barriers, lack of affordable housing, poverty are just some of the challenges that affect many newcomers, particularly those who have been impacted by war. Several students and families in the Gordon Bell community have lived many years in a refugee camp which makes the settlement process even more difficult. Traditional school processes and structures such as parent teacher conferences, monthly newsletters, and parent councils have had limited success in the engagement of newcomer youth and their families. Where are the new spaces in and around public schools for newcomer families to influence the aims, method, matter and manner of public education?

Critical reflection

In the spring of 2009, Gordon Bell High School and Hugh John MacDonald School participated in a

community wide action research project in partnership with the Manitoba School Improvement Program to identify some of the constraints that impact newcomer youth and their families. This qualitative research project involved students, parents, community leaders, teachers, administrators, consultants, and community service providers. The research process itself was a mechanism to develop partnerships across the community. It was also intended to build a shared commitment amongst newcomer families, educators and community organizations to remove some of the barriers.

As a result of the action research a program called The Peaceful Village opened its doors to students and families in October 2009 at Gordon Bell High School and Hugh John Macdonald Junior High. The name is symbolic of the program's aim to work in solidarity with newcomer families so all citizens in Winnipeg enjoy the same democratic rights and freedoms. The term "peace" represents more than just the absence of physical violence. It is a public declaration that to have peaceful and just communities all citizens must have the opportunity to enter into and fundamentally change the commons. The purpose is not to create mirror images of people who enjoy the most power and privilege in society. It is the actualization of the belief that a community should become different because someone new has arrived.

Building a peaceful village

The Peaceful Village currently has three main components: Passion Projects, the Learning Centres, and The Village Kitchens. Students in the program select an artistic passion they would like to explore over the course of the year. These *Passion Projects* can be described as the activities that enrich the community's soul. Piano lessons, beading, Djembe drumming, photography, painting, Hip Hop dancing, cake decorating, singing, sewing, guitar lessons are just some of the activities students have begun to pursue.

At the end of the school year students will gather with their families to share what they have learned. They will use a set of diverse aesthetic languages that do not rely on one's capacity to communicate in English to build connections across the community. Students in the program have described the Passion Projects as the beating heart of The Peaceful Village Program.

Wise council

If the Passion Projects are the beating hearts of The Peaceful Village, the *Learning Centres* are the wise councils. Students, mentors, teachers, parents and volunteers gather together after school to share stories of resilience, build literacy and numeracy skills, complete course work and to share immigration experiences. Two weeks ago one of the students offered to paint one of the volunteer's hands with a Henna tattoo in honour of the upcoming Village Kitchen. As elaborate flowers erupted over her hand, all of the other young women gathered around the table to share stories about why, when, and how Henna tattoos played a role in the lives of women in their birth countries.

The discussion moved to the exploration of child marriages, the contested roles of women at home, and what it is like to vacillate between family members' expectations and the new expectations of Canadian peer groups. The learning centres make space for newcomer youth and their families to share intergenerational knowledge which improves the community's ability to identify and respond to social justice issues.

Enlarging the commons to include the voices of newcomer parents

Newcomer families face many challenges when raising adolescents in a new country. New parenting expectations in Canada, language barriers and gruelling financial burdens add to the complexity of raising happy, kind, healthy and responsible teenagers. Schools traditionally communicate with parents through newsletters, websites, report cards and parent teacher conferences. In this context, most of these mechanisms rely on both the sender and the receiver's ability to speak English. This alienation is exacerbated because newcomer parents are underrepresented on parent councils.

Silenced voices in school communities need a place to be heard and the 2009 action research results also indicated newcomer parents had concerns about the lack of opportunities to engage meaningfully in the life of the school. Some parents had critical questions with regards to students' timetables, assessments and EAL language adaptations once their children were moved from English as an Additional Language classes into mainstream classes.

