

# ***Les pratiques déclarées de l'enseignement de l'oral au primaire : qu'en est-il en Belgique francophone ?***

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## *Résumé*

Cette contribution apporte des informations sur les pratiques déclarées des enseignants concernant l'enseignement de l'oral. Elle a en effet pour visée de traiter les questions suivantes : Que font les enseignants belges pour travailler les compétences en Savoir Parler et Écouter ? Quelles sont les pratiques et les gestes professionnels qu'ils estiment mobiliser dans leurs pratiques ? À quelle fréquence et pourquoi travaillent-ils l'oral en classe ? C'est l'analyse des données recueillies par questionnaire auprès de 290 enseignants du primaire qui nous permet d'élaborer des éléments de réponse.

## *Abstract*

This contribution provides information on teachers' reported practices in oral education. Its purpose is to address the following issues: What are Belgian teachers doing to work on speaking and listening skills? What professional practices and actions do they consider to be mobilizing in their practices? How often and why do they work on oral communication in class? It is the analysis of the data collected through a questionnaire from 290 primary school teachers that allows us to develop elements of the answer.

## *Introduction*

Dans notre contexte, en Belgique francophone, comme ailleurs, l'apprentissage de la langue française se décline en quatre grandes compétences : Savoir Ecrire, Savoir Lire, Savoir Parler et Savoir Ecouter. Et si elles ont la même importance dans les programmes, cela n'est pas nécessairement le cas dans la réalité des pratiques puisque, quand on discute avec les enseignants, on se rend compte que les Lire-Ecrire sont très présents dans les classes, et font par ailleurs l'objet de nombreux travaux de recherche, en comparaison aux Parler-Ecouter.

Sur ce point, au-delà des travaux qui mettent en évidence les lignes didactiques à suivre et des analyses de dispositifs expérimentés ci et là de façon ponctuelle, aucune recherche ne met en exergue les pratiques des enseignants belges du primaire sur le plan de l'oral, qui a une position décrite comme historiquement ambiguë en milieu scolaire (Perrenoud, 1991, repris par Tricot & Roussel, 2016). Que font les enseignants pour travailler les compétences en Savoir Parler et Écouter identifiées dans les Socles de

compétences<sup>1</sup> ? Quelles sont les pratiques qu'ils estiment mobiliser ? À quelle fréquence et pourquoi travaillent-ils l'oral en classe ?

Nous cherchons à ébaucher, dans cette contribution, des réponses à ces questions avec l'objectif de faire un état des lieux de l'enseignement de l'oral en Belgique francophone, en écho aux travaux qui se réalisent dans les autres espaces francophones, comme au Québec, en France ou encore en Suisse. Nos objectifs spécifiques sont d'observer : 1) si les enseignants estiment pratiquer et/ou enseigner l'oral dans leur classe, 2) les ressources qu'ils ont à leur disposition, 3) le « cursus » des praticiens quant à leur formation pour enseigner l'oral, 4) ce qui se fait dans les classes en Savoir Parler et Savoir Ecouter et 5) les besoins et les questionnements des enseignants quant à l'enseignement de l'oral.

Cette étude est un préalable à un travail d'envergure : nous démarrons une recherche collaborative (Bourassa, Bélair & Chevalier, 2007 ; Desgagné & Larouche, 2010 ; Van Nieuwenhoven & Colognesi, 2015) visant, d'une part, à amener des connaissances nouvelles sur les pratiques efficaces (Ko, Sammons & Bakkum, 2014) pour enseigner l'oral en classe, et, d'autre part, à développer des outils didactiques permettant aux enseignants d'améliorer leurs pratiques d'enseignement de l'oral. Mais avant de mettre en place quelque expérimentation, il semble nécessaire d'avoir une connaissance des conceptions des enseignants dans ce domaine, de savoir ce qui se fait dans les classes et de mettre au jour les besoins et les questionnements des praticiens.

Pour réaliser l'état des lieux souhaité, nous avons analysé les réponses à un questionnaire de 290 enseignants en Belgique francophone. Dans les lignes suivantes, nous passons successivement en revue : les repères théoriques mobilisés, nous amenant à identifier ce qu'on entend par « oral » en contexte scolaire et ce qu'on sait actuellement de son enseignement ; ce que les prescrits demandent aux enseignants ; les questions de méthodologie ; les principaux résultats présentés en fonction des différents objectifs spécifiques de cette étude, en étant conscients qu'il ne s'agit bien ici que des pratiques déclarées des acteurs.

### *Repères théoriques*

#### *Qu'en est-il de l'oral et de son enseignement ?*

Nous définissons l'oral comme l'ensemble des actes d'écoute (la compréhension) et de langage (la prise de parole). Nous nous situons dans une perspective où l'oral revêt le statut d'objet d'enseignement/apprentissage, et non de médium (Dumais & Lafontaine, 2011), perspective soutenue par les chercheurs spécialistes du domaine : l'oral doit s'installer dans les programmes au même titre que les autres disciplines scolaires (Bianco, 2015 ; Colognesi, Lyon Lopez & Deschepper, 2017 ; Dumais & Lafontaine, 2011 ; Gagnon & Dolz, 2016 ; Gagnon, De Pietro & Fisher, 2017 ; Simard, Dufays, Dolz & Garcia-Debanco, 2014), les enjeux liés à sa maîtrise étant importants et son enseignement se justifiant largement.

Tout d'abord, l'oral occupe une place majeure dans le quotidien, bien plus que les « Lire » et « Écrire » (Lafontaine, 2016). Il soutient le développement de la littératie des

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<sup>1</sup> Les *Socles de compétences* constituent le prescrit légal en termes de programme d'enseignement. Ils sont émis par la fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles qui a pour charge l'enseignement en communauté française de Belgique. Communauté Française (2013). *Socles de compétences*. Bruxelles: Administration générale de l'Enseignement et de la recherche scientifique, Service général du Pilotage du système éducatif.

élèves (Lafontaine, 2013) et se positionne comme un levier considérable pour l'apprentissage de la lecture (Bianco, 2015 ; Giasson, 2011) et de l'écriture (Colognesi & Deschepper, 2018 ; Nolin, 2015).

Ensuite, comme les démarches intellectuelles et la construction des connaissances passent par le canal oral (Nonnon, 1999 ; Pléssis-Bélair, Lafontaine & Bergeron, 2007) - verbaliser, expliciter ses démarches, partager et coopérer lors des travaux, décrire, reformuler, argumenter, formuler des hypothèses, etc. - la non-maîtrise de l'oral peut constituer un obstacle à l'apprentissage et amener l'élève à une surcharge cognitive (Sweller, Ayres & Kalyuga, 2011). De plus, avoir une maîtrise orale permet non seulement de réagir dans les situations d'interactions, mais contribue aussi au développement de la pensée via notamment des médiations métacognitives (Allen, Lafontaine & Plessis-Bélair, 2016 ; Colognesi & Van Nieuwenhoven, 2016).

Enfin, et plus globalement, l'enseignement / apprentissage de l'oral permet de lutter contre l'échec scolaire et l'exclusion sociale (Le Cunff & Jourdain, 1999 ; Nonnon, 2016), en favorisant inévitablement « l'intégration politique et citoyenne, où la parole est vue comme un moyen d'exercer son esprit critique et de résister aux discours manipulés » (Tricot & Roussel, 2016, p. 84).

Malgré tout cela, l'enseignement de l'oral et son évaluation posent problème aux praticiens qui se disent mal à l'aise pour le mettre en place dans leur classe et lui attribuent une faible place (Lafontaine & Messier, 2009 ; Sénéchal & Chartrand, 2011). Dans le champ de la didactique, puisqu'on sait que « faire pratiquer l'oral ne suffit pas à le faire travailler » (Garcia-Debanc & Delcambre, 2002, p. 3), deux conceptions majeures de l'enseignement de l'oral se distinguent : une approche intégrée / transversale (Hassan & Bertot, 2015) dans laquelle l'enseignement de l'oral est intégré aux séquences d'enseignement quotidien, qu'il s'agisse du français ou d'une autre discipline ; *versus* une conception autonomiste où l'oral est enseigné « à travers un travail sur des genres oraux » (de Pietro *et al.*, 2017, p.12). Plusieurs ingénieries didactiques sont d'ailleurs inscrites dans cette seconde conception, notamment les *séquences didactiques* genevoises (Dolz, Noverraz & Schneuwly, 2001), *l'atelier formatif en production orale* québécois (Lafontaine & Dumais, 2014) ou encore le dispositif belge *Itinéraires* (Colognesi & Deschepper, 2019; Colognesi & Lucchini, 2018).

### *Que sait-on des pratiques enseignantes de l'oral dans les territoires francophones ?*

Les pratiques effectives de l'enseignement de l'oral sont peu connues (Dumais, Lafontaine, & Pharand, 2017), et les études qui les pointent sont peu nombreuses, tant pour le fondamental que pour le secondaire (Garcia-Debanc & Delcambre, 2002 ; Lafontaine & Messier, 2009 ; Sénéchal, 2017). Néanmoins, Lafontaine & Le Cunff (2005) ont comparé les représentations et les pratiques de quatre enseignants québécois et six enseignants français du préscolaire au secondaire. Il ressort de leur étude que bien souvent, et principalement au secondaire, l'oral est « considéré comme un médium d'enseignement [...] mais évalué comme s'il avait été enseigné » (p.24). Les auteurs ajoutent ainsi que l'oral mérite d'être enseigné « de façon systématique à l'école » et « qu'un continuum plus présent doit se faire sentir dans les programmes d'études entre la fin du primaire et le début du secondaire » (Lafontaine & Le Cunff, 2005, p. 24). Pour la Suisse, Surian & Gagnon (2015) ont réalisé une étude exploratoire auprès de quatre praticiens chargés d'enseigner le français dans les classes d'accueil aux élèves primo-arrivants. Les chercheurs les ont

suivis pendant trois fois deux mois d'une même année scolaire (début, milieu et fin) lors des activités d'enseignement de l'oral. Leurs résultats montrent que sur les six mois, trois enseignants ont réalisé une séquence de production orale (se présenter, décrire un trajet, donner son point de vue) ; tandis qu'un autre en a réalisé trois (exprimer ses goûts, gérer un entretien professionnel, un projet de communication orale par le genre kamishibai), ce qui correspond pour l'ensemble des quatre enseignants à 152 activités. Les auteurs ont pu repérer et analyser finement ce qui y relève de la production d'actes de parole et du travail de genres de textes.

Avec un échantillon plus large de 192 enseignants québécois de troisième cycle du primaire, Nolin (2015) a pu mettre en exergue certaines pratiques déclarées des enseignants. Sa recherche met en avant que tous les enseignants disent travailler l'oral au quotidien et dans toutes les disciplines, ce qui tend à confiner l'oral dans son statut de « médium ». De plus, l'étude met en évidence qu'il y a peu de variété dans les genres qui sont utilisés dans les classes québécoises pour travailler l'oral : les exposés oraux, la causerie en grand groupe et la lecture à haute voix arrivent en tête des pratiques. Les enseignants disent que les élèves y apprennent essentiellement des faits de langue (registres, intonation, débit, gestes, etc.), du vocabulaire et des techniques d'écoute. Par ailleurs, il émerge aussi des résultats que les enseignants estiment essentiel de travailler l'oral au quotidien dans la classe.

Sur le plan des pratiques évaluatives, de Pietro et ses collègues (2017) expliquent que « les enseignants éprouvent toujours des difficultés, voire des résistances, à procéder à des évaluations certificatives, et même formatives, de productions orales » (p.16). Lafontaine et Messier (2009) ont identifié que les enseignants du secondaire disent (puisque'il s'agit ici encore de pratiques déclarées) mobiliser les rétroactions verbales comme écrites, l'autoévaluation et les grilles d'observation comme outils privilégiés pour évaluer l'oral. Peu d'enseignants voire aucun utilisent l'entrevue, le journal de bord, l'évaluation par les pairs, le portfolio ou l'enregistrement audio ou vidéo.

### *Qu'est-il prescrit sur le plan de l'enseignement / apprentissage de l'oral dans les programmes de la Belgique francophone ?*

Pour interpréter les réponses des enseignants, il semble nécessaire de faire le point sur les prescrits légaux en Belgique francophone quant à l'enseignement de l'oral. Ainsi, dans les Socles de compétences (2013), trouve-t-on que tout enseignement de l'oral doit s'articuler autour de trois composantes :

- l'expression, c'est-à-dire la production d'un message, le partage de sa pensée par la parole et le corps. Il s'agit du *Savoir Parler* ;
- les capacités d'écoute, et donc de compréhension orale, qui consistent à « mobiliser son attention pour percevoir des signes sonores, verbaux et corporels ; c'est produire du sens en tant que récepteur d'un message » : le *Savoir Écouter* ;
- l'interaction entre le parler et l'écouter, puisque dès lors qu'il s'agit d'oral, des allocutaires sont amenés à être en interaction.

Quatre grandes compétences, elles-mêmes détaillées en divers objectifs à atteindre selon les niveaux d'enseignement, sont à travailler à l'intérieur des *Savoir Parler* et *Savoir Écouter* :

- *Orienter sa parole et son écoute en fonction de la situation de communication.* Cette compétence est présentée comme la plus importante puisque toutes les autres s'organisent à partir d'elle. Il s'agit d'amener l'élève à identifier des éléments propres aux situations communicationnelles (reconnaître l'émetteur, le récepteur, le contexte, l'objectif du message, le support de la communication) ;
- *Élaborer des significations,* c'est-à-dire donner du sens aux messages entendus en relevant les indices, en anticipant (faire des hypothèses), en reliant et comparant des informations (implicites et explicites), en faisant un tri entre l'information utile et inutile, en distinguant le réel de l'imaginaire, le vraisemblable de l'invraisemblable, le vrai du faux, en extrayant des informations textuelles mais aussi en étant capable d'inférer. C'est également pouvoir produire des idées dans les différentes prises de paroles ;
- *Assurer et dégager l'organisation et la cohérence du message.* Il s'agit, d'une part, de pouvoir penser ou retrouver la structure des communications en fonction du genre et aussi, d'autre part, d'en assurer ou d'en isoler la cohérence, c'est-à-dire ce qui a trait à la progression de l'information, à l'enchaînement des idées, aux éléments qui permettent une cohérence spatiale et temporelle. Les *unités lexicales et grammaticales* venant en soutien à cette cohérence ;
- *Utiliser et identifier les moyens verbaux et non verbaux* en considérant notamment les aspects liés à la voix (intonation, pause, débit, etc.) et au corps/à la posture (les gestes, les mimiques, les attitudes, l'utilisation de l'espace, les expressions du visage, etc.).

Les Socles de compétences ajoutent que, dans la plupart des situations de communication, on retrouve un contexte d'échange immédiat puisque chaque interlocuteur prend le rôle d'émetteur et de récepteur. Par conséquent, ces deux domaines de la langue française requièrent des aptitudes, des attitudes et des savoirs spécifiques.

### *Méthodologie*

Pour rappel, notre objectif général est de faire un état des lieux de l'enseignement de l'oral en Belgique francophone. Nous avons choisi de travailler par questionnaire, de manière à toucher un large échantillon de praticiens. Nous avons donc conscience qu'avec ce fonctionnement, nous avons accès uniquement aux pratiques déclarées des enseignants. Elles permettent d'accéder « aux intentions, aux choix et aux décisions de l'enseignant » (Lefevre, 2005, p. 58 cité par Nolin, 2015, p.71) mais ne donnent pas accès aux pratiques effectives, réelles. Cela pourra faire l'objet d'autres études. Néanmoins, il y a un intérêt à investiguer du côté de ces pratiques déclarées dès lors qu'il s'agit de déterminer la façon dont sont perçus les représentations, les moyens, les méthodes, les importances relatives à accorder à un enseignement / apprentissage.

### *Le questionnaire*

Notre questionnaire est structuré en deux parties. La première partie propose des items permettant de caractériser l'échantillon (homme/femme ; enseignant en quelle année ; ancienneté ; profil de l'établissement où la personne enseigne, etc.). La seconde partie, destinée à investiguer les pratiques des répondants, comprend les questions suivantes :

- 1- Que signifie « oral » pour vous ?
- 2- Quand faites-vous de l'oral en classe ?  
(Jamais / Tout le temps / Plusieurs fois par jour / Une fois par jour / Une fois par semaine / Une fois par mois / Moins d'une fois par mois / Autre)
- 3- Enseignez-vous l'oral à vos élèves ? Pourquoi ?
- 4- Quelles sont les trois dernières activités que vous avez réalisées avec vos élèves ? Elles ont été réalisées à environ ..... jours / semaines / mois (entourer) d'intervalle.
- 5- Quelle est l'activité de Savoir Écouter que vous faites le plus souvent ?
- 6- Quelle est l'activité de Savoir Parler que vous faites le plus souvent ?
- 7- Utilisez-vous des ressources pour enseigner l'oral ? Lesquelles ?
- 8- Avez-vous déjà suivi des formations sur l'oral ? Lesquelles ?
- 9- Quels sont les besoins que vous avez, les questions que vous vous posez et/ou remarques à faire quant à l'enseignement des Savoir Parler et Savoir Écouter ?

Pour tester le questionnaire et déterminer la compréhension des questions, nous l'avons soumis à quinze enseignants du primaire, de manière à ce qu'ils notent chaque item de zéro à trois (0 = je ne comprends pas la question ; 1 = question à reformuler car je dois la lire plusieurs fois pour comprendre ; 2 = je comprends la question mais j'ai besoin d'aide pour y répondre, comme des choix, des exemples, etc. ; 3 = gardez la question, elle me semble claire). Le coefficient Kappa de Cohen utilisé pour évaluer l'accord des juges qui ont évalué les questions est de .85 ; ce qui indique un accord important.

#### *Modalités de récolte et de traitement des données*

Le questionnaire a été proposé en ligne et diffusé de plusieurs manières : sur les réseaux sociaux, par les instituts pédagogiques avec lesquels nous collaborons et dans les écoles de stage de nos étudiants. C'est anonymement et de façon libre que les répondants ont réagi aux différents items. Au final, les réponses de 290 individus ont été retenues<sup>2</sup> pour faire émerger les pratiques déclarées des enseignants et identifier leurs questions et besoins relativement à la didactique de l'oral.

Les réponses ont été traitées de manière quantitative pour les questions le permettant et de façon qualitative pour les autres en appliquant alors une analyse de contenu (Miles & Huberman, 1994) aux commentaires laissés par les enseignants permettant, pour chaque item, d'obtenir des catégories.

#### *Échantillon*

Parmi les 290 répondants, on compte 83,5 % de femmes pour 16,5 % d'hommes. L'ancienneté professionnelle des répondants se divise comme suit : 47 % ont entre 0 et 10 ans d'ancienneté, 32% entre 10 et 20 ans et 21 % ont 20 ans ou plus d'ancienneté. Les trois cycles du primaire (6-8 ans, 8-10 ans, 10-12 ans) sont représentés équitablement. 12,9 %

<sup>2</sup> Nous avons, à ce stade, écarté les réponses qui venaient d'enseignants hors communauté française de Belgique et supprimé les doublons apparents, ou autres scories, qui pouvaient biaiser les résultats.



des répondants sont « polyvalents<sup>3</sup> », 29,7% enseignent en encadrement différencié<sup>4</sup>, 7,4% en enseignement spécialisé, et le reste de la cohorte se situe dans l'enseignement dit « ordinaire »<sup>5</sup>. L'équilibre des répondants correspond à la réalité de l'enseignement en Belgique francophone.

### *Présentation des principaux résultats*

Les résultats sont présentés en fonction des objectifs spécifiques de l'étude, précisés *supra*. Nous mentionnons donc successivement : 1) si les enseignants estiment pratiquer et/ou enseigner l'oral dans leur classe, 2) les supports qu'ils utilisent, 3) leur « cursus » de formation pour l'enseignement l'oral, 4) ce qui se fait dans les classes en Savoir Parler et Savoir Ecouter et 5) les besoins que les enseignants identifient quant à l'enseignement de l'oral.

### *Pratiquer versus enseigner*

Un premier résultat quantitatif significatif concerne les moments dédiés à la pratique versus les moments dédiés à l'enseignement/apprentissage de l'oral. Ainsi, à la question « Quand faites-vous de l'oral en classe ? », 83,9 % des répondants indiquent en faire « tout le temps / plusieurs fois par jour / tous les jours ». Est-ce à dire qu'ils l'enseignent ? 82,6 % répondent « oui », mais dans des intervalles de temps nettement plus écartés que la pratique quotidienne déclarée plus haut (« tous les jours » : 29,4 %, « une fois par semaine » : 37 %, « une fois par mois » : 15,5 %)

Ce hiatus entre *pratique* de l'oral et *enseignement* de l'oral confirme bien cette perception que l'oral est tout le temps présent dans les classes, dans la mesure où les élèves et l'enseignant communiquent oralement, mais qu'il est moins souvent l'objet d'une séquence d'apprentissage dédiée. On retrouve donc l'idée que l'oral occupe une place fonctionnelle dans les classes et ne fait pas nécessairement l'objet d'un enseignement/apprentissage explicite (Allen, 2018 ; Bianco, 2015 ; Gagnon, De Pietro, & Fisher, 2017 ; Lafontaine, 2011 ; Sénéchal & Chartrand, 2012). Certains répondants signalent d'ailleurs, dans les questions ouvertes, leur perplexité à ce sujet, comme l'illustre ces extraits:

*« Je fais de l'oral tout le temps. Mon expression orale doit être un modèle pour les élèves et favoriser leur propre expression. Les dialogues élève-élève ou élève-institutrice font partie intégrante de mes pratiques. »*  
*« Je n'enseigne pas l'oral, mais je le « travaille » tout le temps avec mes élèves. »*

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<sup>3</sup> C'est-à-dire qu'ils enseignent de façon verticale sur une question spécifique, qu'ils sont responsables de la remédiation, qu'ils interagissent dans différentes classes d'âge.

<sup>4</sup> C'est-à-dire dans les établissements dont les élèves sont issus de milieux à indice socio-économique faible.

<sup>5</sup> Ces informations concernant l'ancienneté, le cycle, ou le terrain professionnel devraient nous permettre à terme de ventiler les résultats de l'enquête et de mesurer les éventuels écarts de pratique entre ces différents publics. Il sera par exemple intéressant d'identifier si les dispositifs mis en place en encadrement différencié sont plus diversifiés ou spécifiques afin de répondre à une demande d'apprenants potentiellement plus fragiles sur le plan de la langue de scolarisation. Nous n'avons pas encore traité les données de l'enquête via ces filtres, mais ils nous permettront ultérieurement d'affiner les résultats.

*« Je me demande pourquoi est-il moins travaillé que l'écrit et le lire alors que parler et écouter sont plus présents dans la vie quotidienne. Est-ce parce qu'on se « fie » trop au fait qu'on en fait tout le temps ? »*

Quand on demande aux enseignants qui expriment enseigner l'oral pourquoi ils le font, les justifications les plus utilisées sont :

- l'importance au quotidien (*« Ils doivent pouvoir s'exprimer correctement, la communication orale est essentielle dans la vie de tous les jours. L'oral est la base sur laquelle tout repose tout »*) ;
- la prescription du programme ;
- l'impact sur l'apprentissage de la lecture et de l'écriture, sur la compréhension du monde ;
- le fait qu'avoir des interactions efficaces ne soit pas inné (*« Tout n'est pas naturel, même si certains enfants ont déjà un solide bagage, il est important de leur enseigner des manières de s'exprimer, de mener un débat, de défendre ses positions en utilisant les bons arguments, d'utiliser des postures et tons de voix adaptés, d'écouter et comprendre les informations »*) ;
- le développement de la confiance en soi ;
- l'apprentissage de l'expression de soi, de ses idées (*« Pour qu'ils apprennent à dire leurs pensées »*).

Par ailleurs, les 17,4 % des répondants qui expriment qu'ils n'enseignent pas l'oral le justifient en disant :

- que c'est une perte de temps ;
- qu'ils n'ont pas assez de temps pour le faire ;
- que l'enseignement de l'oral leur paraît trop abstrait ;
- qu'il n'est pas possible de l'enseigner (*« L'enseigner ? C'est possible ça ? Apparemment nous n'avons pas la même notion de l'oral vous et moi... »*) ;
- que les élèves *« parlent et écoutent tout le temps, pas besoin de leur enseigner »*.

On le voit, la différence entre enseigner l'oral de façon dédiée et « faire de l'oral » reste prégnante dans les propos des enseignants. Cette distinction, implicite plus qu'explicite, confine l'oral à une pratique de classe non dédiée, et son enseignement à défaut d'être présent, fait parfois même l'objet d'une réticence réelle.

### *La question des ressources*

Nous avons considéré comme ressources tout ce qui peut être utilisé par les enseignants dans une activité à visée d'apprentissage : manuels, banques de données, sites internet, répertoire de capsules vidéos ou d'enregistrement, de CD-Rom, etc. Ainsi, quand on demande aux répondants s'ils utilisent des ressources spécifiques pour enseigner l'oral, 41% d'entre eux répondent « oui », pour 59% de « non ». Outre que cela signifie que près de 60% des enseignants déclarent faire de l'oral sans ressource spécifique (est-ce à dire qu'ils les créent eux-mêmes ou qu'ils considèrent que l'oral ne nécessite pas l'utilisation de ressource ?), ceux qui affirment en utiliser mentionnent des supports très diversifiées.



On peut en effet découper ces ressources dans les catégories suivantes, présentées par ordre décroissant de mention :

- manuels (le plus souvent dédiés spécifiquement aux savoirs parler/écouter) : 72 réponses ;
- internet (pistes audio, textes, activités en ligne,...) : 10 réponses ;
- imagiers, affiches : 7 réponses ;
- écrits officiels : 6 réponses ;
- littérature jeunesse (albums, textes, poésies, ...) : 5 réponses.

En ce qui concerne les manuels, il est à noter que parmi ceux cités, un seul est mentionné plusieurs fois. La collection « Ça te parle ?/Ça s'écoute ! », dont nous sommes les auteurs, est ainsi citée 58 fois. On peut émettre une série d'hypothèses – et de précautions – relativement à ce résultat. D'une part, dans la mesure où nous sommes à l'origine de l'enquête, et même si la diffusion de celle-ci a été ensuite relayée et diffusée par d'autres instances, il est évident qu'une certaine porosité a dû s'exprimer entre utilisateurs de ces manuels et répondants volontaires au questionnaire. Ce biais méthodologique doit être pris en compte. Néanmoins, on peut aussi espérer que la collection, parce qu'elle est récente et s'inscrit dans une niche pédagogique peu exploitée, a trouvé auprès des enseignants une place de choix. Par ailleurs, 14 manuels différents ont été mentionnés, mais chacun cité une seule fois.

Pour le reste, on peut pointer le peu de réponses concernant les sites internet et les écrits officiels (socles de compétences, programmes divers) qui présentent pourtant des propositions d'activités et de dispositifs. Une large majorité des réponses ne contient la mention que d'une seule ressource, ce qui nous amène à ne pas tirer de conclusion rapide sur ce point. Les répondants ont peut-être mentionné leur ressource principale. Cette question mériterait ainsi d'être interrogée de façon plus fine, afin de déterminer si effectivement les pratiques enseignantes se cantonnent ou non à cette seule ressource.

### *La question de la formation*

Une question de l'enquête concernait les formations spécifiques à l'oral. Hors formation initiale, seuls 13,2 % des répondants signalent avoir suivi sur l'ensemble de leur carrière au moins une formation à l'enseignement de l'oral. Parmi ces réponses, la ventilation des enseignants qui déclarent avoir suivi une ou plusieurs formations est équilibrée, quelle que soit l'ancienneté de ces derniers<sup>6</sup>.

Les sujets des formations sont divers, et souvent non identifiés (« Une formation avec mr X » - « un module sur l'oral »). On peut toutefois pointer quelques réponses plus précises qui situent les formations à l'oral dans le champ de la didactique de l'oral (8 réponses), du théâtre et du conte (5 réponses), du français langue étrangère (2 réponses) et de la CNV (Communication non violente, expression des émotions, etc. : 2 réponses).

Les instituts/organismes de formations mentionnés sont diversifiés et appartiennent aussi bien au monde de l'école qu'à celui du péri/parascolaire. Le peu de réponses explicites ne permet cependant pas de faire une analyse plus fine sur ce point.

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<sup>6</sup> 15 d'entre eux ont entre 0 et 10 ans d'ancienneté, 8 entre 10 et 20 ans d'ancienneté et 9 ont plus de 20 ans d'ancienneté.

### *Les activités annoncées comme pratiquées*

Pour ce qui concerne les activités réalisées par les enseignants, nous avons intuitivement la perception que les pratiques de classes étaient très stéréotypées et peu propices aux apprentissages. Ainsi, en *Savoir Parler*, les pratiques de la récitation, de l'exposé et éventuellement de la scène de théâtre (voire du projet théâtral plus global) nous semblaient être largement mobilisées dans les classes. Ces pratiques, parce qu'elles relèvent d'activités fonctionnelles (exception faite de la récitation quand elle porte sur un texte non produit par l'élève) mobilisent l'ensemble des apprentissages et sont davantage le lieu de l'évaluation d'un déjà-là que d'une formation spécifique. Pour ce qui concerne le *Savoir Écouter*, nous pointions le questionnaire d'écoute comme le dispositif pratiqué par excellence. Les résultats de l'enquête confirment largement ces deux perceptions, alors même que nous avons interrogé les enseignants sous la forme de questions ouvertes, sans leur donner une liste de réponses possibles qui contiendraient ces fameuses pratiques.

Enfin, nous avons également dépouillé la question ouverte finale dans laquelle nous demandions aux enseignants d'identifier les questions et besoins qu'ils souhaitaient évoquer à propos de l'enseignement de l'oral.

*En Savoir Parler : la prise de parole.* Lorsqu'on interroge les enseignants sur les activités de *Savoir Parler* qu'ils pratiquent le plus dans leurs classes, on constate que deux pratiques émergent largement : celle de l'expression personnelle (87 occurrences), qu'il s'agisse de raconter son vécu (53 réponses), de donner son avis (23 réponses) ou de gérer les conflits via, entre autres, la tenue de conseils de classe (11 occurrences) et celle de la récitation (69 occurrences). Vient ensuite l'exposé (47 occurrences). Si la première série d'activités (expression orale) concerne spécifiquement l'utilisation de l'oral pour se dire et communiquer sereinement avec autrui, la seconde (récitation) relève davantage d'une pratique de classe dont la pertinence ne cesse d'être interrogée (activité de mémorisation, absence de préparation, évaluation, pertinence, rôle des auditeurs/spectateurs, etc.). L'exposé, qui vient en troisième place de ce podium des pratiques les plus fréquentes se fait parfois seul, parfois en groupe, sur des sujets variés. Ce sont donc les fonctions émotives, communicationnelles, expressives et explicatives de la langue orale qui sont mobilisées massivement.

On trouve alors dans les réponses des autres enseignants quelques pratiques émergentes qui permettent d'ouvrir le champ de ces fonctions, mais en proportions nettement moindres : le débat et l'argumentation (19 occurrences), la reformulation de consignes et la métacognition (19 occurrences), les jeux scéniques et théâtraux (11) qui englobent des pratiques variées, et semblent porter l'accent aussi bien sur la dimension expressive que sur les paramètres vocaux ou gestuels (articulation, mise dans la peau d'un personnage, jeux de rôles), et la lecture à voix haute, signalée 10 fois comme une pratique courante de classe.

Quelques répondants évoquent, sans pour autant considérer qu'il s'agisse d'une « activité » d'oral le fait de développer le vocabulaire, la grammaire ou la syntaxe des élèves (8 occurrences) via une injonction à parler « correctement » :

*« S'exprimer correctement oralement est indispensable : donc, tout le temps. Il faut reprendre les mauvaises tournures de phrases, les accords*

*douteux, les répétitions de mots... À chaque intervention de l'enfant, il y a une occasion de mettre en évidence « de beaux mots ou de belles phrases » mais aussi de reprendre les erreurs (sans moquerie ni jugement de l'enfant auteur) et de les exploiter afin d'améliorer le langage de chacun. « Tiens, tu as dit cela, c'est intéressant mais comment pourrions-nous le formuler de façon plus jolie pour nos oreilles... »*

D'autres considèrent, confirmant en cela le hiatus entre enseigner et pratiquer l'oral, qu'ils font de l'oral tout le temps (« dès qu'un enfant répond ») ou dans des contextes bien spécifiques (« je demande ce qu'on va mettre dans son cartable »). Enfin, certains semblent avoir trouvé dans un manuel l'ensemble de leur programmation et signalent ne plus faire autre chose que les activités dudit manuel.

Les pratiques évoquées confinent à une certaine vision de l'apprentissage de l'oral : pratique d'évaluation plus que formation, expression d'un déjà-là, centration sur les activités de mémorisation, confusion entre apprentissage et pratique non médiatisée, évaluation des compétences orales fondée sur un attendu propre à la langue écrite (le « bien parler » qui correspond régulièrement, dans le chef des répondants, au « bien » écrire), etc. En revanche, on découvre également un intérêt réel pour la question des consignes<sup>7</sup> et de leur reformulation ou pour le débat d'idées<sup>8</sup>. L'expression de soi occupe la première place dans les pratiques évoquées, mais elle recouvre des réalités fort différentes qui vont de l'expression d'une émotion (« comment je me sens aujourd'hui ») à celle d'un événement (« ce que j'ai fait ce weekend ») sans que soit pour autant spécifié le statut qu'ont ces moments de prise de parole au sein de la classe.

*En Savoir Écouter : la compréhension orale.* En Savoir Écouter, sans réelle surprise, l'activité la plus souvent mentionnée est celle du questionnaire d'écoute (102 occurrences). Réalisé à partir de supports variés (CD et DVD, textes lus par l'enseignant, albums, journaux et émissions télévisées, la pratique du questionnaire reste la plus représentée dès lors qu'il s'agit de proposer une activité en Savoir Écouter aux élèves. Centré sur la compétence 2 (identification des contenus) et proposé souvent à des fins évaluatives, le questionnaire est d'ailleurs la seule pratique évaluée de façon certificative dans les évaluations externes de fin de primaire (certificat d'études de base)<sup>9</sup>. Il est à noter que certains répondants semblent regretter cette situation qu'ils évoquent pourtant :

*« Souvent des questionnaires, je dois l'avouer ».*

*« Savoir Écouter « traditionnel » avec un questionnaire. »*

*« Questionnaire comme au CEB pour les habituer à répondre correctement. »*

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<sup>7</sup> Il faudra analyser les profils de ces répondants afin de mesurer s'ils émergent, par exemple, d'écoles en encadrement différencié au sein desquelles la pratique de la langue nécessite un travail plus approfondi.

<sup>8</sup> Identiquement, il faudrait voir si l'argumentation intervient dans tous les cycles ou plutôt en 5<sup>e</sup> et 6<sup>e</sup> primaires.

<sup>9</sup> CEB : certificat d'études de base. Le CEB est la seule évaluation externe obligatoire qui détermine la réussite de l'enseignement primaire en communauté française de Belgique. Il contient une seule activité de savoir écouter, sous forme de questionnaire aux réponses fermées. Il ne contient pas d'évaluation en savoir parler.

« Raconter une histoire et répondre à des questions. Snif ☺ »

En dehors de ce dispositif, on trouve des pratiques un peu floues (73 occurrences) qui sont simplement signalées par les termes « écoute de... » suivi d'un support défini (écoute d'une histoire, écoute d'un CD, écoute d'une lecture, écoute de l'actualité, etc.). Ces pratiques déclarées renvoient-elles davantage à celle du questionnaire, peut-être moins formalisé, du débat d'idées suite à l'écoute ou à de l'écoute gratuite, « plaisir » qu'on peut proposer aux élèves lors d'une lecture d'album, par exemple ?

Ces pratiques d'écoute « non identifiées » renvoient vraisemblablement à des réalités de terrain fort différentes qu'il faudrait interroger. À titre d'exemple, 28 d'entre elles mentionnent « les consignes » comme support d'écoute. Est-ce à dire qu'il s'agit, à la manière des dictées spatiales, de reproduire sur papier une série de consignes données par l'enseignant en vue d'élaborer un message, un dessin, un itinéraire (« dessiner un personnage à partir de consignes », « suite de consignes à exécuter ») ou plus prosaïquement d'être capable de comprendre les consignes données par l'enseignant en vue de réaliser une tâche ? Dans cette hypothèse, il faudrait admettre que ces pratiques déclarées en Savoir Écouter ne sont pas centrées sur cette compétence mais bien sur la capacité des élèves à mobiliser leur écoute pour comprendre une demande. On semble percevoir que, dans une large part des réponses, c'est bien cette dernière hypothèse qui prévaut de sorte qu'on peut raisonnablement penser que la compréhension de ces consignes ne fait pas l'objet d'un apprentissage médiatisé.

« Écouter des autres et des consignes. Mais ce n'est pas une activité ».

« Consignes très simples. Par exemple « colle », « découpe », ... »

« Écouter les consignes que l'enseignant donne et les comprendre. »

« Je donne des consignes. »

« Les consignes de mon cours. »

27 répondants déclarent simplement suivre les activités d'un manuel. Si l'on peut se réjouir de ces réponses, en considérant que le manuel proposera aux enseignants des activités variées permettant de travailler différentes compétences en Savoir Écouter, on peut par ailleurs craindre une limitation des pratiques à celles justement proposées dans ces supports. A tout le moins, il s'agirait de savoir si l'exploitation de manuels permet aux enseignants d'élargir leur panel d'activités et de développer une didactique de l'oral proche des préoccupations et besoins de leurs élèves. Ainsi, le manuel semble parfois agir comme une solution prête à l'emploi sans que son exploitation soit sujette à amendements.

« Je travaille essentiellement à partir du livre « écouter pour apprendre » cycle 3. Il s'agit d'un CD avec des histoires, que je fais écouter 3-4 fois durant l'activité. »

On ne rencontre que de façon tout à fait anecdotique, la pratique de l'écoute au service d'un débat, d'un conseil de classe, de coopération (9 réponses), l'écoute au profit de la reconstruction d'une chronologie, d'étapes,... (7 réponses), des activités de conscience phonologique (3 réponses), voire la pratique de la dictée (2 réponses) ou la métacognition (1 réponse). Il semble donc qu'en Savoir Écouter, plus encore qu'en Savoir Parler, la

surconsommation du questionnaire d'écoute oblitère d'autres pratiques, du moins en termes de priorité.

Mentionnons finalement quelques répondants (8) qui signalent n'en faire jamais (ou tout le temps) sans donner davantage de précisions.

*« Je ne fais pas de Savoir Écouter. Maintenant, dès qu'on découvre un nouveau texte de lecture globale ou d'éveil, je leur demande ce qu'ils ont compris. »*

*« Le Savoir Écouter est tout le temps présent ... C'est la base. Préciser cette question me semble utile ;- ) »*

### *Les besoins identifiés*

Quant aux besoins et aux questions évoquées par les enseignants, sans en faire le relevé exhaustif ici, on trouve quatre grandes catégories d'interrogations. Elles concernent ;

- l'évaluation certificative (Comment mesurer les compétences des élèves ? Comment identifier les progrès ? Comment faire pour proposer une évaluation objective) ;
- l'évaluation formative : la manière de différencier, en fonction du nombre et du niveau des élèves (Faut-il apporter des rétroactions à chaque élève chaque fois qu'il s'est exprimé ? Comment soutenir les différents profils d'élèves dans le cadre d'activité de compréhension orale ?) ;
- la fréquence et la durée des activités (A quelle fréquence faire des activités d'apprentissage de l'oral ? Faut-il privilégier des activités de courte durée pour garder la motivation des élèves ? Faut-il prendre du temps pour que chaque élève puisse s'exprimer oralement ?) ;
- les traces à garder à l'issue des activités (Comment faire des synthèses des activités réalisées ? Quelles traces garder ? À quels moments les réutiliser et pourquoi ?).