To create the space for newcomer families to voice their concerns and advocate for their children, parents in The Peaceful Village Program meet with school staff, volunteers and program staff in the *Village Kitchen.* Once a month participants come together to eat supper, ask questions, provide information and advocate for their children. Interpreters attend each event so families can speak directly to school staff. Young people do not act as interpreters in order to reinforce and communicate respect for the parents' leadership roles in the family. Parents' feedback is recorded and shared with school staff and the expectation is that the voices of newcomer parents will influence the work of the school. Gordon Bell has welcomed an average of 60 participants at each event and Hugh John has enjoyed the participation of 45 people on each occasion. The Village Kitchen is evolving into a site of community empowerment, celebration, and solidarity.

"Learning to love humanity through its particular expressions"

Alessandro Ferrara in his book The Force of the Example asks his readers to celebrate the places in our community that demonstrate "outstanding instances of authentic congruency that are capable of educating our discernment by way of exposing us to selective instances of that special pleasure called by Kant the 'feeling of the promotion of life,'" (p. 22).

We should not aim to create carbon copies of programs and people in the name of cultural integration and inclusion. A world where any idea is acceptable in the name of cultural autonomy can dangerously absolve us of our responsibility for collective renewal. We need to embrace the *in between* space created by the public school, a place where children and caring adults work together to imagine a better future. In order to "learn to love humanity through its particular expressions" (Sandal, 2008), we should rigorously engage with others to understand and come to some agreement about what constitutes "the good life" for us all. Newcomer families and educators in the Gordon Bell and Hugh John school communities have generously offered some possibilities to "educate our discernment" and reinvigorate the Manitoba commons. ■

Alysha Sloane is a consultant with Manitoba School Improvement Program and a teacher on leave from Gordon Bell High School.

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The Newcomers: The Changing Face of Rural Education

"Growth means change and change involves risk, stepping from the known to the unknown." — Anonymous

By Julie van Kommer

Balanced precisely on the cusp where undulating prairies meet the majestic Parkland region lies Beautiful Plains School Division. Here, the pace of life is distinctly … rural. Though the "state of being rural" brings with it many benefits, there is the occasional downside. Over this past decade, Beautiful Plains, like most of its rural counterparts, has experienced a slow and steady decline in student enrolment. The student population here hovers around 1,500, and until just recently this population was nearly as homogeneous as the surrounding prairie landscape.

A recent influx of immigrant workers and their children within our communities has changed this. For the first time in over a decade student enrolment is on the rise and there is a diversity and richness of language, culture, and race evident for perhaps the first time since this area was settled over 140 years ago.

Re-thinking what we know

Our division's narrative begins with a dream envisioned by a local industry, Hytek, a pork processing facility. Hytek is an excellent example of a rural initiative intended to breathe life into a stagnant local economy. With the development of this industry, several hundred workers were needed and with a demographic that would simply not support this initiative, worldwide recruitment of workers began.

Soon contingents of Korean, Filipino and Ukrainian workers began to arrive. Within one year, their children would join them. For a school division that to this point had an immigrant population of less than one percent, the arrival of newcomers who would contribute over ten percent to the student population was daunting.

Certainly, the arrival of immigrant students is nothing new to public education in general and larger urban centers in particular; however the arrival of the first wave of our immigrant students was new to us, and brought many questions to the forefront—readily asked but not easily answered. What resources are required to support immigrant students? How should resources be allocated in the classroom for English as Additional Language (EAL) students and how would we know if those resources were adequate? What do we as an education system need to do to attempt to ease the cultural dislocation of immigrant students? What is the impact of these students on the schools, teachers, and communities in which they reside? What is the impact of schools and teachers on these students?

Public education is one of—if not *the*—cornerstone of Canadian society. The purpose of education is to provide children with knowledge through the curricula we develop, but education also provides students with opportunities to discover what it is to be part of a broader community. Through a complex interweaving of relationships and experiences in school, children learn values and life lessons, concepts which are integral to success in later life.

Schools and teachers become the initial and primary vehicle by which immigrants, both students and their parents, will learn English and internalize Canadian values and responsibilities. Educators are, then, an essential part of the support system for immigrant students. Immigrant students require the aid of the entire school community in making their transition to a new environment.

As with any student, many factors can influence academic success, but students with limited English skills bear the additional challenge of getting an education within an unfamiliar system while utilizing a language structure that is foreign to them. When one adds age to these barriers, the challenge becomes increasingly complex. Consider, for example,

one of our recent immigrant students from Korea who enrolled in the ninth grade. In four years, this student will need to master an additional language so that he can understand, read, write and speak English fluently, while learning new content and concepts so that he may earn enough credits to graduate high school; a daunting task indeed.