De plus, l'analyse des réponses des enseignants met en évidence deux aspects importants quant aux besoins. Premièrement, le besoin de comprendre le sens de l'enseignement de l'oral : à quoi il sert et ce qu'il apporte aux élèves en termes de développement de compétences. Ainsi, plusieurs verbatims renvoient au fait que les enseignants estiment que l'oral se fait tout le temps en classe et qu'un apprentissage qui lui est dédié n'est pas nécessaire.

*« L'oral est tout le temps travaillé, quand les élèves arrivent de maternelle, ils savent parler et écouter pour répondre aux consignes. Pourquoi prendre du temps encore pour cela ? »*

*« En fait, je ne me pose pas de questions, car j'évite le sujet. »*

*« L'oral s'enseigne peu, ce sont les parents qui apprennent à parler aux enfants. Il y a d'autres priorités en classe ! »*

Deuxièmement, il semble qu'un enseignement de l'oral entrerait en concurrence avec les autres apprentissages. On observe ainsi d'importantes résistances des répondants, qui estiment qu'un enseignement-apprentissage de l'oral n'est pas ou peu pertinent au regard

de la priorité qui doit être accordée à l'écrit. Pourtant, les prescrits légaux mentionnent un travail « équilibré » des différentes compétences du français. Le besoin identifié ici est donc de donner à voir comment, concrètement, un enseignement de l'oral peut s'inscrire dans les pratiques de classes et comment il peut s'articuler avec le reste du programme.

« *Pas évident à mettre en place, il y a beaucoup d'autres notions en français à aborder (écriture, lecture, grammaire, orthographe).* »  
« *Je laisse de côté le Savoir Parler et écouter au privilège du savoir lire et savoir écrire.* »

Comme pistes pour répondre à ces deux besoins, on pourrait, d'une part, faire intervenir, dès la formation des enseignants, un temps de réflexion sur les bénéfices qu'apportent un enseignement de l'oral et, d'autre part, convoquer l'écrit et ses principes d'enseignement, reconnus et acquis par les enseignants. Le passage par la didactique de l'écrit nous semble une porte d'entrée intéressante pour développer une didactique de l'oral qui trouve sa place dans les pratiques enseignantes. C'est l'objet d'expérimentations que nous sommes actuellement en train de mener afin d'ouvrir une brèche dans la légitimation de l'enseignement de l'oral en offrant aux enseignants des balises d'opérationnalisation acceptables à leurs yeux.

#### *Discussion et conclusion*

Si le questionnaire que nous avons soumis aux enseignants ne donne pas une vision exhaustive de l'ensemble des pratiques déclarées de l'oral en Belgique francophone, il amène néanmoins des informations émanant de près de trois cents instituteurs du primaire. Pour autant, et si on émet l'hypothèse que les répondants sont probablement déjà plus engagés dans la réflexion sur l'oral que d'autres puisqu'ils se sont saisis du questionnaire, les résultats – sans nous surprendre – nous interpellent sur plusieurs points.

En effet, sur la base de nos rencontres quotidiennes avec des enseignants, nous avons intuitivement la perception que les pratiques de classes pouvaient être stéréotypées. Ainsi, en *Savoir Parler*, la récitation et l'exposé nous semblaient être largement mobilisées dans les classes. En *Savoir Écouter*, nous pensions pouvoir identifier le questionnaire d'écoute comme le dispositif pratiqué par excellence. Les résultats de l'enquête confirment largement ces deux hypothèses, alors même que nous avons interrogé les enseignants sous la forme de questions ouvertes, sans donc leur donner une liste de réponses possibles qui contiendraient ces pratiques. Nos résultats font écho aux travaux des autres territoires francophones, comme notamment ceux de Nolin (2015) en ce sens qu'il y a peu de variété dans les genres envisagés dans les classes et que ceux-ci sont plutôt issus des habitudes et traditions scolaires que de réelles situations de vie que les élèves pourraient rencontrer.

Effectivement, si les moments dédiés d'apprentissage du *Savoir Parler* consistent uniquement dans la récitation, la présentation, voire la déclamation des textes, parfois élaborés, souvent appris par cœur, et si ceux assignés au *Savoir Écouter* se manifestent essentiellement dans la réponse à des questions de contenu suite à l'audition d'un message et sans avoir appris à le faire, comment les élèves pourront-ils faire usage de la langue dans différentes pratiques discursives et sociales et donc intervenir adéquatement dans une situation de communication donnée (Dolz & Gagnon, 2008 ; Dolz & Schneuwly, 1998) ? Dans les dispositifs mentionnés par les enseignants, il est souvent question d'évaluer une



compétence qui n'est que rarement enseignée par et pour elle-même. Ce faisant, les pratiques scolaires entérinent un déjà-là, des pratiques non médiatisées, dont elles mesurent l'efficacité sans se concentrer sur leur apprentissage.

Plus encore, nos résultats mettent en évidence, non seulement des pratiques peu variées et une quasi absence de perspective de progression, mais également des résistances importantes de la part du terrain scolaire, en écho à ceux relevés dans d'autres travaux comme ceux de Dumais (2001), Lafontaine et Messier (2009) ou Sénéchal et Chartrand (2011), d'où l'importance de didactiser des dispositifs éprouvés par la recherche.

Or, lesdites résistances sont, pour partie, corrélées à la façon dont sont perçus et menés les enseignements/apprentissages des lire/écrire. Dès lors, l'enseignement/apprentissage de l'oral par les genres présente une porte d'entrée intéressante pour équiper les enseignants dans leur travail de l'oral au sein de projets de communication divers en lien avec leurs connaissances en didactique de l'écrit. C'est le pari que nous avons fait en tentant de transférer un dispositif initialement prévu pour enseigner l'écrit (*Itinéraires*, voir par exemple Colognesi & Lucchini, 2018) vers un enseignement / apprentissage de l'oral. Les résultats sont encourageants (Colognesi & Deschepper, 2019) dans ce sens que le dispositif permet aux élèves de réaliser plusieurs « ré-oralisations » (Colognesi & Dolz, 2017), se voyant ainsi évoluer vers la maîtrise d'un genre oral choisi, en étant soutenus, d'une part, par l'enseignant qui amène les étayages langagiers en lien avec les caractéristiques génériques et, d'autre part, les pairs qui donnent un retour sur les versions intermédiaires réalisées. D'autres études pour en mesurer les impacts sur le développement langagier et les compétences transversales des élèves sont en cours.

Pour aller plus loin, nous postulons que mobiliser plus largement la didactique de l'écrit au profit de celle de l'oral, comme nous l'avons développé ailleurs (Colognesi & Deschepper, 2018), est une voie à explorer. Ainsi, sans pour autant envisager l'oral comme de l'écrit, ce qu'il n'est pas, tant au niveau du processus que des produits (Cappeau, 2017), il y aurait un réel intérêt didactique et stratégique à renforcer les liens qui existent entre l'un et l'autre, dans la perspective d'une mise à profit mutuelle et d'une articulation des liens qui les unissent (Morinet, 2017).

À l'issue de cette première étude, nous envisageons donc de développer nos recherches autour de trois axes : (1) une analyse plus précise et ventilée des pratiques déclarées telles qu'elles apparaissent dans le questionnaire (par exemple, observe-t-on des dispositifs différents dans les classes à encadrement différencié, et si oui, pourquoi ou lesquelles), (2) une compréhension plus fine de ce qui se fait effectivement dans les classes via des études de cas longitudinales (avec des enseignants tout venant et, comparativement, des enseignants qui ont suivis une formation sur l'enseignement / apprentissage de l'oral) afin de récolter des données liées aux pratiques réelles et aux progrès qu'elles induisent, ou n'induisent pas, et (3) le développement d'ingénieries didactiques issues de l'écrit et adaptées à l'enseignement/apprentissages de l'oral (quelles adaptations, quels effets etc.).

Ces trois axes de recherches pourront permettre de mieux comprendre ce qui se fait réellement dans les classes et d'identifier des leviers en vue d'améliorer ces pratiques. Comme évoqué dans l'introduction, c'est le choix d'une recherche collaborative qui a été fait. Le groupe est constitué de formateurs d'enseignants (psychologues, psychopédagogues ou didacticiens), d'enseignants, d'étudiants-chercheurs en sciences de

l'éducation (en maîtrise et en thèse) et de chercheurs universitaires. L'ambition est de produire des savoirs nouveaux quant aux pratiques efficaces d'enseignement de l'oral, et de viser le développement professionnel de tous les acteurs engagés dans la recherche.

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# ***Un regard qualitatif sur la motivation en grammaire d'élèves de la fin de l'ordre élémentaire scolarisés en contexte francophone minoritaire***

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## ***Résumé***

À partir de données provenant d'un questionnaire et d'une entrevue, cet article explore la motivation en grammaire de huit élèves de la fin de l'élémentaire en milieu minoritaire et la met en relation avec le développement de leur compétence à effectuer l'accord du verbe à l'écrit. Les résultats nous permettent de poser des hypothèses viables sur la relation entre la motivation en grammaire et le développement de ladite compétence. Ils révèlent aussi que, pour les élèves, le travail grammatical est fréquemment associé à la mémorisation de formes linguistiques et que celle-ci ne contribue pas à leur motivation.

## ***Mots-clés***

motivation, grammaire, milieu minoritaire, accord du verbe, écriture

## ***Introduction***

L'apprentissage de la langue écrite en contexte de minorité linguistique est particulier, en ce sens que le milieu socioculturel dans lequel évoluent les élèves peut influencer sur le développement de la compétence qui leur permet de respecter les normes linguistiques qui sont mises en avant par l'école (Bélanger, Minor-Corriveau et Bélanger, 2015; Groupe DIEPE, 1995). Cavanagh et Blain (2009), s'attachant à mettre en exergue quelques-uns des défis que l'enseignant œuvrant en milieu linguistique minoritaire doit relever pour enseigner l'écrit, soulignent à cet égard que les apprenants (1) ont tendance à voir le français comme une langue artificielle, (2) qu'ils manquent d'occasions d'écrire en français, (3) qu'ils affichent des compétences linguistiques hétérogènes et (4) qu'ils font montre d'une certaine insécurité linguistique. Puisque, en fonction de la situation démographique de la région minoritaire et des dynamiques linguistiques qui prévalent en milieu familial, l'exposition des élèves au français à l'extérieur de l'école s'avère souvent disparate, certains chercheurs (Blain, 2003; Thibeault, 2016) soutiennent en outre que la mise en synergie des cadres théoriques offerts par la recherche en langues première (L1) et seconde (L2) serait féconde pour comprendre la réalité plurielle des apprenants qui, à la jonction d'au moins deux langues, vivent en contexte minoritaire.

Il va donc sans dire que la recherche se focalisant sur l'apprentissage de l'écriture dans ces milieux ne peut se limiter au paradigme cognitiviste qui a longtemps dominé dans cette discipline scientifique (Nelson, 2012), car l'environnement sociolinguistique et socioéducatif *dans* et *par* lequel le scripteur construit sa compétence d'écriture l'amènera à développer une relation socioaffective relativement complexe vis-à-vis du matériau écrit (Murray, 2016). Dans cet article, à la lumière de ces quelques états de fait, nous souhaitons



nous arrêter à l'influence d'un facteur socioaffectif sur le développement de la compétence linguistique en milieu minoritaire, *la motivation en grammaire*. Pour ce faire, nous prendrons appui sur les résultats d'une étude de cas multiples qui a porté sur le développement de la compétence qui permet l'accord du verbe à l'écrit chez huit élèves de la fin de l'ordre élémentaire dans le sud-ouest de l'Ontario, l'une des zones les plus anglodominantes de la province (Ontario 400, 2016). Les résultats de cette étude initiale (Thibeault, Fleuret et Lefrançois, 2018; Thibeault et Lefrançois, 2018) seront dès lors utilisés dans cet article pour comprendre le rôle potentiel de la motivation en grammaire dans le développement de la compétence ciblée.

### *La motivation, un construit complexe*

Si la recherche sur l'écriture en contexte majoritaire, en L1, a longtemps privilégié une analyse du fonctionnement cognitif par l'entremise duquel l'individu-scripteur s'engage dans le processus récuratif qui le mène vers la trace graphique (Hayes et Flower, 1980), les travaux des quarante dernières années tendent à élargir leurs horizons épistémologiques et à tenir compte, notamment, de l'aspect motivationnel. De manière générale, on reconnaît donc maintenant que la motivation est un élément qui contribue grandement à la production d'un texte écrit (Saddler, 2012; Troia, Shankland et Wolbers, 2012). D'après Boscolo et Hidi (2007), les nombreux construits qui relèvent de la motivation peuvent être regroupés selon trois principaux domaines, lesquels sont liés les uns aux autres et forment la dynamique motivationnelle du scripteur. Le premier a trait aux raisons qui le motivent à écrire (ses objectifs, ses intérêts, ses besoins, etc.) (Hidi, Berndorff et Ainley, 2002; Wigfield et Eccles, 1996). Le deuxième concerne le sentiment d'efficacité personnelle, cette perception que se crée le scripteur à l'endroit de sa propre compétence à écrire (Bruning, Dempsey, Kauffman, McKim et Zumbunn, 2013; Villalón, Mateos et Cuevas, 2015). Le dernier cible les stratégies métacognitives qui lui permettent de s'autoréguler sur les plans cognitif et affectif pendant la réalisation de la tâche (p. ex., l'élaboration d'un plan, le recours à des outils de référence, la demande d'aide) (Pajares, Britner et Valiante, 2000; Zimmerman et Kitsantas, 2007).

### *La motivation en grammaire*

Là où un nombre grandissant d'études se centrent sur l'écriture et la motivation, peu de chercheurs se penchent sur une discipline scolaire à laquelle on consacre énormément de temps en classe (Lord, 2012) et qui est souvent associée à l'écriture : la grammaire. En langue première, à notre connaissance, l'étude quantitative de Boyer (2012) est la seule qui, en français, se soit focalisée sur l'une des composantes de la motivation en grammaire et qui l'ait mise en lien avec la performance d'élèves en écriture. Plus précisément, la chercheuse a examiné, chez 295 élèves de première secondaire (7<sup>e</sup> année) au Québec, la relation entre le biais d'évaluation de leur compétence en orthographe grammaticale et leur performance dans ce même domaine. En s'appuyant sur la recherche qui montre que l'illusion de compétence et d'incompétence tend à devenir réalité chez plusieurs élèves (Bandura, 1997; Bouffard et Narciss, 2011), Boyer a voulu voir si l'écart entre les scores des sujets lors d'une épreuve mesurant un indice d'habileté scolaire et ceux obtenus lors d'une dictée pouvait être expliqué par le sentiment d'efficacité personnelle en grammaire. Les résultats montrent que le sentiment d'efficacité est corrélé à la performance en orthographe grammaticale et que des croyances exagérément positives envers sa



compétence orthographique sont en relation significative avec des performances supérieures en dictée. Inversement, des croyances particulièrement négatives ont eu l'effet opposé, c'est-à-dire qu'elles ont été mises en lien avec des performances inférieures en orthographe grammaticale.

En langue seconde, Jean et Simard (2011), dans une étude quantitative menée auprès de 1328 élèves de 14 ans apprenant l'anglais et de 993 élèves de 15 ans apprenant le français au Québec, ont quant à elles cherché à documenter leurs perceptions vis-à-vis de la grammaire. De manière générale, les apprenants ont une perception de l'utilité assez positive de cet objet d'apprentissage, qui serait nécessaire pour bien s'exprimer en L2, à l'oral, certes, mais encore plus à l'écrit. Cela dit, l'intérêt qui est manifesté par les participants en ce qui a trait à la grammaire demeure restreint, ce qui pousse les chercheuses à soutenir que, pour les élèves, l'enseignement grammatical demeurerait un mal nécessaire : ils en perçoivent l'utilité, bien qu'il soit une source d'intérêt restreinte.

À notre connaissance, aucune recherche adoptant un devis qualitatif n'a tenté de décrire la dynamique motivationnelle des élèves en grammaire. De telles études, cela étant, pourraient nous informer en ce qui a trait aux pratiques qui sont les plus susceptibles de motiver les apprenants et qui, de facto, répondraient à leurs besoins socioaffectifs. En milieu minoritaire, par ailleurs, on sait que les élèves font souvent face à une insécurité linguistique importante (Cavanagh et Blain, 2009) et, pour cette raison, il nous semble important que la recherche s'intéresse à la motivation des élèves en grammaire. Ainsi, dans le présent article, nous visons à rendre compte de la motivation en grammaire chez des élèves scolarisés en français là où cette langue est minoritaire et à observer s'il existe une relation entre cette motivation et le développement de la compétence linguistique qui permet l'accord du verbe à l'écrit.

### *Une note sur l'accord du verbe à l'écrit*

De prime abord, le choix de cet objet linguistique peut sembler anodin. Après tout, la règle qui en régit le fonctionnement – le verbe s'accorde en personne et en nombre avec le noyau du groupe en fonction sujet (Chartrand, Aubin, Blain et Simard, 2011) – paraît relativement simple. Or, la recherche montre que son apprentissage est chronophage et qu'il n'est pas terminé à la fin de l'élémentaire (Cogis, 2013; Geoffre et Brissaud, 2012), quoique les instances ministérielles ontariennes en demandent la maîtrise à ce moment de la scolarité obligatoire (ministère de l'Éducation de l'Ontario, 2006). Afin d'expliquer cette complexité, David et Renvoisé (2010) nous rappellent notamment que les verbes au présent de l'indicatif affichent de nombreuses marques inaudibles et qu'un même verbe peut détenir plusieurs radicaux (p. ex., le verbe *aller* en compte quatre au présent de l'indicatif). Il nous semblait donc intéressant de nous arrêter à l'accord du verbe puisque, au terme de l'école élémentaire, les élèves doivent avoir construit des connaissances à son endroit, mais que, pour plusieurs, cet apprentissage est encore en cours à ce moment. On peut donc s'interroger sur l'influence de facteurs comme la motivation en grammaire, lesquels peuvent soutenir ou freiner l'appréhension de cet objet linguistique complexe.

### *Méthodologie*

Comme nous le disions en introduction, l'étude dont il est question ici repose sur une recherche plus large, dont l'objectif était de décrire le développement de la compétence permettant l'accord verbal à l'écrit chez des élèves de la fin de l'élémentaire en contexte

francophone minoritaire (Thibeault, Fleuret et Lefrançois, 2018; Thibeault et Lefrançois, 2018)

Nos participants, quatre filles et quatre garçons, étaient tous scolarisés dans une classe à niveaux multiples du sud-ouest de l'Ontario au moment de la recherche, durant l'année scolaire 2015-2016. Pour composer notre échantillon, nous avons abordé le conseil scolaire, qui nous a référé à l'enseignante des participants. Nous avons ensuite invité l'ensemble des élèves de la classe à prendre part à l'étude ; nous avons reçu l'autorisation parentale de ces huit élèves. Au commencement de la recherche, la moitié d'entre eux était en cinquième année, l'autre était en sixième année, et nous les avons suivis pendant 13 mois pour décrire le développement de la compétence par le truchement de laquelle ils opéraient, à l'écrit, l'accord du verbe au présent de l'indicatif. Ils ont tous une intelligence normale en regard des épreuves du K-ABC (Kaufman et Kaufman, 1995), auxquelles ils ont été soumis pendant la recherche. Tous sont plurilingues, connaissant minimalement le français et l'anglais. Six ont toujours été scolarisés en français en Ontario, alors qu'Isaac est arrivé de la République d'Ouganda, où il a appris le français langue seconde avant son arrivée au Canada en cinquième année, et que Pierre a suivi un programme de scolarisation bilingue français-créole haïtien avant d'arriver au Canada en 4<sup>e</sup> année. Dans le tableau 1 sont répertoriées les langues qu'utilisent les élèves au foyer avec leurs parents. Notons que, afin de préserver leur anonymat, nous avons remplacé le nom des participants par des pseudonymes.