The instructional strategies we use with EAL students are necessarily different than those utilized with native English speakers. Immigrant students need to learn content and concepts as well as the associated language. Because English language learners often struggle to make sense of de-contextualized language, teachers need to spend a great deal of time scaffolding—providing the English language for the concepts students already know in their first language. This situation is made more complex at the secondary level where textbooks are text-rich with few illustrations to support content.

Language barriers are further compounded when one considers that in numerous cases students possess stronger English skills than their parents. Students become language interpreters for their parents and are responsible for helping their parents cope within their new communities. This role reversal makes immigrant students largely responsible for everything from their own education to banking to grocery shopping—a heavy burden for any child to bear.

It is with these issues in mind that Beautiful Plains has attempted to put appropriate supports in place for our immigrant students and their teachers. This is where EAL services, programs, and initiatives emerged in our educational framework.

Community outreach

Divisional initiatives began long before our new students arrived. The parents of our students, due to the Canadian immigration process, preceded their children's arrival by a year. The division took this as an opportunity to meet with parents as soon as was feasible. The first outreach meeting was held with more than 40 Korean parents. Senior administration, administrators, guidance counsellors, resource teachers and teachers were happy to attend this meeting to welcome our newest community members, provide them with information regarding our schools and programs and to answer any questions they had.

> As with any student, many factors can influence academic success, but students with limited English skills bear the additional challenge of getting an education within an unfamiliar system while utilizing a language structure that is foreign to them.

Translation services were provided both orally and in print. In this way, immigrant families were introduced to the Canadian public education system in general and to our local schools in particular. These meetings were also used as an opportunity to gather demographic information about the incoming children prior to their arrival to further guide school initiatives.

School initiatives and supports

One key initiative was the establishment of a mechanism for intake and reception. Initiated by the EAL teacher, families are encouraged to attend this meeting with their child. The purpose of these meetings is two-fold. The first is to fill out the required forms and establish the necessary documentation; the second and perhaps most significant purpose is establishing a connection between the families and the school. Families are encouraged to share their experiences and stories, ask questions and share concerns.

A comprehensive student profile is completed by the EAL teacher at this time and this profile is shared with classroom teachers before the student begins class. At reception, the family is offered a school tour, and peer-helpers and administration are on hand to make those all important first connections. In a follow-up meeting, the student is asked to participate in comprehensive English as an Additional Language Assessment. From the results of this assessment, the EAL teacher determines the student's placement and programming, and writes an inclusive Education Plan.

This plan is shared with the student, parents, administration and teachers. This plan helps to establish realistic goals for second language acquisition—goals the entire school community can work towards achieving. Utilizing a straightforward tracking system, the EAL teacher is able to update the student, staff, parents and administrator of each child's progress throughout the school year.

Once the student is placed, another need became obvious: professional development opportunities to prepare our teachers. Our approach focused on two elements: a cultural awareness and instruction. In order for an educational program to be effective, it must be developed with an understanding of the immigrant

student's culture. Programs have to recognize, respect and build onto the existing identity, language, and knowledge these students already possess.

One strategy utilized by many teachers to support language learners at all levels is embedding content-based language in meaningful contexts by using manipulatives, video, audio and other types of realia. Thus, content explicit language becomes more significant and therefore more effortlessly learned. To further engage immigrant students, many of our educators have provided opportunities to share their cultural identities with their Canadian counterparts. Teachers understand that immigrant students bring a wealth of rich experiences that, when shared, serve as a scaffold for new classroom explorations that enrich the experiences of all learners.

While classroom activity is centered on language acquisition, it is important to acknowledge that developing second language proficiency is a process that can take as many as seven years depending on a student's prior experience. Dedicated EAL classrooms have been established in both our larger schools. Each room has direct service provided by a designated EAL teacher and students are further supported with educational assistants. These classes are designed to work in congruence with each student's education plan, classroom programming and the individual needs of the child. They provide small group and one-to-one support where students receive intensive and direct instruction in English language acquisition.