Tableau 1

*Langue(s) que les participants utilisent lorsqu'ils parlent à leurs parents*

Élève (niveau scolaire en début d'étude)	Langue(s) parlée(s) avec la mère	Langue(s) parlée(s) avec le père
Emma (5 <sup>e</sup> )	Anglais	Anglais
Maya (5 <sup>e</sup> )	Anglais, français	Anglais
Ali (5 <sup>e</sup> )	Arabe, français, anglais	Anglais, arabe, français
Alicia (5 <sup>e</sup> )	Anglais, tagalog, français	Anglais
Sabrina (6 <sup>e</sup> )	Anglais, français, espagnol	Anglais
Pierre (6 <sup>e</sup> )	Créole haïtien	Créole haïtien
Kate (6 <sup>e</sup> )	Anglais, français	Anglais
Isaac (6 <sup>e</sup> )	Swahili, français	Français, anglais

Pour explorer leur motivation en grammaire, nous avons recouru à deux instruments, ces derniers ayant étant élaborés en fonction de trois axes : l'intérêt de l'élève vis-à-vis de la grammaire, sa perception de l'utilité de la grammaire et son sentiment d'efficacité en grammaire. Le contenu de ces deux outils a fait l'objet d'une validation, une didacticienne de la grammaire et une psychologue s'intéressant à la motivation ayant gracieusement accepté d'y jeter un regard critique. Nous les avons aussi mis à l'essai dans le cadre d'une étude-pilote menée auprès de sept élèves de 5<sup>e</sup> année d'une autre classe de la même école. À la suite de la validation de contenu et de la pilote, nous avons apporté les

quelques modifications que nous jugions nécessaires et, en mai 2015, nous avons invité nos huit participants à prendre part à une collecte ciblant leur motivation en grammaire.

Le premier instrument que nous avons conçu est un questionnaire à questions fermées de type Harter (1999) dans le cadre duquel le participant doit lire un énoncé, faire un choix binaire et, ensuite, nuancer son positionnement initial. Dans un premier temps, il doit donc choisir, selon l'énoncé, dans quel groupe il se situe, celui des cercles ou des carrés. Puis, il se positionne à nouveau, selon son degré d'appartenance au groupe des cercles ou des carrés. La figure 1 présente un exemple d'item portant sur la perception de l'utilité de la grammaire.

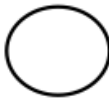



<b>Dans le groupe des cercles, les élèves pensent que la grammaire n'est pas utile.</b>		<b>Dans le groupe des carrés, les élèves pensent que la grammaire est utile.</b>	
			
<b>Très semblable à moi</b>	<b>Semblable à moi</b>		<b>Semblable à moi</b>
			<b>Très semblable à moi</b>

Figure 1. Exemple d'item du questionnaire sur la motivation en grammaire

Pour ce qui est du contenu du questionnaire, on retrouve quatre items pour chacun des trois axes que nous avons retenus pour aborder la motivation en grammaire ; ainsi compte-t-il un total de 12 items. Chacun d'eux a été codé à l'aide d'une échelle de -2 à +2, le total possible s'échelonnant donc de -24 à +24, de -8 à +8 par axe.

Pour compléter les données en lien avec la motivation en grammaire, et pour avoir un accès privilégié au cadre personnel de référence de nos participants quant à ce construit (Van der Maren, 2004), nous les avons également rencontrés individuellement à la bibliothèque de leur école dans le cadre d'un entretien semi-dirigé. Gravitant autour des trois axes que nous avons arrêtés précédemment, cet entretien nous offrait l'occasion, entre autres, de colliger des données témoignant de leur expérience et de leurs points de vue (Baribeau et Royer, 2012). Le guide d'entretien est constitué de cinq questions et, selon les réponses que nous proposaient les participants pendant l'entrevue, nous leur posions des relances afin d'obtenir davantage d'informations relativement au construit que nous abordions avec eux. Deux questions traitaient de l'intérêt en grammaire (« Qu'est-ce que tu aimes faire en grammaire à l'école ? Qu'est-ce que tu n'aimes pas faire en grammaire à l'école ? »), une de la perception de l'utilité de la grammaire (« D'après toi, la grammaire, ça sert à quoi ? »), deux de la perception de sa compétence en grammaire (« Qu'est-ce qui est difficile pour toi en grammaire ? Qu'est-ce qui est facile pour toi en grammaire ? »).

Comme nous l'avons mentionné précédemment, cette étude s'inscrit dans une recherche plus large (Thibeault, Fleuret et Lefrançois, 2018; Thibeault et Lefrançois, 2018), lors de laquelle nous avons décrit le développement de la compétence permettant

l'accord du verbe à l'écrit de nos participants<sup>1</sup>. Ainsi cette étude initiale nous a-t-elle permis de classer nos huit participants en trois groupes de scripteurs distincts. Le premier, constitué d'Emma, de Pierre et de Sabrina, affiche une compétence opérationnelle dès le début de la recherche et s'engage fréquemment dans la quête du donneur d'accord pour opérer l'accord du verbe ; la compétence de ces élèves n'évolue que légèrement au gré des 13 mois de la recherche. Plus faible, le deuxième groupe, celui de Kate, de Maya et d'Isaac, en début de recherche, ne connaît pas la marque prototypique de la pluralité des verbes (-*ent*) et ne s'engage pratiquement jamais dans la quête d'un potentiel donneur pour les accorder ; ils utilisent surtout la chaîne parlée (« Je l'ai écrit comme ça se prononce ») et le temps verbal (« Je l'ai écrit comme ça parce que c'est le présent ») afin de justifier leurs graphies. À la fin de la recherche, on note chez ces scripteurs une intériorisation progressive du morphème de la pluralité des verbes, mais son recours est encore loin d'être stabilisé, et la réflexion grammaticale dont ils font preuve n'est pas centrée sur l'identification du donneur d'accord. In fine, le troisième groupe, Ali et Alicia, ressemble au deuxième au commencement de l'étude. Cela dit, entre mai 2015 et février 2016, il accuse un développement notable et, en fin de recherche, il rappelle davantage le premier groupe. Pour ce texte, sans présenter dans le détail les données décrivant le développement de la compétence associée à l'accord verbal, nous prendrons appui sur les regroupements de scripteurs qui ont émergés lors de l'étude initiale et nous focaliserons notre attention sur les résultats liés à la motivation en grammaire.

### *Résultats*

Pour rendre compte de nos données, nous nous arrêterons d'abord aux résultats globaux des élèves au questionnaire. Par la suite, nous nous concentrerons sur chacun des trois indicateurs de la motivation en grammaire et nous présenterons le score des élèves pour chacun d'eux. La présentation des résultats relatifs aux indicateurs sera également accompagnée d'extraits de verbatim tirés des entretiens individuels, ces passages complétant et nuancant donc les données provenant du questionnaire.

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<sup>1</sup> Pour décrire ce développement, nous avons recouru à trois outils : l'activité de complètement, lors de laquelle l'élève devait écrire des verbes au présent de l'indicatif dont l'infinitif apparaît entre parenthèses, une production écrite et un entretien métagraphique, dans le cadre duquel nous avons demandé aux participants de verbaliser les raisonnements qu'ils ont mis en œuvre pour accorder les verbes lors des deux tâches précédentes. Chaque instrument a été utilisé à trois reprises, sur une période de 13 mois. Qui plus est, nous avons demandé à l'enseignante des élèves de procéder à son enseignement habituel de l'accord du verbe.

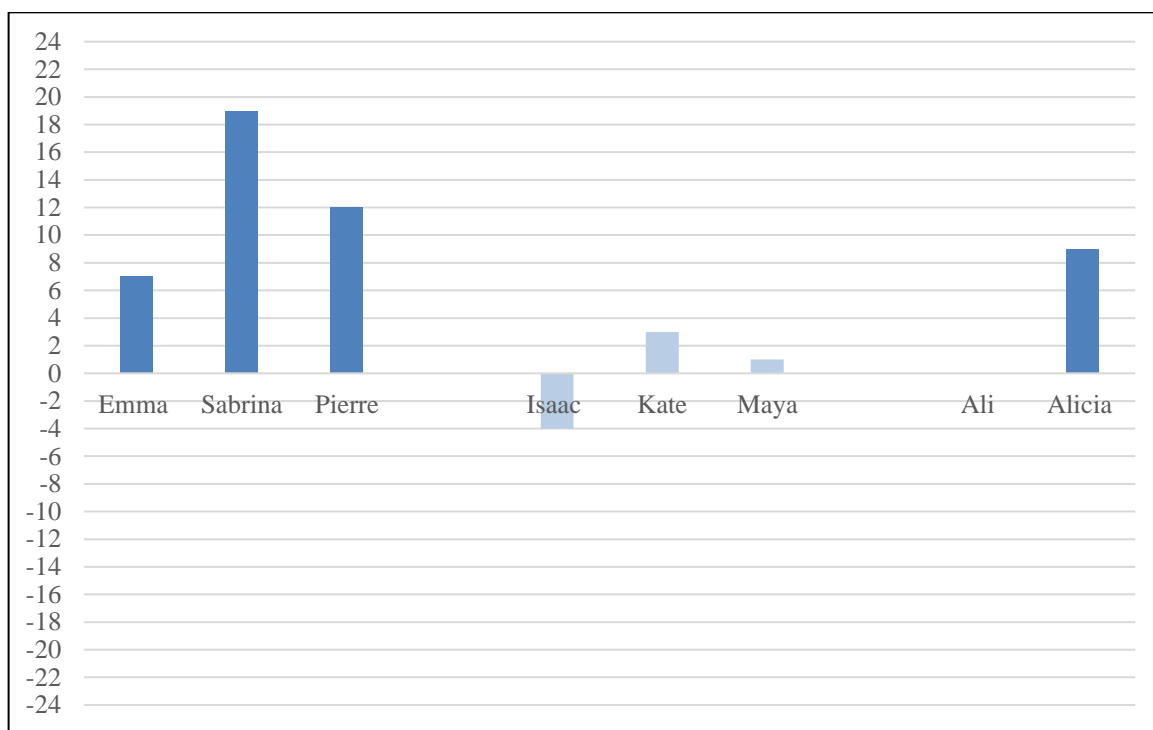


Figure 2. Scores globaux de la motivation en grammaire

Les élèves du groupe 1, celui qui fait montre d'une compétence assurée tout au long de l'étude, témoignent d'une motivation claire en grammaire, leur score se situant entre 7/24, pour Emma, et 19/24, pour Sabrina. Pour ce qui est des élèves du deuxième regroupement, ceux dont la compétence ciblée est peu opérationnelle au gré de la recherche, les résultats sont plus faibles et homogènes, se situant entre -4/24, pour Isaac, et 3/24, pour Kate. La motivation des participants du troisième groupe diffère quant à elle d'un élève à l'autre ; Ali obtient un score de 0/24, tandis qu'Alicia obtient 9/24. Il est donc difficile de proposer des explications relatives à la dynamique motivationnelle des élèves du troisième groupe en grammaire et aux potentiels liens qu'elle entretient avec leur compétence à accorder les verbes. Cela dit, le portrait global que nous brossons permet de poser des hypothèses concernant les relations entre la motivation en grammaire et la compétence permettant l'accord verbal. En effet, tous les élèves du groupe 1 semblent être relativement motivés dans leur apprentissage des composantes grammaticales de la langue, alors que les élèves du groupe 2 le sont moins. Les élèves du groupe 3, de leur côté, présentent des résultats qui fluctuent.

### *L'intérêt en grammaire*

Premier indicateur de la motivation en grammaire, l'intérêt des élèves à l'égard de cette discipline paraît quelque peu mitigé, comme on le constate à partir de la figure 3. Sabrina (7/8), Maya (7/8) et Pierre (5/8) présentent des scores élevés, les autres en affichent des plus faibles. Alicia (2/8) et Kate (2/8) obtiennent des scores positifs, mais moindres, alors que ceux des autres participants, Emma (-1/8), Ali (-4/8) et Isaac (-5/8), sont négatifs.

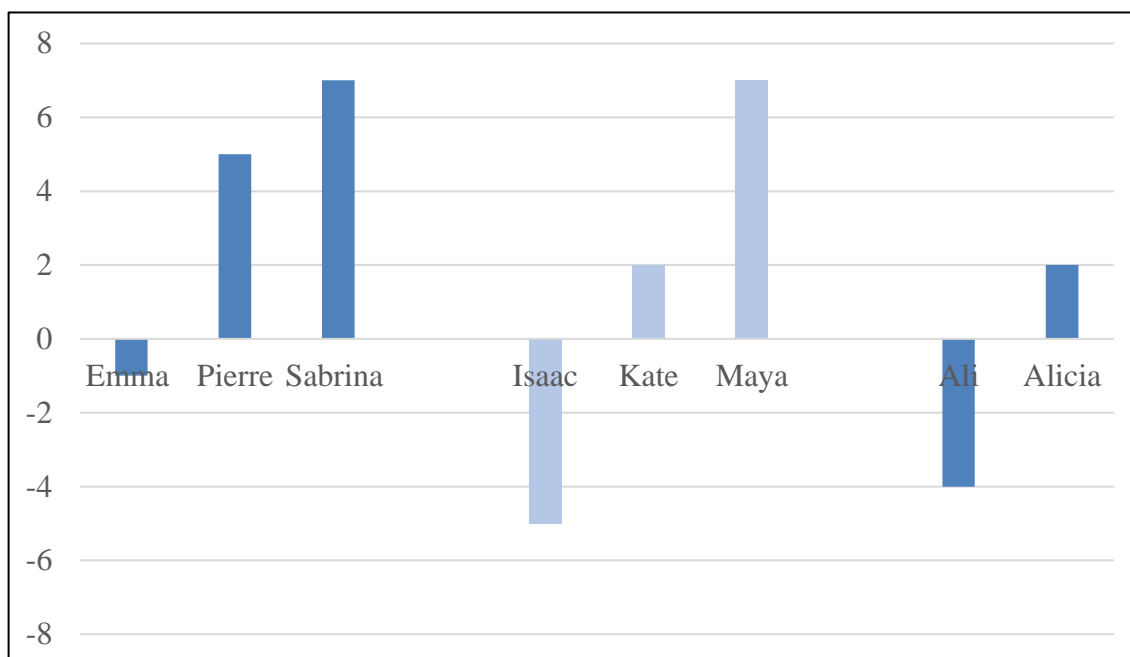


Figure 3. Scores liés à l'intérêt en grammaire

Dans le groupe 1, on retrouve une disparité importante concernant l'intérêt en grammaire. Emma, qui obtient le score le plus faible du regroupement, souligne qu'elle aime apprendre les adjectifs.

Expérimentateur : Qu'est-ce que tu aimes faire en grammaire à l'école ?

Emma : J'aime faire les adjectifs.

Expérimentateur : Les adjectifs. Pourquoi les adjectifs ?

Emma : Parce que comme, il y a beaucoup de différents types d'adjectifs, so c'est le fun d'apprendre.

Expérimentateur : Qu'est-ce qui est le fun d'apprendre dans les adjectifs ?

Emma : Ils sont faciles. Comme, ça décrit un chose, une personne. Il y a beaucoup de différentes sortes, et c'est le fun d'apprendre les différents et qu'est-ce qu'ils décrivent.

Dans ce passage, on note que c'est le travail lexical qui semble être d'intérêt pour Emma. En effet, quoiqu'elle fasse mention des adjectifs, elle n'en discute pas en termes de morphosyntaxe, mais en fonction du sens qu'ils véhiculent et des informations qu'ils apportent aux noms qu'ils complètent. Quand nous l'interrogeons sur ce qu'elle n'aime pas en grammaire, elle précise que les autres notions grammaticales lui déplaisent parce qu'elle doit constamment s'investir dans un effort de mémorisation lorsqu'elle les apprend.

Pierre et Sabrina, dont les scores sont relativement similaires pour ce qui est de l'intérêt en grammaire, présentent un discours différent de celui d'Emma ; on remarque en effet qu'ils prennent plaisir à s'engager dans une réflexion grammaticale et qu'ils aiment comprendre le fonctionnement d'unités linguistiques.



- Expérimentateur : Qu'est-ce que t'aimes faire quand tu fais le complément de phrase ?  
Pierre : Tracer les lignes.  
Expérimentateur : Tracer les lignes ?  
Pierre : Pour que ça montre où ça va. C'est l'fun.  
Expérimentateur : Pourquoi tu trouves ça le fun ?  
Pierre : Tu peux écrire si c'est bon ou non. Tu peux même dire si je dois mettre un virgule.

Dans cet extrait, Pierre fait référence à l'analyse de phrases et aux lignes qu'il doit tracer afin de rendre compte de sa démarche. Il montre à cet égard qu'il connaît le fonctionnement syntaxique du complément de phrase et explique que l'analyse de ce dernier, qu'il réalise en traçant des lignes, est pour lui une source d'intérêt.

Pour ce qui est du groupe 2, dans lequel on note aussi une variation considérable dans les scores liés à l'intérêt en grammaire, la réflexion métalinguistique n'apparaît pas dans le discours des élèves. Isaac, qui obtient le score le plus bas du regroupement, souligne qu'il prend plaisir à apprendre les verbes :

- Expérimentateur : Pourquoi tu aimes conjuguer les verbes ?  
Isaac : Conjuguer les verbes, c'est amusant, ça t'aide aussi à savoir comment...comme si tu conjugues ce verbe au présent comme...comment est-ce que...qu'est-ce qui change.  
Expérimentateur : Okay, qu'est-ce qui change où ?  
Isaac : Comme si c'est une partie ou c'est tout le mot qui change.

Comme Emma, Isaac souligne qu'il aime se concentrer sur une catégorie de mot, ici le verbe ; en effet, il apparaît que la modification du verbe en fonction du contexte phrastique suscite chez lui un intérêt marqué. Quand nous lui demandons ce qu'il lui déplaît, il nomme la correction de ses productions.

- Isaac : Je n'aime pas comme...je n'aime pas écrire et corriger les mots si comme tu te trompes. Si tu dois conjuguer, tu dois le changer dans le texte, c'est comme conjuguer, mais c'est corriger en grammaire.  
Expérimentateur : Corriger en grammaire, et pourquoi tu n'aimes pas ça ?  
Isaac : Car moi je pense que si je pouvais savoir comment comme...si je pouvais retenir tout le grammaire avant de faire mon test, ça m'aidera à me complètement corriger.

Isaac semble donc associer le développement de connaissances déclaratives, la mémorisation des règles grammaticales, aux résultats qu'il obtient dans le cadre d'examens et aux corrections qu'il effectue de ses productions. Or, cette mémorisation semble lui poser problème et affecter son intérêt pour la grammaire.

Eu égard au groupe 3, qui accuse également une certaine disparité dans les scores liés à l'intérêt, les réponses des élèves pendant l'entrevue varient. Ali, qui obtient un score bas au questionnaire, mentionne qu'il apprécie écrire et analyser des phrases, parce que c'est plaisant pour lui. Quand on le questionne concernant ce qui lui déplaît, il discute du soutien que lui offre son enseignante.