Another support that has eased the integration of immigrant students has been the dedicated efforts of our school administrators. With an eye towards a larger cultural framework, administrators have played a key role in empowering teachers, students and parents, and in motivating and leading their schools toward multicultural awareness. They have provided release time for material preparation, programming, and professional development opportunities. By taking these steps toward building cultural competence within their schools they have set the tone for creating school climates that are welcoming to immigrant students and their families.

Another part of creating welcoming school climates is facilitating immigrant students' involvement with their new school and community. School counsellors do this by utilizing peer buddies and by extending invitations to join activities at school and in the community. At the secondary level, school counsellors help students explore career options and guide them through the unfamiliar miasma of applying to Canadian post-secondary education institutions.

A journey shared

A year has passed since the first group of students arrived from Korea. I have watched as they experienced their first day of school in a new country, watched as seven- and seventeen-year-olds alike have tried to catch first snowflakes on their tongues, giggling with delight. I have gamely tasted some of their traditional food—as they gamely have tasted mine. When I reflect upon this past year I recognize the bravery, fortitude, diversity and joy these students have brought to our community, and I begin to wonder if these students are here for us to teach—or to learn from.

Though great effort has been extended to support our newest students, it is important to recognize that the initiatives implemented by our division are not a "laundry list" of discrete actions. Instead they reflect the strong commitment our division makes to the foundation on which all successful education programs are constructed. In Beautiful Plains, this commitment involves supporting the development of effective programs through current research, best practice, human and financial resources, and professional development. Education is growth, growth is change, change is risk. As Beautiful Plains steps from the known into the unknown, it seems somehow fitting that we do so alongside our newest students. ■

Julie Van Kommer is responsible for English as an Additional Language and is the itinerant resource teacher for Beautiful Plains School Division. She is in her final year of Doctoral studies at the University of Calgary, Graduate Division of Education Research.

Stories From Newcomers: Mojgan Heidari

I was born in 1987 in the Kabul, Afghanistan. My country is a country with four seasons where you can find all the beauty of the world. However, being a woman and living in Afghanistan is a challenge and was a challenge for me. As a woman you have power over nothing whatsoever, not even your own life. I lived in Afghanistan until I was seven—that was when the Taliban's war came to my house.

At that time me, my mother and my two other sisters were out shopping for Eid—the day we celebrate the end of Ramadan. When we came back from shopping somebody told my mother our house was bombed. My mother instantly fainted. When I went to my house I saw little pieces of meat on the ground. I didn't really know what was going on until somebody came to me and said take this bucket and collect the pieces of your father and sister. At that time I wasn't even capable of doing anything except staring at my dad's head with blood all over him. It was the beginning of the Taliban's time.

My difficulties really started after my father passed away. After he was killed, my dad's sister became a monster in our lives. According to Afghani culture after the husband dies his family has the right to do whatever they want to do with his kids and his wife. Three days after my father passed away my Aunt started treated us as her slaves, despite the fact that my mother was pregnant with my younger sister. Six months after my mother gave birth to my sister, my aunt decided to sell my sister to someone else because she needed money at the time.

One year later my whole family moved to Iran. Living in Iran was another challenge for me. Even though life in Afghanistan was hard, I think of my time in Iran as the most difficult time of my life. Living in Iran is very difficult for Afghanis. Every day I used to face discrimination and racism. We couldn't go to school to get educated because the Iranian government wasn't allowing Afghanis to go to school. Living like a slave for my Aunt and not being able to go to school was depressing but things got worse. It was in Iran that my Dad's family sold my mother to some rich people. My uncle was addicted to drugs and he needed money for his drugs. Selling my mother was their solution.

After living in Iran for about seven years my aunt was able to bring us to Canada by acting as our biological mother. Living in Canada was another challenge for me, especially because I'd never even gone to school at all. I did not know a word of English or even the alphabet. Plus, I was having family problems on top of that. The first six months in Canada were very, very hard. It was the first time I went to school and they put me in grade nine, which was horrifying. But there was a funny part—I had no idea what was my teachers were saying or talking about so I would just nod and smile and they thought I understood!