Expérimentateur : Qu'est-ce que t'aimes pas faire en grammaire à l'école ?

Ali : Euh, comme, quand, tu sais quand on analyse les phrases, des fois, well, on doit le faire tout seul. Je demande de l'aide pour comme, une vraiment longue phrase qui a comme deux verbes et comme trois sujets ou quelque chose...like...like...sometimes, I ask her to help me, and it takes forever.

Expérimentateur : Okay, donc le faire seul, you don't really like it?

Ali : Non, j'aime faire seul, mais quand je demande de l'aide, ça prend comme... ça me slow down.

Il semble donc qu'Ali aime s'engager dans une réflexion métalinguistique, car il mentionne l'analyse de phrases comme étant un vecteur d'intérêt en grammaire. Cela étant, quand il fait face à des difficultés, il aimerait recevoir un appui promptement.

### *La perception de l'utilité de la grammaire*

Eu égard de la perception de l'utilité de la grammaire, les scores sont globalement plus élevés que ceux associés à l'intérêt. La figure 4 en fait justement état. Cette fois-ci, Maya obtient le score maximal (8/8) ; elle est suivie de Sabrina (7/8), et d'Emma, de Pierre et d'Alicia, qui ont tous le même score, 6/8. Viennent ensuite Kate (5/8), Isaac (2/8) et Ali (-4/8), ce dernier participant étant le seul qui, pour cet indicateur de la dynamique motivationnelle en grammaire, présente un score négatif.

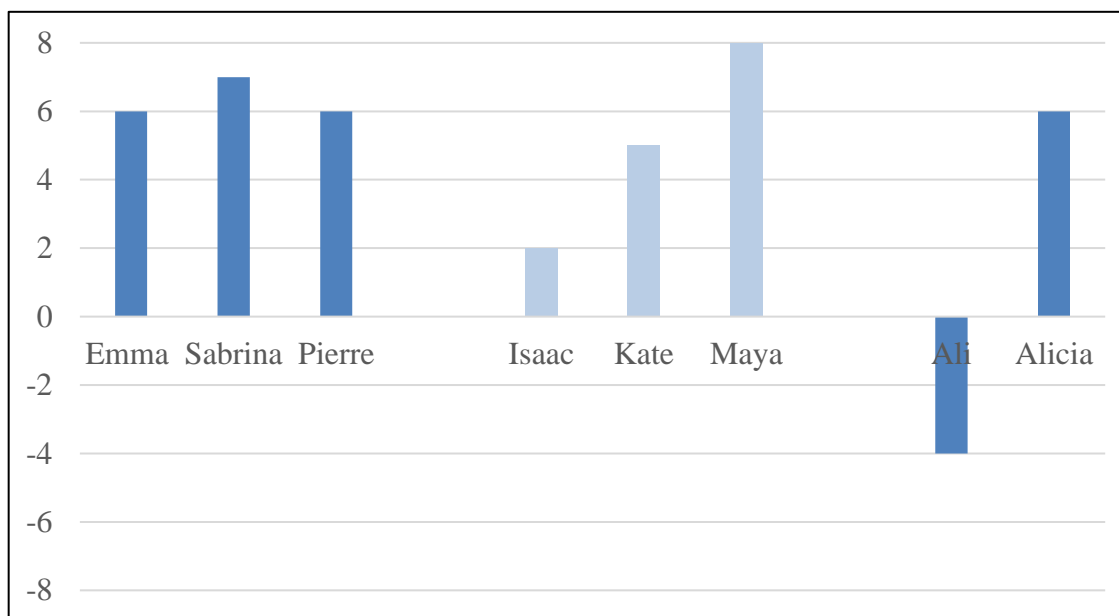


Figure 4. Scores liés à la perception de l'utilité de la grammaire

Les trois élèves du premier groupe 1 semblent avoir développé une perception positive face à l'utilité de la grammaire. Tous ces participants affirment que l'enseignement grammatical leur permet de parfaire la qualité de leurs productions. Sabrina explique :

Expérimentateur : Alors, dis-moi Sabrina, la grammaire, pour toi, ça sert à quoi ?

Sabrina : Euh...ça sert pour, comme, quand je veux parler, je peux utiliser comme le...euh les bons mots et comme, si je voulais dire, comme *la chaise*, je pouvais aussi en train de dire *le chaise*.

Dans ce passage, non seulement Sabrina nomme-t-elle une utilité de la grammaire, celle en lien avec la bonification de ses discours oraux, elle cible aussi un fait de langue, l'accord du déterminant en genre, qu'elle utilise en exemple<sup>2</sup>. En fait, à la suite de ce court extrait, elle discute également de la conjugaison et de la position de l'adjectif dans le groupe nominal.

Le questionnaire nous dévoile que les différents élèves du groupe 2 se sont construit des perceptions différentes de la grammaire. Contrairement aux élèves du groupe 1, ils ne font jamais explicitement mention de faits de langue. Isaac, par exemple, souligne que la grammaire lui est utile afin de comprendre les mots et, plus généralement, de connaître la langue.

Expérimentateur : Est-ce que ça sert à autre chose ?

Isaac : Tu peux savoir leur langue. Tu vois comment écrire dans des différentes langues.

Il nous est difficile de faire sens de ces propos d'Isaac, qui a obtenu le score le plus faible de son regroupement. Il est tout de même intéressant qu'il ne se limite pas, dans son discours, à l'apprentissage du français, la grammaire lui étant principalement enseignée dans cette langue. Peut-être veut-il dire que l'apprentissage grammatical contribue au développement de compétences rédactionnelles dans plusieurs langues, mais, sans précisions de sa part, nous ne pouvons pas nous avancer de manière définitive.

À l'instar d'Isaac, Kate, qui obtient trois points de plus que son camarade au questionnaire, souligne que la grammaire lui permet d'écrire des textes ; elle ne fait toutefois pas mention d'autres langues que le français.

Expérimentateur : Ma première petite question... d'après toi Kate, faire de la grammaire en classe là, ça sert à quoi?

Kate : Pour que, quand on est plus vieux que comme, si on écrit des textes, si on peut comme écrire les histoires.

Bien qu'elle reconnaisse cette utilité scripturale, il appert qu'elle l'associe à la vie adulte, qu'elle n'en perçoit pas l'utilité immédiate. Cet état de fait trouve un écho certain dans la suite de l'entrevue, quand nous lui demandons de nous faire part d'autres utilités de la grammaire.

Expérimentateur : Est-ce que ça sert à autre chose?

Kate : Euh...like, for jobs.

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<sup>2</sup> Cet exemple est intéressant, car il présente une difficulté qui est principalement attestée chez des locuteurs du français langue seconde. En effet, le choix du genre du déterminant, qui relève de l'assignation du genre des noms, n'est que peu documenté en L1, puisque les élèves ont souvent construit les connaissances implicites permettant la sélection du genre nominal. Cela, à notre avis, montre la pertinence d'un arrimage conceptuel L1/L2 pour les milieux francophones minoritaires (Blain, 2003; Thibeault, 2016).

Expérimentateur : For jobs? Okay. Et autre chose? How is it useful for jobs ?

Kate : Comme, si tu dois comme, enseigner le grammaire, de le savoir. Si tu travailles n'importe où...you have to take notes and give them to people. You have to know, like, how to write.

On remarque encore une fois dans cet extrait que la grammaire, pour Kate, est utile, certes, mais qu'elle en voit principalement une praticité, celle de pouvoir remplir les tâches qui sous-tendent un potentiel emploi.

Au questionnaire, les membres du groupe 3, Ali et Alicia, affichent des scores distincts, cette dernière percevant davantage les bénéfices de la grammaire. Ali semble tout de même en reconnaître deux utilités, la première linguistique, l'autre scolaire. Il postule d'entrée de jeu que cet objet d'apprentissage lui vient en aide lorsqu'il écrit et lit des textes. Concernant l'écriture, nous avons recueilli les propos suivants.

Expérimentateur : Comment ça t'aide à écrire des histoires ?

Ali : Euh, parce que, j'aime écrire beaucoup, et dans des tests, tests d'écriture, yeah, je dois savoir comment... les... analyser les phrases. Et tests de grammaire, je dois savoir quoi ce que, comment on utilise les phrases.

Il mentionne donc explicitement un intérêt pour l'écriture, mais il met l'accent sur l'utilité de la grammaire en fonction des examens qu'il doit compléter à l'école, notamment en syntaxe. Concernant la lecture, il précise ceci :

Expérimentateur : Puis comment, tu as dit que quand tu lis aussi, ça t'aide. Comment ça t'aide quand tu lis ?

Ali : Parce que je peux savoir comment les prononcer.

Expérimentateur : Est-ce que tu peux m'en dire plus ?

Ali : Euh, parce que comme, euh, well, maintenant on faisait le mot *écureuil*. Je lisais le phrase et j'étais comme, je ne savais pas comment le prononcer parce qu'il y avait un *e* à la fin et j'étais comme, *l'écureul* ou *écureuil* ?

Expérimentateur : Et, donc, la grammaire t'aide à pouvoir le prononcer correctement ?

Ali : Oui.

Dans ce passage, Ali déclare que la grammaire lui vient en aide dans l'association des graphèmes aux phonèmes correspondants ; on peut dès lors questionner ce qu'est la grammaire pour cet élève, sa définition allant au-delà du domaine linguistique qui y est traditionnellement associé, la morphosyntaxe.

Pour terminer, soulignons qu'Alicia, qui obtient un score d'utilité plus élevé qu'Ali, reconnaît les apports de la grammaire dans l'élaboration de discours dotés de sens.

Expérimentateur : Alicia, pour toi, dis-moi, faire de la grammaire en classe, ça sert à quoi?

Alicia : Ça sert comme, quand tu dis le, quand tu dis le sentence, ça fait plus de sens...

Expérimentateur : Okay.

Alicia : ...et tu peux comme understand qu'est-ce qu'on va dire, comme ça, ya.

On remarque donc que, contrairement à Ali, ce n'est pas l'association graphophonémique qui lui vient à l'esprit quand nous la questionnons sur l'utilité de la grammaire, c'est plutôt la construction de sens que cet objet facilite pour elle.

#### *Le sentiment d'efficacité personnelle en grammaire*

Les résultats de nos huit participants quant à leur sentiment d'efficacité personnelle en grammaire sont globalement plus bas que ceux associés à leur perception de son utilité. Le figure 5 présente les scores qu'ils ont obtenus.

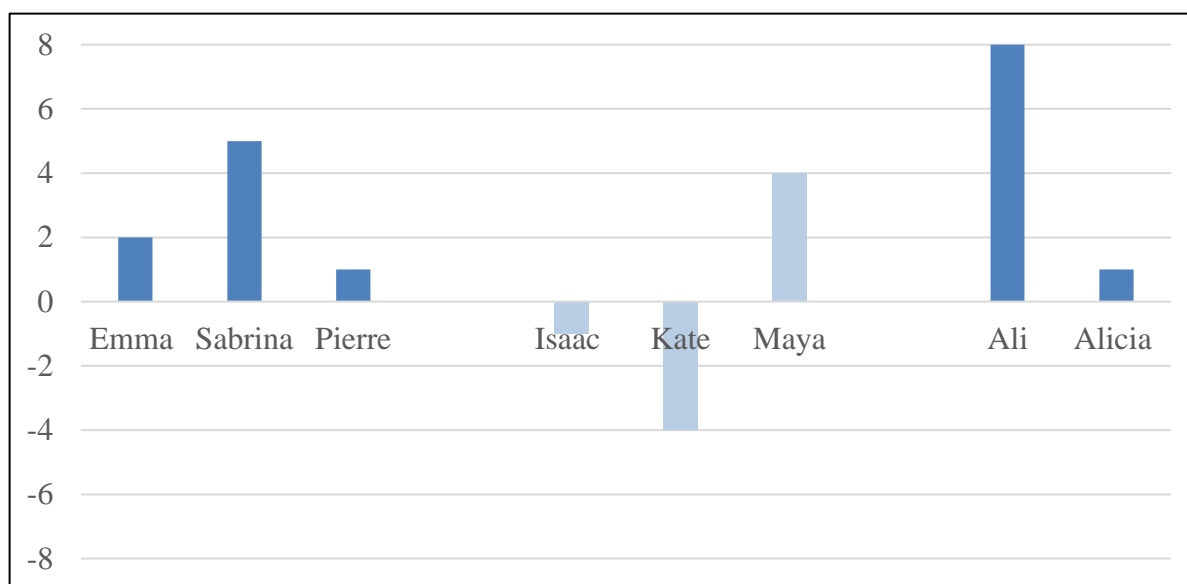


Figure 5. Scores liés au sentiment d'efficacité personnelle en grammaire

Cette fois-ci, alors qu'il était parmi les élèves dont les scores étaient les plus bas pour ce qui est des indicateurs précédents, Ali obtient le score le plus élevé, 8/8. Il est suivi de Sabrina (5/8) et de Maya (4/8), qui sont encore une fois parmi les scripteurs dont le résultat est le plus haut. Viennent ensuite Emma (2/8), Pierre et Alicia (1/8), Isaac (-1/8) et Kate (-4/8).

Disparates, les scores des élèves du groupe 1 sont tous positifs. Pour Emma, qui nous affirme être compétente en grammaire, c'est l'étude des verbes qui est facile, bien qu'elle ne sache pas nous dire pourquoi. Du côté de Sabrina, celle qui obtient le score le plus élevé du groupe au questionnaire, l'analyse de phrases semble revêtir une certaine facilité.

Expérimentateur : Qu'est-ce qui est facile pour toi en grammaire ?

- Sabrina : Facile? Facile c'est, c'est comme, essayer de trouver le sujet, le verbe et le prédicat et des choses dans les phrases.
- Expérimentateur : Okay. Pourquoi c'est facile, ça ?
- Sabrina : C'est facile car euh, car on utilise comme des petites machines. Alors c'est plus, alors c'est plus facile à savoir, comme, et tu dois te poser des questions, comme, pour savoir si c'est un sujet ou le verbe ou le prédicat.

Les machines dont parle Sabrina renvoient à un outil référentiel que son enseignante utilise pour aider ses élèves à poser des hypothèses sur les fonctions grammaticales et les catégories de mots, et à les valider (Lefrançois, Montésinos-Gelet et Anctil, 2018). Dans cette machine, par exemple la machine à sujet, se trouvent les questions que l'élève doit se poser pour vérifier si un groupe de mots est bel et bien le sujet de la phrase (*Puis-je l'effacer ? Puis-je l'encadrer par c'est...qui ?*, etc.). Il appert donc que cet outil, qui repose sur la réflexion métalinguistique de l'élève, facilite l'apprentissage grammatical de Sabrina. Par ailleurs, quand on la questionne concernant ses difficultés en grammaire, elle mentionne le choix des radicaux des verbes et la mémorisation qui lui est associée.

Pierre, qui affiche le sentiment d'efficacité personnelle le plus faible au questionnaire, tient des propos fort différents de ceux de ses pairs du groupe 1. Contrairement à elles, il affirme que les verbes sont faciles pour lui.

- Expérimentateur : Qu'est-ce qui est facile pour toi en grammaire ?
- Pierre : Verbes.
- Expérimentateur : Et pourquoi cela ?
- Pierre : Tu dois les savoir, tu dois les savoir par cœur.

Il avance aussi que le repérage du verbe est facile, car il peut prendre appui sur la terminaison du mot, qui lui en indique la catégorie grammaticale. Pour ce qui est de ses difficultés, il fait mention de l'identification du prédicat de phrase.

- Expérimentateur : Pourquoi tu ne peux pas le trouver (le prédicat) ?
- Pierre : Non, comme, le verbe si tu le trouves, tu peux trouver le prédicat facile, mais si tu ne peux pas trouver le verbe, tu ne peux pas trouver le prédicat de phrase.

Le prédicat, fonction de premier niveau et constituant de la phrase syntaxique française, ne peut être repéré à l'aide de manipulations décisives, comme c'est le cas, par exemple, du sujet. Quand la phrase est de type déclaratif, l'élève peut donc procéder par élimination, en identifiant le sujet et les potentiels compléments de phrase, et en décrétant que le groupe restant de cette analyse est le prédicat. Il peut aussi, comme le précise Pierre, repérer le verbe, ses compléments et ses modificateurs, et postuler qu'il s'agit du prédicat. Cette procédure, couteuse en temps et en énergie cognitive, est tributaire d'un ensemble de sous-procédures, dont l'identification du verbe, et semble donc engendrer des difficultés chez Pierre.

Le sentiment d'efficacité personnelle en grammaire des élèves du groupe 2 est généralement plus bas que celui des participants du premier groupe. Isaac souligne dans



l'entrevue qu'il ne se trouve pas compétent en grammaire parce ce n'est pas une discipline qui l'intéresse et qu'il préfère en fait les mathématiques. Quand on lui pose la question relativement à ce qu'il trouve facile en grammaire, il répond en mobilisant un argument lié à la fréquence d'occurrences de certaines formes grammaticales.

Expérimentateur : Qu'est-ce qui est facile pour toi en grammaire ?

Isaac : Conjuguer au présent.

Expérimentateur : Okay, pourquoi tu trouves ça facile ?

Isaac : Car euh, on utilise le présent beaucoup de fois dans la vie. Comme *je, tu, il, elle*, des choses comme ça, on utilise ça beaucoup dans la vie.

De tout notre échantillon, Isaac est le seul qui recourt à ce type de critères pour expliquer ce qui, pour lui, est facile en grammaire.

Celle dont le score est le plus élevé dans le groupe 2, Maya, souligne qu'elle éprouve une certaine facilité à repérer le sujet et le complément de phrase.

Expérimentateur : Pourquoi c'est facile trouver le complément de phrase ?

Maya : Euh, car euh, qu'est-ce qu'on doit vraiment faire est, trouver un groupe de mots et voir comme, si on peut le bouger à une autre place... I'm not sure how to say it in French.

Expérimentateur : Not a problem. Why is it easy to find this complement?

Maya : It's easier because, when I move it, it helps me understand the sentence better sometimes.

Nous relevons plusieurs points intéressants dans cet extrait. D'abord, les manipulations syntaxiques semblent faciliter l'apprentissage de la grammaire pour Maya et, plus précisément, l'analyse de phrases. Il appert aussi que, grâce à ces procédures métalinguistiques, elle peut, avec plus d'aisance, faire sens des énoncés qu'elle analyse. On retrouve donc encore une fois les bienfaits d'un enseignement grammatical sur l'apprentissage de la lecture. Concernant ses difficultés, elle précise qu'elle ne connaît pas toujours le genre des noms qu'elle utilise en production.

Dans le groupe 3, Ali se démarque cette fois-ci, non pas parce que, comme pour les autres indicateurs du questionnaire de la dynamique motivationnelle en grammaire, il obtient l'un des scores les plus bas, mais bien parce que, en ce qui a trait au sentiment d'efficacité personnelle, il obtient le score maximal. Concernant ses facilités, il juge l'analyse de phrases comme étant facile.

Expérimentateur : Qu'est-ce qui est facile pour toi en grammaire.

Ali : L'analyse de phrases.

Expérimentateur : Okay, pourquoi ?

Ali : Parce que c'est juste facile, parce que la seule chose que tu dois faire c'est comme, comprendre la phrase, tu dois juste savoir le sujet. Comme, quand tu sais le sujet, tu sais de quoi la phrase va parler à propos de. Et tu vas savoir où est le verbe parce que le verbe est toujours avant ou derrière le sujet.

Dans ce passage, Ali nous montre qu'il connaît les outils qui permettent l'analyse des phrases françaises et que leur mise en application lui facilite l'effort de réflexion grammaticale<sup>3</sup>. Pour lui, ce sont les efforts de mémorisation qu'il doit déployer qui lui engendrent des difficultés.