In every school there are great teachers to help the students, but there are some teachers who really discourage the students by saying that they cannot do certain courses. I was able to find good teachers to help me and because my school was diverse, I was able to make friends with other Afghanis. However, my sister went to a different school and she had a really difficult time. She was the only Muslim student, students teased her, she got into fights, her teachers didn't pay attention to her and she didn't make any friends for two years.

I was able to finish my high school in five years as regular student with honours. Soon after, I moved out from my house and started living on my own successfully. I was lucky enough to find such great people around me, like my teachers, who helped me to stand on my own feet. Things are far from perfect here but I am planning to go to college to get my diploma as an accountant, if God is willing.

Personal Electronic Devices Support Intensive Programming for Newcomer Students in Louis Riel School Division

By Cindy Petriw, Bruce Young and Tim MacKay

The number of newcomer students is ever-increasing in nearly every school division in Manitoba. As growth continues (Manitoba anticipates receiving over 13,000 newcomers in 2010), school divisions are challenged to respond to the needs of learners and classrooms and to provide appropriate materials that meet both language and subject area learning needs. To meet the challenge, Louis Riel School Division is exploring a very unique approach to providing learner-appropriate materials through personal electronic devices.

Background

A multitude of personal electronic devices exist: iPods, mp3 players of all sorts, and a host of variations on the theme of personal, portable multimedia players. Louis Riel School Division currently uses Zunes© to support newcomer students. A Zune is a portable personal electronic device created by Microsoft© and sold as a multimedia portable device much like an iPod©. It plays audio, video, holds photo images and comes with a range of storage capacities. Users can upload any content they wish and take the device with them wherever they go. The device is particularly useful for newcomer students because a classroom teacher, with only a little "tech savvy", can upload personalized and levelled material onto the device to meet each learner's unique needs.

The Personal Electronic Devices project started in the fall of 2008 through a partnership with another school in the city, based upon an Innovative Classrooms Grant from Microsoft that provided three Zunes for use in a classroom-based literacy project. The partnership entailed using the devices to "twin" a class of grade 11 English-speaking students in one school with a class of refugee newcomer students from another school. The newcomer students had experienced significant disruptions in their schooling, so they were simultaneously learning English, developing initial literacy skills, and learning basic academic concepts missed as a result of their limited formal schooling.

In a very successful partnership, the EAL teacher selected and sent appropriate written material to the partner school, where students created audio and video files of the material (spoken vocabulary lists, pictures to accompany vocabulary—visual and oral dictionaries—and spoken stories) and loaded these onto the devices. The Zunes were then returned to the students in the newcomer class. As their learning progressed, new materials were selected and uploaded.

Personal electronic devices in use

The project was immediately successful with the newcomer students—they were engaged in learning and motivated to use the devices and the individualized content significantly enhanced learner progress. As a result of the initial success, the division has purchased 20 Zunes to continue a uniquely effective approach to providing learner-appropriate content in a portable and flexible format.

Personal electronic devices' adaptability to individual learners means a teacher can quickly change content on the device to accommodate a range of learners' needs and subject areas—especially important for older students, who are sensitive to learning with age-inappropriate materials. Currently, the pilot teacher supports a class of 19 students, aged 14 to 19, at four different language levels and with specialized literacy groupings. Beginner-level learners can have Zunes loaded with basic vocabulary and language experience stories. More intermediate learners have e-books and corresponding vocabulary. Advanced learners have e-books in written and spoken form.

As a formal instructional tool, the personal electronic device can be used during small group instruction in reading. It provides a "virtual teacher" as students can follow the book and access visuals as necessary to comprehend content more effectively. In addition, because students readily engage with the devices, the teacher can provide one-to-one support through adjusting content and time with individual learners.

Personal electronic devices are also multi-functional. The audio/visual capabilities of the device enhance learning with large video screens, large memory capacity, audio playback through headphones, and the ability to support individualized content like PowerPoint presentations for content area subjects. As a result, learners receive personal course information for independent practice and review, and because the device is so portable, it even provides a virtual "practice partner" outside of class when one-on-one support may be unavailable.

The most obvious result of the project is that students engage in learning that meets their needs, in and out of class. Students regularly sign out Zunes for use beyond the school day and at home. Furthermore, because these students live in homes in which English is not the prominent language of communication—and in many instances, not used at all—the devices provide a language model for continued practice. In fact, parents and other family members frequently share devices signed out overnight to create novel and informal "family literacy programs". Interestingly, some students note that the device respects oral language traditions by emphasizing auditory literacy. To date, after nearly two years of the project, not a single device has been damaged, lost or stolen.

Other benefits

Personal electronic devices are compact and portable, thereby allowing easy student access to their learning materials at any time and in any setting. They are also less expensive and less visible than a laptop computer. Furthermore, students still learning basic computer skills benefit from the easy interface and entry-level technology of the device.

Perhaps of greatest benefit is that personal electronic devices provide added social comfort for adolescent literacy learners among English-speaking peers. As literacy learners, these students would otherwise be using very basic materials, readers and texts. Even age-appropriate materials can stigmatize EAL learners if the content and level differ significantly different from that of their peers. In an age of iPods, iPhones, and mp3 players, personal electronic devices permit discrete language, literacy and content support in an acceptable and "cool" medium.

Extensions

Given the success of the project, the school division now seeks to extend the use of personal electronic devices into other educational applications, such as social stories for learners who require scripts and coaching to successfully navigate various social encounters throughout the day. For learners with complex emotional and social needs, the Zune could provide an appropriate and non-stigmatizing access to social stories in a socially acceptable format. Traditionally, social stories and behavioural scripts have been provided through paper-based picture scripts and story boards, including picture-based timetables and other organizing tools for learners. Visual content has always been a powerful resource for this purpose, but the personal electronic device's wide range of scripts, individualized to each learner and backed up with audio files that enhance the visuals and coach learners, provides an exciting enhancement to student learning through an engaging format.

Looking ahead

Portable personal electronics are here to stay—and the Zune is just one version of a device that has become ubiquitous in our society. The key to this project's success is less the use of a specific product than the development of resources and processes that support learning through any personal electronic device.

As a result, iPods, other mp3 players that support video, and laptops and notebook computers merit equal consideration. The critical factor is not the platform or device, but the development of the electronic content. To this end, every individualized lesson remains ready for reuse in devices of the future as new students enter our program. Each lesson forms part of our expanding reserve of materials.

As our project expands, we are focusing on developing a sharing system to store lessons and content centrally for access by teachers across the division. Using the technology to its fullest implies having teachers across the division creating materials, storing them on a central sharing site, and accessing other materials as needed.

Conclusion

The pilot teacher has offered reflections on the experience: "I was initially apprehensive about a new and 'foreign' piece of equipment in the classroom, and the prospect of using it with only fundamental computer skills. A significant measure of the project's success and feasibility is my discovery of the ease with which content can be created, loaded, and shared."

So a secondary benefit of the project is the excitement it has generated for a colleague: "I have learned about and used technology to transition from a basic chalkboard and overhead projector to a technology-rich environment with LCD projector, multi-device content loader for personal electronic devices, and Mimio interactive whiteboard device. The best part has been watching my students' enthusiasm for learning grow so quickly, because of their ability to read what is meaningful and important for them."

Most importantly, our colleague has demonstrated that even basic technological skills can support the adoption of new technology to enhance individual student learning. This discovery, and the modeling provided by a dedicated and competent professional learner, can motivate others to take similar risks for the most important outcome—enhanced learning for students. ■

Cindy Petriw is the EAL Classroom teacher and Tim MacKay is Principal at René Deleurme Centre. Bruce Young is Coordinator of Instructional Technology, Louis Riel School Division.

Stories From Newcomers: Arsisadin Gobena

I was born in Ethiopia (Oromia). My father had to flee Ethiopia because of political unrest. He ended up in Canada, and following him, I came to Canada as a refugee. I was given no notice when I was chosen to leave Ethiopia. I was called to a meeting with officials and two hours later I was on a plane. I didn't have a chance to say goodbye or look through the few belongings that I had.