### *Discussion*

Au regard des données présentées dans cet article, on peut dire que les liens entre le développement de la compétence qui permet l'accord verbal à l'écrit chez nos participants et leur motivation en grammaire sont relativement étroits. En effet, les scores généraux obtenus au questionnaire en motivation montrent que les élèves du groupe 1 sont plus motivés dans leur apprentissage grammatical, alors que les élèves du groupe 2 le sont moins. Les élèves du groupe 3, pour leur part, présentent des résultats mitigés : Alicia semble relativement motivée, tandis qu'Ali obtient un score de 0/24. Conformément à plusieurs travaux sur la motivation et l'écriture (Saddler, 2012; Troia, Shankland et Wolbers, 2012), lesquels discutent les effets positifs d'une motivation élevée en écriture sur la qualité des productions écrites, nous posons l'hypothèse qu'un tel lien existe aussi entre la motivation en grammaire et le développement de la compétence à écrire le verbe.

Nos données nous permettent de surcroît d'offrir un éclairage relatif aux indicateurs qui, dans notre étude, permettent de rendre compte de la dynamique motivationnelle de nos élèves en grammaire : l'intérêt en grammaire, la perception de l'utilité de la grammaire et le sentiment d'efficacité personnelle en grammaire. Pour ce qui est de l'intérêt, les résultats au questionnaire varient d'un apprenant à l'autre, mais les propos qu'ils tiennent pendant l'entrevue permettent de faire émerger certaines tendances. En effet, les élèves du groupe 1, plus compétents en grammaire dès le début de l'étude, savent cibler les concepts qui suscitent chez eux un intérêt et ceux qui, à contrario, constituent une source d'ennui. Ils font usage de termes métalangagiers de manière plus fréquente pour expliquer leurs points de vue et semblent prendre plaisir à adopter une posture réflexive à l'endroit des unités constitutives de la langue. Enfin, l'ensemble des élèves de notre échantillon déclare que les efforts de mémorisation qu'ils doivent parfois déployer lors de l'apprentissage de certains concepts ne contribuent guère à leur intérêt vis-à-vis de la grammaire.

De manière générale, les scores obtenus quant aux perceptions à l'égard de l'utilité de la grammaire sont plus élevés que ceux concernant leur intérêt. Cet état de fait corrobore les résultats de Jean et Simard (2011) qui, en langue seconde, ont remarqué que l'apprentissage de la grammaire renvoyait pour les élèves à un mal nécessaire, qu'elle serait utile, mais ennuyeuse. Les élèves du groupe 1, dont la compétence est la plus élevée au moment où nous avons décrit la dynamique motivationnelle des participants en grammaire, déclarent que leur apprentissage de la grammaire leur permet de rehausser la qualité de leurs productions écrites et, globalement, ils sont capables de cibler, comme nous l'avons remarqué dans les extraits de verbatim abordant leur intérêt en grammaire, les concepts grammaticaux les plus utiles. Les élèves du groupe 2, plus faibles, font aussi mention de l'apport de la grammaire pour la qualité de leurs productions, mais ne se focalisent pas sur les faits de langue. Enfin, les élèves du groupe 3, qui développeront quelques mois après

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<sup>3</sup> Fait intéressant, au moment où Ali a pris part à cet entretien, il n'utilise pratiquement pas les manipulations syntaxiques quand il accorde ses verbes. Par contre, Ali est celui qui, quelques mois plus tard, en février 2016, fait un usage presque systématique de ces manipulations lors des tâches portant sur le verbe et son accord.

la description de leur dynamique motivationnelle en grammaire une compétence à accorder les verbes tout à fait opérationnelle, en mentionnent des bénéfices différents de leurs pairs ; Ali aborde explicitement l'association des phonèmes aux graphèmes, alors qu'Alicia parle de l'apport de la grammaire dans la construction de sens.

Enfin, le sentiment d'efficacité personnelle en grammaire de tous les élèves du groupe 1 est positif, alors que, dans le groupe 2, il se situe en deçà de 0/24 pour Kate et Isaac. Ce résultat rappelle celui de Boyer (2012), qui a montré que ce sentiment pouvait être influent sur l'apprentissage orthographique. Dans le groupe 3, le score d'Ali, en ce qui a trait à cet indicateur, mérite aussi d'être discuté. En effet, pour tous les autres indicateurs de la motivation, ce participant obtient un score négatif, alors qu'il atteint le score maximal pour ce qui est de son sentiment d'efficacité personnelle en grammaire. Ali, qui peaufinera sa compétence liée à l'accord du verbe de manière remarquable à la suite de notre description de sa dynamique motivationnelle en grammaire, nous rappelle donc les résultats de chercheurs (Bandura, 1997; Bouffard et Narciss, 2011) soutenant que l'illusion de compétence et d'incompétence devient fréquemment réalité. Par ailleurs, les propos qu'ils tiennent lors de l'entrevue nous indiquent que plusieurs élèves – Sabrina, Emma, Ali et Maya – trouvent l'analyse phrastique facile, notamment parce qu'ils peuvent recourir à des outils d'analyse pour mener à bien un tel travail grammatical. Enfin, à l'exception de Pierre, tous les élèves peinent à s'investir dans un effort de mémorisation quand ils font de la grammaire à l'école.

### *Conclusion*

Nous ne saurions, en raison du devis qualitatif qui a été retenu, suggérer la représentativité des données qui sont ici présentées. Cela étant, nos résultats nous encouragent à poursuivre la réflexion sur la motivation et son rôle dans l'apprentissage grammatical. Ainsi, à la lumière de nos résultats, il nous semble important que les enseignants mettent en place des pratiques qui rendent les élèves cognitivement actifs lors de leur apprentissage et qui traitent la langue non pas comme un amas de composantes qui n'entretiennent pas de liens entre elles, mais bien comme un tout unifié, cohérent et, ipso facto, accessible. Les apprenants pourront dès lors comprendre, de manière féconde, les rouages du système par l'intermédiaire duquel se réalisent les discours qu'ils produisent et devraient donc déployer des efforts de mémorisation moins considérables pour le mettre en application.

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# *Identifying Patterns in and Relationships Between Graphic Representations and Talk of Northern Canadian Rural and Indigenous Children*

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## *Abstract*

In this paper, we report on the first phase of an initiative to develop a classroom tool to document and describe children's emergent writing. Here, we describe the process through which we developed an analytic framework to assist us in identifying patterns in young northern rural and Indigenous children's graphic representations in response to three formal tasks. Participating children lived in 11 northern, rural communities in two Canadian provinces. The resulting patterns, consistent with those described in the literature on children's emergent writing, suggest the need to explore further how children use the verbal mode while representing meaning graphically.

## *Introduction*

Researchers working within an emergent perspective of writing understand young children as meaning makers, capable of producing a variety of socially situated textual forms that reflect their basic understandings about writing (Harste, Burke, & Woodward, 1982; Kress, 1997; Sulzby, 1985). Past research has documented the development of specific features of young children's writing (e.g., Gombert & Fayol, 1992; Tolchinsky-Landsmann & Levin, 1985) and name writing (e.g., Bloodgood, 1999; Hildreth, 1936; Levin, Both-de Vries, Aram, & Bus, 2005), and how specific domains of emergent writing account for children's written performance on writing-related tasks (e.g., Puranik & Lonigan, 2014). Recently, researchers have sought to create organizational frameworks for understanding aspects of young, English-speaking children's written representations (e.g., Mackenzie, Scull, & Munsie, 2013; Rowe & Wilson, 2015). However, these studies tend to be urban-centric and focus primarily on children's written responses to formal tasks administered in a one-on-one setting.

As researchers participating in a partnership project to support the oral and written language of northern rural and Indigenous children through play, we wanted to build on these recent assessment frameworks to create a tool that will assist participating rural and northern teachers in documenting their students' graphic representations during classroom writing activities. Our goal in this phase of the larger research initiative was to generate an analytic framework to allow us to identify patterns in the children's graphic representations that would assist us in creating such a tool. The purpose of this paper is twofold: to illustrate

the process through which we created the framework and to describe patterns revealed through the application of the framework to young children's graphic representations. Our work builds on past studies of assessment of young children's writing by introducing an alternative framework for analyzing emergent writing. This framework highlights observed patterns in how a group of young Indigenous and non-Indigenous children living in rural and northern communities represent and communicate meaning in the visual mode.

We begin with an introduction to the context of our larger project, of which this multi-phased initiative is a part, and then situate this particular initiative within theory and research. We describe the iterative process through which we developed the framework and the research questions that guided our data analysis. We then discuss the resulting patterns in the graphic representations of young northern and rural children and relate these patterns to previous research. We conclude by highlighting changes to the data collection and analysis procedures for Phase 2 of our initiative.

### *Context*

The aim of the Northern Oral Language and Writing through Play (NOW Play) project—a collaboration between university researchers, teachers, and early childhood educators (ECEs)—is to support the literacy achievement of Indigenous and non-Indigenous children in northern rural communities in Canada. We—university researchers—visit each of the teachers for one-on-one meetings about their individual action research initiatives about five times each school year. Using a dialectic process (Nicholson & Kroll, 2015), we view videos of the children's play that teachers have recorded using iPods, and discuss how the children are responding to the initiatives. Together, we develop theoretical understandings of what play interactions show about young children's language, and social and conceptual learning.

The need for a classroom observation tool to document children's writing development was voiced by participating educators in interviews at the beginning of our six-year project. At this point, they were using developmental tools that focused on children's understandings about print (Gentry, 2007). Having collaboratively created a tool for recording observations of children's social uses of language in play (see Peterson, 2017), participating teachers had gained an interest in expanding their ongoing assessment of children's writing to include content. We would also use this information to inform theory.

### *Conceptual Framework and Related Research*

#### *Conceptual Framework*

Educators often think of literacy from a linguistic perspective and place an emphasis on developing children's oral and written modes of communication; however, children are active meaning makers who will make meaning through multiple modes and with any medium at hand (Kress, 1997). As such, *writing* can be conceived of as a graphic mode, with meaning being conveyed through both writing and drawing, and with the different meaning-making potentials of these two forms of representation taken into consideration (Kress, 2000). In writing, meaning is communicated through action, event, and sequence within a narrative, whereas in drawing, meaning is communicated through "the inclusion of visually noticeable elements and by the positioning of these elements in space (Kress, 2000, p. 195).

Children develop as writers through their interactions with others in print-rich environments (Harste et al., 1982; Teale & Sulzby, 1986) and as drawers through their exposure to models of drawing in their natural surroundings, such as the classroom and the home (Anning & Ring, 2004). Although there is no set sequence of development (Sulzby, 1992), researchers have identified patterns in the features of children's graphic representations as they progress towards more conventional forms of writing (Gombert & Fayol, 1992; Levin & Bus, 2003; Puranik & Lonigan, 2011). In general, when presented with writing materials, such as a pencil and paper, and asked to write, young children represent meaning using non-letter forms (e.g., scribbling, wavy lines, circles), letter-like forms (e.g., pseudo letters), or letters (e.g., letters from their own name, other letters). These forms may reflect more the purpose of writing than the child's developmental level (Kenner, 2000).

Researchers espousing the stage theory of drawing (e.g., Kellogg, 1969/2015) view children's early marks as a progression from basic scribbles through to early pictorialism, whereas researchers working within a sociocultural perspective consider how meaning is represented through the child's choice of content (e.g., Anning & Ring, 2004) and how content has been organized on paper (e.g., Bearne, 2017; Lancaster, 2007). Young children express their intended meanings visually through structural clues within the drawing, verbally through rich descriptions as they draw, or as announcements once they complete their drawings (Cox, 2005). By studying the process of drawing as well as the graphic products, educators gain insight into children's cognitive processing which, according to Anning (1997), "can be as informative as studying their language" (p. 237).

### *Related Research*

*Assessment.* Underpinning traditional writing assessment practices is a belief, as Huot (1996) asserts, that a student's ability to write is a fixed and consistent trait and that trained individuals can score a student's written response on a standardized assessment using a standardized scoring rubric. However, instead of placing their faith in what he calls, the "technology of testing" (p. 549), Huot suggests educators espouse a new type of writing assessment. Rather than establishing validity through statistical calculations of inter-rater reliability, he recommends educators consider the consequences of the assessment, specifically, "the linking of instruction and practical purposes with the concept of measuring students' ability to engage in a specific literacy event or events" (p. 561). In other words, tasks administered to students as part of an assessment should validate what teachers are doing in the classroom.

*Writing assessment tools.* Rowe and Wilson (2015) designed a standard writing task to generate a set of categories and common vocabulary to describe four features of young children's writing development. Their *Write Start! Writing Assessment* included a photo caption task, which they administered in the fall and spring in one-on-one settings to 139 children, ranging in age from 2 to 5 years. The children were 98% African American, English-speakers, and lived in a low-income neighbourhood in an American city. They concluded that sequenced categories generated through their formal assessment could provide teachers with a "common vocabulary for describing and tracking four important features of young children's writing" (p. 285) and a base from which they could "infer children's current hypotheses and approaches to writing" (p. 285).

Rather than designing a task to generate descriptive categories and a common vocabulary, Mackenzie et al. (2013) designed a procedure for analyzing early writing. Teachers instructed 6 -7 year olds enrolled in Year One classrooms in two Australian states to write freely for a period of 20 minutes. Through their close analysis of selected writing samples, the researchers generated descriptors of competence within the six dimensions of writing from the national curriculum document. They found that the tool successfully considered students' writing development across all six dimensions and concluded that it allowed for "a systematic analysis of writing competence" (p. 386) that would assist teachers in framing their own teaching experiences as well as the learning experiences of their students.

*Literacy in rural schools.* Educators have expressed concerns with the literacy abilities of young rural children. However, findings from rural education research suggests the need to unpack the relationship between literacy scores and rural conditions. Durham and Smith (2006) looked for a relationship between young children's metropolitan status and their emerging literacy ability. Using multiple measures to assess their reading level at the beginning of kindergarten, the authors determined rural *not* to be a variable. They found that, although non-metropolitan status was associated with lower initial reading scores, a child's educational performance was related to their socioeconomic status and ethnicity. In her review of *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)*, Jimerson (2005) found an incompatibility between the structure of NCLB and the delivery of education in rural settings. For example, she cites statistical problems with high-stakes testing that comes from small population sizes (N's) and suggests this incompatibility as a possible reason why small schools have been labeled as failing.

Corbett and Donehower (2017) recommend rural literacy scholarship be viewed as "an emerging subfield in both literacy studies and rural studies" (p. 1) and suggest that researchers work with educators to better align literacy instruction in school with the social practices of the community. In Canada, a high proportion of individuals with Indigenous backgrounds live in northern and rural communities (Clarke, Surgenor, Imrich, & Wells, 2003). Given the possibility that within these communities young children's early experiences with print might differ from those experienced by children living in more populated southern centres, our goal during this phase of the initiative was to work collaboratively with participants to develop a research-based framework that captures nuances within the children's writing development. Specifically, we wanted to document patterns in the graphic forms they use while drawing and writing, how they visually communicate content, and how they convey their message. It is beyond the scope of our research during this phase to correlate these patterns with the community context.

### *Methodology*

To create a framework, we needed to collect and analyze samples of the students' writing. Although we recognize that children's emergent writing is best understood in a natural setting (Rowe & Wilson, 2015), we drew from past studies on young children's writing (e.g., Gombert & Fayol, 1992; Levin et al., 2005; Puranik & Lonigan, 2011, 2014) and chose to work individually with children, asking them to participate in formal tasks, designed and implemented by the researchers.

### *Sites and Participants*

This study was conducted in nine communities in two Canadian provinces. Our research sites are located in four northern resource-based towns with populations of 400-7000 people and two fly-in First Nations communities with populations of 200 and 500 people. We also partner with an Aboriginal Head Start program in a northern city. Each of the seven participating rural communities is located 200-700 kilometers from a major urban area. We collaborate with teachers in seven classrooms in three communities in a western province, and 12 classrooms in four Indigenous and two non-Indigenous communities in a central province. The mother tongue of all participating kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers and their students is either English or an Aboriginal English Dialect. Eight of the teachers, working in the First Nations communities and the Aboriginal Head Start program, are Indigenous, and the other 11 teachers across all the communities are non-Indigenous.

In this pilot phase, teachers selected approximately six students of mixed academic abilities to participate with the final sample drawn from those children whose parents/caregivers gave written consent. More specific details of the participating children are found in Table 1.

With the help of various district staff and classroom teachers, researchers collected writing samples in the fall, winter, and spring terms of one school year. In total, we collected 323 writing samples from 162 children. We administered the tasks to the children individually, either in a separate corner of the classroom or in a quiet location, such as the hallway or empty classroom.

Table 1

### *Participating children*

Grade (Age)	Central Province		Western Province	
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
Pre-K (3)	8	0	0	0
JK (4)	34	10	0	0
SK (5)	51	15	2	15
Grade 1 (6)	3	1	7	16
Total	96	26	9	31
	122		40	

### *Selecting the Tasks*

We chose to engage the children in three tasks. Here we outline our rationale for each one.

*Name writing.* During our initial meeting, many of the kindergarten teachers shared with us the goal of wanting their students to write their first names by the end of the school year. Research also recognizes the importance of given names for young children (Clay, 1979), with name writing included in studies assessing young children's early writing development (e.g., Gombert & Fayol, 1992; Levin & Bus, 2003; Puranik, Schreiber, Estabrook, & O'Donnell, 2014). Research has determined that name writing improves more rapidly with age than does the writing of dictated words (Hildreth, 1936; Levin et al.,



2005), and children often use letters from their names in early attempts at writing individual words (Bloodgood, 1999). Given this importance, to begin a session, we asked each child to write his or her name.

*Drawing.* When given the choice between writing or drawing, young children often choose drawing as their communicative tool since, through drawing, they can focus on content rather than form (Landsmann & Karmiloff-Smith, 1992). The content within drawings often reflects the theme of family (Anning & Ring, 2004; Coates & Coates, 2006). Furthermore, the way in which children arrange individual elements in their drawing suggests syntactic principles similar to those underlying writing systems (Lancaster, 2007). For these reasons, we asked the children to draw a picture about what they liked to do with their family.

Because talk can permeate the child's writing process, providing meaning and the means for getting meaning on paper (Cox, 2005; Dyson, 1983), as part of our assessment, we made notes to capture the child's talk during the drawing task. If children ascribe meaning to elements of their drawings, then drawings are considered to be representational (Martlew & Sorsby, 1995), and so once the drawing was complete, we asked the child to tell us about the drawing.

*Writing.* Research suggests a developmental pattern in young children's writing (Gombert & Fayol, 1992; Levin & Bus, 2003), yet there is little research evidence to support a precise and invariant sequence in children's writing development (Sulzby, 1992). However, according to Rowe and Wilson (2015), a sequence of categories is "useful for forming general expectations for sequences in which children add new more advanced writing performances to their writing repertoires" and "to tentatively predict the kinds of emergent writing performances children are likely to construct for each writing feature as they gain experience with writing" (p. 285). Rather than generating a sequence of categories to assist teachers in understanding their students' emergent writing development, our goal was to generate a set of descriptors to capture patterns in children's written performances from which teachers might elicit possible next steps to support writing development.

In order to gather samples of children's writing, Mackenzie et al. (2013) engaged children in a free-writing activity. Likewise, we chose to present children with the opportunity to write about what they liked to do after school. Since we were working with young children, we decided to make the assessment dynamic and model for them a strategy for spelling individual words. Specifically, we wrote our question on paper and as we wrote, we stretched out the sounds within individual words before asking the child to write a response. We then asked the child to read back what he or she had written.