When I came to Canada, I didn't know the culture well. When I started school I didn't know anyone, so I tried to blend in without anyone noticing me. I tried not to do things that brought me attention. It was like getting a spot on a team without being a target.

When I started school I put up my hood and always sat at the back of the classroom. I didn't want to sit in front, because a lot of people will see you. I could feel people looking at me. I didn't want to be observed. I wanted to be the observer. Attention felt like a burden. When I sat at the back of the room I could see, and I didn't have to worry about what people thought of me. When I didn't wear my hood, there were these thoughts in my head saying, "are you on a different planet?", "why are you here?", "do something!"

When I had my hood on, I felt like I was on planet earth again. The hood was my guard against thoughts of what people were thinking of me. It was my comfort zone. From inside the hood I could slowly hunt for my position in my school.

The hood was the beginning of my comfort zone but it caused problems. I didn't want to put up my hood a lot, because of perceptions people have about kids in hoods. Everyone looks cockeyed at them and asks them to take them off. I started to sit at the back of classrooms when I got in trouble for wearing my hood. But when I walked in a room I would I put it on to try and find a safe place to sit. There were other kids like me that were in a very similar condition. Some were immigrants that understood me. So I started to connect with them.

A lot of kids were nicer than I expected, but like always there are some who don't know the meaning of the word. In gym one day I was playing badminton with one of the top gangster kids and I beat him by eight points. But he told everyone he beat me by eight points. I couldn't do anything because it was his word against mine and nobody believed me. I didn't want attention but I wasn't going to be a pushover. I wanted to make a stand to see if I could get the respect I deserved. I had a stare down with that kid in my next class. Because of this I got a bad reputation and had to find a group of older kids to help me. People called me psycho. My older friends helped me stay safe.

A similar thing happened in a floor hockey game. Everybody who played hockey played rough. They push you, trip you, slash you and threaten to beat you down later. Even though I didn't know the rules of hockey I used my soccer skills and I played well. I just took everything and kept going. At the end the Canadian born kids—even the ones that called me psycho and had bad reputations—gave me respect.

People have different ideas hidden in their heads or under their hoods. I know I was hiding a lot until I felt respected and safe. Just like me, everyone has a story for why they are the way they are.

Stories From Newcomers: Lin Ruttan

I was born in Canada. My mother is Métis and my father is Chinese and Vietnamese. I guess you could say that I have all of Canada's history running through my veins.

Imagine being in a high school where everyone you see is from a different cultural background than you. Your friends are people who are from the same culture as you. Imagine a school where Caucasian people aren't the majority. Well this is the high school I went to, Gordon Bell.

Gordon Bell is a very diverse school. When I graduated we had people from all over the world. The problem was that everyone you saw seemed like a stranger to you. Because they spoke a different language, had different customs, ate different food, they were just different from you. So you hung out with the people who were like you, the people who were from the same culture as you. In high school being different is considered a negative thing, so you don't want to associate with different people. Well this is a lie. Being different is not negative at all. Being different makes a person unique. Associating with people from different cultural backgrounds improves your life.

At Gordon Bell we created a storytelling group called Many Voices, One World where we tried to bridge the gaps between the Canadian students and the immigrant students. In this group we told our personal stories, it gave us all a better understanding of each other.

It is easy to judge people when you know nothing about them, but once you hear what they have been through and why they act the way they do, it is hard to judge them at all. Telling and listening to each other's stories created a bond between us all, we knew all about each other's hardships, and we soon became a family. We not only hung out during the group session, but we also began to hang out during school hours and even after school hours. We all went from complete strangers to making lifelong friendships. It is amazing what the power of storytelling can do.

Now having friends from many different cultural backgrounds has been a very positive experience. I have learned so much about other cultures and customs. Although sometimes our cultures may collide we realized that it was nothing to argue over. As long as we did not pressure our cultural values onto each other, there was no problem. Also hearing stories about how some of the students went through war, and some of the horrific things they saw helped me appreciate what I have. We take things for granted all the time, we do not realize how important someone or something is until it is too late.

I learned two important things about myself: I learned that I am empathetic and I am resilient. These are two traits that will help me in my life, and I know that if I ever need someone to talk to I can count on the people of Many Voices One World.

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