### *Developing the Protocol*

At the conclusion of our fall data collection, we met to reflect on the tasks, our administration process, and how we recorded observations. We came to three conclusions. First, the writing samples reflected some variation in how administrators instructed the children to respond to the tasks. For example, at one site, a teacher who was assisting with the administration drew outlines for some children's names and asked the children to trace rather than write their names. Second, the two questions we asked the children might have been confusing since they invoked similar responses. For example, we first asked the children to draw a picture of what they liked to do with their families and then asked them



to write what they liked to do after school. Finally, by making this a dynamic assessment, the complexity of the task analyses may have increased. Based in part on these conclusions and in part on the feedback we received during our meetings with teacher-participants, we decided to revise the tasks and how they would be administered in February/March and May/June.

To standardize the delivery of the tasks, we created a writing task protocol. This protocol included descriptions of the tasks as well as verbal prompts for the administrator to use in response to a child's actions. We also combined task questions so that administrators only asked each child a single question, "What do you like to do with your family?" Following this question, children were prompted to draw a picture, to explain or talk about their picture, to write something about their picture, and then to read back their writing.

During the second and third rounds of data collection, only university researchers, and at one site the school district staff, administered the tasks. We followed our writing task protocol and recorded our observations by checking off boxes directly on an observational checklist and writing notes in corresponding spaces. We administered the protocol to 114 children in September/October, 108 children in February/March, and 101 children in May/June, with 49 students in attendance to participate in all three rounds. Participation varied due to children's attendance on the days of the tasks, children transferring out of the school mid-year, or to children bringing back a signed consent form after the first round of the task.

### *Determining Variables and Generating Categories*

*Determining the variables.* Following the second and third rounds of data collection, we examined the samples of the children's drawing and writing, and based on our review of the literature and on our own experiences as teachers of young children, we identified features that we believed should be included in our framework. In all three tasks, we were interested in documenting the kinds of marks students made on the page. Within the two writing tasks, we identified two distinct forms: non-letter and letter. Drawing from Kellogg (1969/2015) we identified three distinct forms within the picture task: unidentifiable scribbles, marks, or shapes; unidentifiable images; and identifiable images.

When examining a child's picture, we drew from Anning and Ring (2004) and Bearne (2017), and focused on the content within the picture (e.g., characters, objects) and the child's elaboration of that content. We also noted relational aspects (Lancaster, 2007) such as the size and position of the characters and/or objects within the picture. When examining a child's written response, we focused on the content of the writing (e.g., words or sentences). Drawing from Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, and Johnston (2008), we focused on spelling stage (e.g., emergent, alphabetic), and from Puranik and Lonigan (2011) and Rowe and Wilson (2015), we looked at linguistic features (e.g., discreteness, directional knowledge). Finally, when examining the message conveyed through both picture and writing, taking from Rowe and Wilson (2015), we focused on the content (linguistic analysis) and coherence (relating verbal response to either the picture or the writing) of the message.

*Generating the categories.* To generate individual categories within each of our variables, we began an inductive analysis of the writing samples following the second round of data collection. Over several meetings, we sat together to review and describe the

samples. After generating a list of descriptive codes for each variable, we collectively coded a common set of samples. Following the third round of data collection, we brought together a group of graduate students to discuss our variables and codes. We created a coding sheet and selected 10 samples for all of us to code. We discussed the variables and codes for each sample, looked carefully at the variations between us to find agreement, and reviewed the notes we had made while coding. We repeated this process two more times to note the codes that overlapped, described the same items, needed modifications, or could be removed. We then created a spreadsheet for variables with drop-down menus for categories/codes. Once we were confident that our variables and categories reflected the children's writing and drawing, a graduate student was tasked with coding the complete set of 323 samples, with one of the researchers periodically checking for agreement in the codes.

### *Data Analysis*

To identify patterns in the children's graphic representations, we filtered the coded samples by grade and Indigeneity and conducted frequency counts for each of the variables. We also looked at changes in the children's responses over time. The following research questions guided our analysis:

1. What forms do children use when writing their own names, drawing a picture, and composing a message?
2. How do children represent content in their pictures and written texts?
3. When explaining their pictures, how complex is the content of the children's messages and how coherent is the verbal message to the picture content?

### *Findings*

Our analysis of the data within the Pilot Phase of the initiative suggests a range in the graphic representations of young Indigenous and non-Indigenous children living in rural and northern Canadian communities in terms of their form, content, and message.<sup>1</sup> Given the low number of participating Indigenous Grade 1 children and non-Indigenous JK children, the findings will only report on tendencies in the comparison between Indigenous and non-Indigenous SK students.

### *Graphic Forms*

*Names.* When tasked with writing their names, the children's responses ranged from marks/lines/shapes/scribbles, to letter-like forms, to conventionally formed letters. In the 1st term, 42% of the JK and 81% of the SK Indigenous children, tended to write their names with letters (ranging from random letters to some or all of the letters from their given names), with this number changing in the 3rd term to 70% in JK and 87% in SK. By the end of the school year, all non-Indigenous children in JK and SK, and over half of Indigenous children in JK and SK (56% and 71%) were printing their given names accurately.

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<sup>1</sup> The frequencies reported in the findings take into consideration the number of samples that we could not code (ranging from 15% to 37% across variables). For example, although 101 children were administered the tasks in Term 3, the *Content of Writing* variable only included 77 samples when calculating frequencies. Samples were not coded if part of a task was missing or there was confusion about how to code a variable.

From JK through to Grade 1, almost all children were writing their given names (whether marks or letters) in a straight line. From the beginning of the school year, all Grade 1 children were writing their names conventionally, although the appropriate use of letter case varied. By the end of the year, all non-Indigenous and most Indigenous Grade 1 children were using the appropriate letter cases. Throughout the year, JK children tended to print their names with a mix of letter cases, with slightly over half of the SKs using appropriate upper- and lowercase letters for their names. At the beginning of the school year, most students across all grades were printing their names with somewhat inconsistent letter sizes, with the majority of Grade 1s printing letters with appropriate relative sizes by the end of the year.

*Pictures.* We found that the children's pictures were composed of scribbles/marks/shapes and images. Almost all Pre-K children drew scribbles/marks/shapes, with JK children beginning the year drawing mainly scribbles and unidentifiable images then ending the year drawing images. SK children began the year drawing unidentifiable images and at the end of the year we could identify most of their images. From Term 1 to Term 3, Indigenous children increased their use of identifiable images from 42% to 82% in JK and 65% to 86% in SK, whereas approximately 87% of non-Indigenous SK children drew identifiable images throughout the year. In all three terms, children in Grade 1 drew pictures using images that could be easily identified.

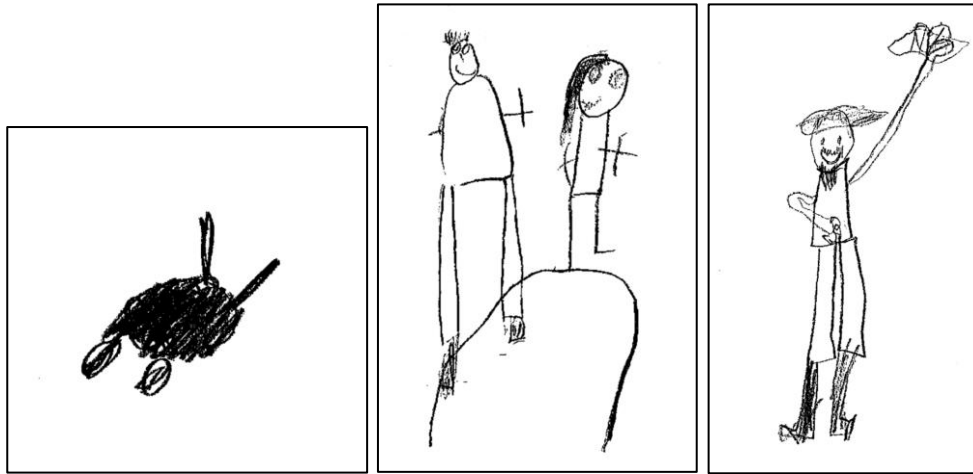
*Words.* When children were asked to write about their pictures, our framework revealed they used a range of forms, including marks/lines/shapes, letter-like forms, and letters. By the third term, of the children who printed responses, 65% of JK, 84% of SK, and all Grade 1 children used letters. With very few exceptions, the children's writing in each grade showed evidence of left to right directional knowledge. Almost all the children used a mix of upper- and lowercase letters, with a few SK (9%) and Grade 1 (37%) children using the appropriate cases, and more children printing letters with appropriate relative letter sizes from Term 1 (13%) to Term 3 (29%).

### *Communicating Content*

*Pictures.* In almost all the drawings, we determined the children intended their marks or images to represent characters (people and animals) and/or objects with some children placing these characters and/or objects into a setting. JK children tended to draw characters more often than objects, but sometimes included objects with their characters. In all grades, some children expressed their ideas by placing both characters and objects in a setting, with this number increasing in Term 3 to 7% of JK, 14% of SK and 43% of Grade 1 children. No Pre-K children included settings in their drawings.

Our framework revealed certain tendencies in the level of detail that the children used to elaborate the content of their pictures. Overall, the majority of students in each grade drew characters, objects, and settings with only a few details and this did not change across the three-task administration. However, over the year, we coded slight changes in the amount of detail used. For example, from beginning to end of school year, the number of children drawing characters with some details increased from 24% to 30% and the number of students (mostly Grade 1s) adding many details to their characters increased from 5% to 9%. The number of children drawing objects with some details increased from 29% to 35% and the number of students adding many details to objects increased from 11% to 23%. The number of children drawing the setting with some details increased from 17%

to 27% and the number of students adding many details to their setting was consistently about 10%.



*Figure 1.* Character details: Students expressed ideas through a few character details (left), some character details (center), and many character details (right).

The students appeared to represent relationships within the content by demonstrating a size difference between and amongst the characters and objects in their pictures. Students typically varied the sizes of their characters to indicate differences between adults and children or people and animals, as well as to indicate differences between characters and objects (e.g., between a person and a checker board or cell phone). A small number of children across the grades (9%) used size to represent differences between all the items they included in their pictures. This number increased slightly (to 16%) by the end of the year.



*Figure 2.* Size differences: Students expressed ideas through size differences between characters (left), size differences between objects (center), and size differences between characters, between objects, and between characters and objects (right).

Throughout the year, we observed that most JK children drew the items in their pictures *floating* on the page. As the year progressed, we found that SK and Grade 1 children tended to move from drawing items floating to *grounding* their items with a line, frame, or setting (from 23% to 36% in SK, and 50% to 74% in Grade 1).

We found JK and SK children, compared to almost no Grade 1s, tended to draw single items or place multiple items randomly on the page, although this tendency

decreased over the year (from Term 1 to Term 3, 77% to 36% for JK, 53% to 26% for SK). At the end of the year, more students (74%) arranged items on their papers than at the beginning of the year (48%). For example, in Term 3, 28% of children related items in a horizontal line, 11% drew items above or below one another, 27% drew items touching, and 8% (mostly Grade 1s) overlapped items, which created some depth in the picture. This tendency was seen in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous children's pictures during this phase of the initiative and suggests the children may be developing more advanced drawing systems (Matthews, 2003) to better represent meaning in their pictures



Figure 3. Position: Students positioned items in a horizontal line (left), above or below one another (center), and overlapping, showing depth (right).

*Words.* We found JK children primarily wrote in the *emergent* spelling stage (Bear et al., 2008). Although SK students showed a range of spelling stages, 66% wrote in the emergent stage. By the end of the year, this number decreased to 40%, with the rest of the SK students moving mainly into the early- and mid- *letter name alphabetic* stages. The Grade 1 children started the school year showing a range from emergent through *within word pattern* spelling stages, although most were writing in the letter name alphabetic stage. By the end of the year, 70% of the Grade 1 samples were at or above the within word pattern stage, compared to 11% in October.

We did not observe spelling differences between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous JK children. At the beginning of the year, slightly more Indigenous than non-Indigenous SK children were writing at the emergent stage (76% and 57% respectively), and at the end of the year, this difference was more pronounced (54% and 19% respectively). Although the number of participating Indigenous Grade 1 children was very low, when comparing the Indigenous writing samples to the non-Indigenous samples, the children showed a similar range of spelling stages.

### *Communicating Message*

*Pictures.* When asked to verbally explain their drawings, the children's responses included: labeling items with a noun or verb, giving simple sentences (subject and verb), using simple sentences with time/place information, and using sentences with more complex details or elaborating beyond their picture information.

Overall, our framework revealed the level of complexity in how students verbally explained their drawings increased. From Term 1 to Term 3, 61% to 79% of students gave verbal explanations beyond a noun/verb label. Most striking was the change over the year in the amount of information that Grade 1 children gave beyond that depicted in their



pictures. The JK and SK children also progressively offered more information about their pictures with their use of single word labels decreasing from fall to spring (see Table 2).

The verbal explanations given by most JK, SK, and all Grade 1, children were directly related to the items drawn in their pictures. Only a small number of students gave verbal responses that seemed to have no relationship to the images in their drawings (5% in Term 1 and 6% in Term 3).

Table 2

*How students explained their pictures in Terms 1 and 3 (as expressed in percentages)*

Grade	Labeled Items		Subject + Verb		Subject, verb + time/place		Complex Sentence or Details Beyond Picture	
	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring	Fall	Spring
JK	41	30	35	35	24	35	0	0
SK	46	23	26	41	19	27	7	9
Grade 1	5	5	39	27	50	26	6	42
Total	38	21	30	37	26	28	5	14

*Words.* Our *Spelling Stage* variable assisted us in understanding the meaning the child intended his or her chosen graphic form to represent, whereas the *Sentence Structure* variable considered the linguistic complexity of their intended message. For example, Jaeson printed "I P aD M H", which we coded as emergent *spelling stage* when he read back "I played at my house". Linguistically, we coded this as *subject + verb + time/place*.

When asked, most students explained their pictures, with a smaller number of children willing to write about their pictures. Children showed a range of differences between the content of their written and verbal responses. As expected, many children talked about their pictures with more complexity than they wrote yet this was the reverse with a few children. Sionna in SK serves as an example. Sionna verbally labeled items in her picture as "my mom", "that's my dad", "that's my sister", "Margie" and "that's my baby". She wrote "Itbg" and "IKlnbs", which she she read back as: "I clean dishes. I clean all the floor. I clean clothes. I eat my food. I eat hotdogs. I play a lot. I make flowers. I listen to my teacher. I listen Margie." We coded her written representation at the emergent spelling stage, and her written message included *subject + verb* content. It was unclear whether she thought her writing included only two sentences or all the sentences she conveyed.

Comparing the Term 3 overall intricacy of verbal and written explanations, SK children tended to communicate with similar levels of complexity. The non-Indigenous SK children tended to put slightly more complex content into their writing, tending toward including subject + verb and subject, verb + time/place phrases, with Indigenous children tending toward labeling and including subject + verb content. The JK children's written content tended toward less complexity and the Grade 1 children's written content tended toward more complexity (see Table 3).



Table 3

*How students wrote about their pictures in Term 3 (as expressed in percentages)*

Grade	Labeled Items	Subject + Verb	Subject, Verb + Time/Place	Complex Sentence or Details Beyond Picture
JK	58	18	12	12
SK	19	44	32	5
Grade 1	0	26	42	32
Total	23	34	30	13

In all grades and all terms, when the majority of children read back their writing, their message was directly related to what they wrote, with an exception in Term 3, when 45% of JK and 22% of SK Indigenous students ascribed a meaning to their writing that seemed unrelated to what they wrote.

### *Discussion*

Our objective in this phase of the initiative was similar to that of Mackenzie et al. (2013) and Rowe and Wilson (2015) in that we focused on developing a framework for documenting nuances within young children's graphic representations with the aim of generating descriptors for teachers to use when recording their students' graphic activity. Rather than selecting participants from urban centres, we chose to work with an under-represented group of children, specifically, Indigenous and non-Indigenous children living in northern rural communities. Additionally, rather than focusing on one form of graphic representation, we invited children to respond in two different visual modes to a given task. Insights gained from our analyses will assist us in modifying the framework for use in the second phase of our initiative. However, relating these patterns to the rural and Indigenous context goes beyond the scope of this study.

By the end of the school year, our analyses suggest that participating children in all three grade levels were representing their given name in a linear fashion using the appropriate letters. Although the younger children's use of letter case and letter size was inconsistent across all three time points, we found that the Grade 1 children were writing their names conventionally by the end of the school year. Thus, overall, we found the children's ability to write their name improved with age, a finding that we suggest reflects a school-literacy practice within the classrooms and is consistent with past literacy research (e.g., Hildreth, 1936; Puranik & Lonigan, 2011).

When writing about their pictures early in the year, we found that, across all three age groups, the children who responded used a range of forms that included scribbling, letter-like forms, letters from their name, and letters. However, unlike in the name writing task, for many of the children, their use of appropriate letter case and letter size remained inconsistent. We suggest that, in terms of form, the young children were more advanced at writing their names than they were at writing individual words, a finding consistent with Levin et al. (2005).

Overall, we found our assessment framework made visible nuances within the children's writing. Our analyses suggest that, similar to findings in past literacy research

(e.g., Bear et al., 2008; Gombert & Fayol, 1992; Puranik & Lonigan, 2011), there exists a developmental pattern in young northern rural Indigenous and non-Indigenous children's spelling ability and in the linguistic content of their writing. Contrary to the belief that rural schools are failing to meet the literacy needs of young children (Jimerson, 2005; Stockard, 2011), we suggest the youngest children in our study were demonstrating abilities consistent with an emergent stage of spelling. Although many of the children represented salient sounds in words using single letters, we found that most lacked the concept of a word and demonstrated little letter-sound correspondence. We identified patterns within the older children's writing that suggest that, by the end of Grade 1, their abilities had progressed to the within word pattern stage. These children were able to spell most single-syllable and short vowel words conventionally. Our analyses further suggest that the complexity of the children's written messages increased with age, with Grade 1 children writing sentences with a subject, verb, and time/place information.

Overall, more children chose to draw than write. Based on our analysis, of the 100 children who responded to the drawing task in Term 3, 90 children also responded in print form, with 74 children from this group attempting letters or words. In contrast, all children, except one, responded to the prompt to draw a picture. This finding appears to support Landsmann and Karmiloff-Smith's (1992) suggestion that the graphic mode of drawing better affords young children the opportunity to represent and communicate meaning than does writing.

Our assessment framework also made visible nuances within the children's drawings. Although we found children in kindergarten tended initially to represent content in their pictures using scribbles or unidentifiable images, by the spring data collection, most of these younger children and all of the older children represented content by drawing identifiable images. This finding supports the developmental pattern described in past research (e.g., Kellogg, 1969/2015). Based on the elaboration we observed in the content of these drawings, we suggest that the children intended these images to represent characters and/or objects, a finding consistent with past sociocultural research (e.g., Coates, 2002; Cox, 2005).

Our analyses also suggest that, by the end of Grade 1, many of the children appeared to communicate relationships within their pictures through size and the intentional positioning of characters and/or objects within the picture and on the page (Lancaster, 2007). A look across variables revealed that the children showed size differences between characters (people and/or animals) whether they placed these characters in a straight line or positioned them randomly on the page. However, when the children randomly drew one character and one object on the page, we noticed that they tended to draw both items the same size. Almost all the children who grounded the items in their pictures tended to show size differences between at least some of the items. Of the students who "floated" items on the page, half showed size differences.

Finally, our analyses suggest that the complexity of the children's verbalizations was greater than the complexity of their graphical representations, with older children demonstrating greater complexity than younger ones. The children progressed from providing single word labels, to talking about their representations in single or multiple sentences, to providing details beyond what they appear to have represented graphically. Although the children's progression from single word labels to single or multiple sentences is consistent with Rowe and Wilson's (2015) research, their continued progression to

providing additional details is not. This suggests a need to further explore the children's language use during the administration of the tasks.

We acknowledge that, due to changes in our choice of tasks, the variation in the task administration, and incomplete administrator notes, during this phase of the study, our analysis was limited to generating frequencies in form, content, and message, as well as across grade levels and time points. However, since our research-based framework revealed patterns consistent with those found by literacy researchers working with young children in urban areas, we believe the tasks through which we generated the children's writing and drawing samples, and the variables and categories we used to analyze these samples, assisted us in identifying patterns in the northern and rural children's graphic representations. The insights we gained from these patterns will guide our research during the second phase of the initiative.

#### *Future Research*

In order to extend the research on young children's emergent writing and drawing, in Phase 2 of the initiative, we will adopt a mixed-methods design. Specifically, we will video record and transcribe the one-on-one interviews with the children. An analysis of the children's talk will assist us in confirming their intentions while representing and discerning patterns in how they use the verbal mode while representing graphically. We will also extend our analysis to better inform our understanding of how the children represent meaning graphically in their pictures and text. Consistency in our data collection methods will allow us to perform an in depth quantitative analysis of the variables including cross variable examinations. We anticipate findings from Phase 2 will better inform our understanding of the patterns in and relationships between the children's graphic representations and their talk. In keeping with the aim of the larger project, specifically assisting northern and rural educators as they support the oral and written language development of their Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, we look ahead to working collaboratively with educators to build a classroom tool that will assist them in understanding and communicating their students' learning.

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## ***“The Term ‘All Genders’ Would be More Appropriate”: Reflections on Teaching Trauma Literature to a Gender-fluid Youth***

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### *Abstract*

Using intersectional feminism and narrative inquiry, this paper reflects on a qualitative case study where a trauma text was taught in high school English for the purposes of analyzing students’ responses. One gender-fluid participant provided particularly compelling insights and so this project revisits their data. They demonstrate that their lived experience as a gender-fluid youth in school informed their authoring of themselves as a ‘diversity worker’ and/or ‘equity person’ (Ahmed, 2017), which overall, resulted in allyship and accomplice work that benefited the school. Because self-defined identities are important (Zamani-Gallaher, 2017) and there is a lack of studies that attend to trans spectrum students’ positive experiences in school (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017), this paper aims to address this gap.

### *Keywords*

adolescent literacy, accomplice, ally, case study, critical literacy, diversity worker, gender fluidity, narrative inquiry, trauma literature

### *Introduction: Lingering Thoughts on Landry*

"Male is partly female, because female/Carries male. To whit, Gender's not a jail" (Clarke as cited in Andrew-Gee, 2016, p. 2).

A teacher is not supposed to admit this, but I did have favourites and Landry (pseudonym) was one of them. A bright, stormy-eyed and waiflike person often dressed in black - right down to their lipstick - sat quietly in my academic English classroom through their grade nine and ten years. The volumes they spoke in their writing more than made up for their quiet classroom demeanour; however, I remember them as a talented creative writer especially, and their expository work was equally thoughtful and convincing. They had a few close friends, whom they always sat with at a table near the door, often chatting about the show *Supernatural* or online avatars. Landry always chose their words carefully, usually preferring body language to speaking; I'd usually receive nods or mischievous smirks when I asked what trouble they managed to rustle up over the weekend, and I'd sometimes get a roll of the eyes and a violent head shake if I inquired whether a new Netflix show was worth watching. Simply, Landry is one of those students that teachers go to work for.

In grade nine, Landry stayed after class one day to ask me to use their preferred name rather than their given one, as well as gender neutral pronouns; they identified as gender-fluid. They showed me their forearm, where every day, they'd imprint thoughts regarding their gender fluidity in their skin with sharpie. As I understood them, their explanation of it is much akin to this: "“Gender-fluid” means that identity changes by days or weeks over time, and that questioning and changing one’s identity from time to time is

also legitimate” (Risman, 2017, p. 72). I remember telling them, “You got it” and thanked them for trusting me. I got some flushed cheeks and a quick smile in return, along with a rare “Thanks, Ms. M - have a nice day” before they scurried off to their next class. Their black tutu skirt bounced as they left, their legs reminding me of Beetlejuice with tights of thick black and white stripes, anchored by black combat boots that were surprisingly quiet scuffling across the cement floor of my classroom.

I return to Landry for this paper because simply, they never left me though I left teaching two years ago to pursue doctoral work, following the completion of my MA. In my thesis and the subsequent research article that followed (Moore & Begoray, 2017), I wrote about Landry along with my other 24 participants. However, I had a lingering feeling that Landry had a great deal more to offer because not only did they provide rich data, but more so, they repeatedly demonstrated that they think critically about gender and related issues, such as violence against women, and are committed to social justice. Thus, I was brought back to this piece where I explore what their responses might reveal about one gender-fluid student’s literacy experience with trauma literature, and particularly, a story about gender violence. The purpose of this article, then, is to document how their meaning making included beliefs and perspectives informed by their experiences with being out as a gender-fluid student in school, coupled with a strong sense of social justice ethics. My goal is to provide a dynamic portrait of how Landry’s responses not only allowed them to author themselves as a social justice worker, but further, to model such subject positioning for their peers.

To achieve this goal, I tighten the frame of this project slightly from the last time I worked with this data set. Using the theoretical lens of intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 1989) specifically, and the particular conceptual frame of Ahmed’s (2017) ‘the diversity worker’ and/or ‘equity person,’ I explore how Landry authored themselves as such by taking up the roles of ally and accomplice - expert of and engaging in - cultural critiques on significant issues including gender identity, gendered violence, and trauma. To do this, I return again to narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, Leggo, 2004; 2012) primarily because I strive to “attend to the story of [an]other” (Leggo, 2012, p. xii). Thus, my aim is to contribute to how some gender-fluid students might experience literacy in high school English, particularly critical literacy learning - “focused on the uses of literacy for social justice in marginalized and disenfranchised communities” (Luke, 2012, p. 5) - centered on trauma literature investigations. I am interested in providing insights from how they responded to trauma literature, and demonstrate that their lived experience as a gender-fluid youth in school informed their authoring of themselves as a ‘diversity worker’ and/or ‘equity person’ (Ahmed, 2017) in the classroom, which overall, resulted in allyship and accomplice work that benefited the learning culture. It is important to be clear that my intention is not to offer Landry as an example of how gender fluidity typically ‘works’; indeed, there is nothing ‘typical’ about Landry, or any student, and so, I do not want to produce a narrative about how gender-fluid students receive and respond to any story, trauma or otherwise. Rather, what I hope to offer is a rich exploration of one gender-fluid student’s experience with learning about a trauma text, and how this critical literacy event afforded them an opportunity to engage themselves and their peers in activist-oriented behaviour that meaningfully contributed to our class and school culture(s). This project thus represents an individual case of meaning-making where Landry drew from their experiences as a gender-fluid person as part of what informed their learning; exploring this

is useful because it highlights an epistemology based on being able to occupy different subject positions which is very helpful when considering social justice work, especially with respect to gender violence. Further, as much scholarship on youth with such gender identities and education focuses on negative experiences in school (Bartholomaeus & Riggs, 2017), this paper also strives to showcase a positive, productive example of one gender-fluid literacy student who thrived in their literature class.

*On 'Defining' and Understanding Gender-fluid Identit(ies)*

Young people like Landry are becoming more vocal about “expanding notions of gender beyond traditional categories of boy/man and girl/woman” (Frohard-Dourlent et al., 2017, p. 1). Throughout this paper, the term “gender-fluid” will be used to describe Landry’s gender identity because this is how they self-identified, and because it is something that “people claim for themselves” (Fox, 2015, p. 163). Across literature on LGBTQ+ youth, this term is used interchangeably with: “gender-variant... gender creative, gender non-conforming” and even “transgender” (p. 163), as well as “genderqueer” (Ressler & Chase, 2009, p. 17), “non-binary,” “bigender” and “pangender” (Richards et al., 2016, p. 96). This terminology continually evolves, sometimes creates controversy, and often causes confusion (de Jong, 2015). Even educators new to discussing LGBTQ+ issues “often find the language and labels daunting” (Ressler & Chase, 2009, p. 16), and it is significant to acknowledge how “Non-binary identity is not currently... well accepted in many Western cultures” (Matsuno & Budge, 2017, p. 116)<sup>1</sup>. However, as mentioned, my understanding of Landry’s use of the term is that some “are simply more fluid by nature. They do not feel comfortable fitting into boxes of behaviour. They may move from one box to the next, and back again, or say that neither box feels right” (Brill & Pepper, 2008, p. 24), much like how Landry keeps daily ‘gender notes’ on their skin. As such, I align myself with how I observed Landry assigning meaning to the term, and recognize the importance of honouring this; after all, “Gender identity is a basic defining feature of a person’s identity which deeply influences every part of people’s life” (Fontanella, Maretti, & Sarra, 2013, p. 2554). Thus, with this work, I echo Matsuno and Budge’s (2017) important call to action:

if every person who read this article discussed concepts of non-binary and genderqueer identity with someone in their life (who was not already well-versed in concepts of gender), that would be a major step in deconstructing a society that continues to misunderstand and invalidate the experiences of those who do not fall within the gender binary. (p. 199)

This call to action might be one way in which to answer Goodrich and Luke’s (2014) question: “Our schools, and our [LGBTQQIA] students, are in crisis. How will you answer the call and assist in facilitating the personal growth and development of each and every student?” (p. 364). Attending to experiences such as Landry’s provide a much-needed contribution to discussions regarding best practices for supporting gender diverse students in K-12, particularly because Landry’s literacy learning was largely generative for themselves

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<sup>1</sup> To be clear, this is not to suggest that non-binary and gender-fluid people should be conflated into one group. Rather, Matsuno and Budge (2017) are being drawn from here to emphasize the point that anyone who pushes back against gender binaries face challenges in Western culture.

and their community. Overall, Landry's stories are worthwhile and necessary; indeed, they show us that "We need to question our understanding of who we are in the world. We need opportunities to consider other versions of identity" (Leggo, 2012, p. xx).

### *Theoretical Framework: Intersectional Feminism*

I approach this work using an intersectional feminist lens, an idea largely developed by legal scholar Crenshaw (1989); she deeply considers how individuals with multiple social identities are systematically impacted. Since Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality,' it has been "taken up and invoked widely and flexibly... the word, if not always the concept, has traveled so far" (Case, 2017, p. x), though much of this surge arises from Black feminists. Key tenets include honouring diverse identities, analyzing systems of power, and enacting social justice. For example, intersectionality provides a way in which to "interrogate identity disparities" (Banks, Pliner, & Hopkins, 2013, p. 102). Moreover, it is a tool for resisting oppression; it is "both a theoretical framework as well as a process of analysis through which one can understand how multiple identities congeal to mediate one's ability to navigate sociocultural systems of power" (Nicolazzo, 2016, p. 1177). Crenshaw argues: "it is a relationship between identities... *and* [my emphasis] structures... they are not separate" (Crenshaw as cited by the Equal Rights Trust, 2016, p. 5). Thus, it is a frame and "mechanism" (Case, 2017, p. ix) that has profoundly influenced feminist philosophy, politics, and practices. Due to these qualities, this framework is appropriate here because not only was the original study conducted using feminist framing, but more specifically, its focus on diverse social identities will help to better attend to the voice of an individual with a dynamic, complex gender identity. Intersectional feminism is also necessary for conceptualizing the significance of a gender-fluid student's critical literacy learning experiences because "any serious discussion of feminism in education has to espouse a theory of intersectionality" (Henry, 2011, p. 262), and further, "feminism will be intersectional, "or it will be bullshit," to borrow from the eloquence of Flavia Dzodan" (Ahmed, 2017, p. 5).

Within the field of education, intersectionality transforms pedagogy because it offers "a frame to complicate identity" (Case, 2013, p. 6). For instance, Case and Lewis's (2017) example of intersectional pedagogy in a psychology course is useful for the purposes of this paper where Landry's demonstration of allyship and accomplice work will be discussed. In their research, students began to adopt an ally identity, and were "eager to use the term [ally]" (p. 138), demonstrating intersectional awareness with respect to Black LGBTQ+ liberation. Fostering such awareness with students is important for critical literacy and for encouraging social action, such as in the form of ally/accomplice work. This is an example of how "intersectionality can serve communities through what [Crenshaw] refers to as 'coalition building'" (Yenika-Agbaw, 2017, p. 108). To encourage such building, "critical educators must also give students, especially privileged groups, tools to effect change- [intersectional strategies]" (McQueeney, 2016, p. 1466) to avoid only "emphasizing individuals' experiences with these social identities, rather than the systems of power and oppression that shape these experiences" (Núñez, 2014, p. 85).

Intersectional feminism is thus an important stream of feminism that provides a way of understanding the significance of Landry's social location(s) and how such complexity in their identity can influence them to be both a unique voice in literacy learning, and to also engage in social justice behaviour. Ultimately, because "an

intersectional approach is expected to be fluid” (Goswami et al., 2016, p. 2), fluidity is a value of this theoretical framework, making it appropriate to use as a lens for (re)examining Landry’s critical literacy contributions.

*Conceptual Framework: Sara Ahmed’s ‘Diversity Worker’/ ‘Equity Person’*

Because “there can be unintended consequences to the blanket application of intersectionality” (Luft, 2009, p. 100), Ahmed’s (2017) concept(s) of the ‘diversity worker’ and/or ‘equity officer’ - drawing on her “own involvement in trying to transform universities” (p. 90) - will be used here as a means to interpret Landry’s ideas and impressions which contributed to their own efforts to, like Ahmed, transform our school. She is a committed intersectional feminist scholar who argues that this approach is “the point from which we must proceed if we are to offer an account of how power works” (p. 5), and describes intersectionality as “messy and embodied” (p. 119). Particularly her latest book, *Living a feminist life* (2017), she describes the intersectional feminist killjoy role(s) of ‘diversity worker’ and/or ‘the equity person’ as a part of her discussion on transformative diversity work as feminist theory - “an effort to be in a world that does not accommodate our being” (p. 91). She calls diversity work (1) “work we do when we are attempting to transform an institution” and (2) “the work we do when we do not quite inhabit the norms of the institution” (p. 91). However, it “also covers a wide range of different practices” - it is “complex” (Ahmed & Swan, 2006, p. 99). Due to this complexity, ‘diversity workers’ and ‘equity people’ do “messy, even dirty work” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 94) and “work that is less supported” (p. 96). And so, although it is encouraging to witness Landry’s efforts to transform their school culture, the conceptual lens of Ahmed’s ‘diversity worker’ and/or ‘equity person’ is being invoked to also deliberately call attention to how Landry’s very presence reveals heteronormativity in the institution of school. This paper does celebrate Landry’s contributions that emerged during a trauma novel study; however, Ahmed’s conceptual lens aids in framing this work as inherently “sweaty” - Landry was, of course, never officially ‘appointed’ as a diversity worker. According to my analysis, they took on this labour when they sensed they needed to, perhaps because they were - to my knowledge - the only gender-fluid student in class. In each moment I analyze, it was likely demanding and difficult because it is not easy to “intervene in the reproduction of power,” to “think differently,” and to “think on our feet” (p. 93).

A diversity worker and/or equity officer typically undertakes roles including: “strategic work” (p. 97), “sending things out” (p. 102), and engaging in “pushy work” (p. 107). First, “strategic work” is work that comes from a place of “trying” - “an attempt to do something... to carry something out” (p. 97) - despite difficulties. To do so, Ahmed argues that diversity/equity officers have to exhibit a self-awareness and reflexivity in any resistance they engage with; they might have to even “try on” (p. 98) different styles or methods. As well, such strategic work often means carefully selecting appropriate language whilst dialoguing with others in the institution, which can be tiresome, leading to “equity fatigue” (p. 98). Nonetheless, “image management” (p. 99) is important, and as such, as institutional killjoys, those in these roles often “polish” (p. 102) institutions to make them better. The next important undertaking of diversity/equity officers is “sending things out.” One example is producing writing documents and/or policies - creating a “paper trail” (p. 104). Lastly, diversity and/or equity officers do “pushy work,” meaning, they have to hold the institutions accountable for what they say they will do; in this way, pushy work often



involves “mind[ing] the gap” “between words and deeds, trying to make organizations catch up with the words they send out” (p. 107).

Overall, all of these strategies of the diversity and equity officer are characterized by Ahmed as “wilful work” (p. 113), and such wilfulness, such persistence and striving to “know” how to keep “pushing to open up spaces to those who have not been accommodated” (p. 114) is exactly the kind of feminist killjoy work Landry demonstrated throughout the course of the study in their ally and accomplice behaviours.

### *Methodology*

#### *The Study*

Landry’s data analyzed here is from a qualitative case study (Yin, 2013) I undertook for five weeks in a Western Canadian public high school in 2015 (Moore & Begoray, 2017). Landry was a middle-class white fifteen year old, self-identified gender-fluid and pansexual student - one of 25 who participated. The purpose was to explore the ways in which grade ten students responded to trauma literature, particularly sexual assault narratives. The research questions that guided this study were: (1) in what ways can the use of trauma narratives develop critical literacies and an empathetic classroom culture? And (2) What critical literacy strategies are most effective when using trauma literature to explore issues such as rape and sexual assault, sexual harassment, exclusion, power, peer pressure, and bullying? The unit was centered on reading *Speak* (Anderson, 1999), a young adult trauma novel about a grade nine girl who is raped by a classmate. Alongside *Speak*, several complementary texts including current event materials, poetry, photographs, and videos were also studied.

The students’ responses were collected through a number of print and digital writing activities (creative and personal writing, blogging, Instagram, poetry, a variety of ‘tickets out the door’ quick-writes, threaded discussion groups), class, individual, and small group discussions during lessons, as well as in a focus group session where students were asked about their learning experiences during the unit, after the conclusion of the course (Landry did not participate in the focus group). I originally framed the study using social constructivist (Smagorinsky, 2013), feminist, gender, and queer studies (Butler, 1990; Lorde, 1984; Rich, 2003), and trauma theories (Caruth, 1991, 1995); however, for the purposes of this revisitation, I have accordingly reframed and narrowed my lenses more particularly with intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 1989), specifically Ahmed’s (2017) conceptions of the diversity and/or equity worker, as mentioned.

This is also a good place for me to acknowledge that I am an able-bodied, cisgender white woman who grew up in a middle class context; although this case study foregrounds the voice of a gender-fluid youth, the analysis and perspective are mine. I believe that this paper, as part of my ongoing research on teaching and learning about trauma literature, offers some dimension to understanding gender-fluid experiences intersectionally, from my perspective as a cultural “outsider” (Collins, 1986). However, it is also important to acknowledge that I am still ‘inside’ gender because I move through the world and, specifically, my classroom, as a female teacher. My gendered experience in education very much informs my investment in this project because I have experienced harassment and sexism as both as teacher and a student and so, I have some experiences with feeling scared, small, and silenced in school. Of course, these experiences differ greatly from those of gender-fluid youth like Landry; however, I want to acknowledge that my gendered learning



experiences influence my investment in seeking ways in which I might foster more inclusive, welcoming learning spaces for my students. It is necessary to hone in on specific experiences of gender diverse youth in order to seek to understand how educators might best service them, as well as honour their voices and stories.

### *Narrative Inquiry*

Narrative inquiry, “the study of experience” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 189), is a research methodology “rooted firmly in a wide range of philosophical, psychological poetic, and pedagogic perspectives and imperatives” and it is often used in education (Leggo, 2004, p. 97). It is appropriate for this project because while it is aimed at understanding social context, it is centered primarily on individuals within a context rather than the context itself (Kitchen, 2006). This is complementary to education because teachers often endeavour to teach individuals rather than just classrooms; as Aoki (1994) describes: “the important thing is to understand that if in my class I have 20 students, then there are 20 interspaces between me and my students. These interspaces are spaces of possibilities” (as cited in Leggo, 2004, p. 109). Narrative methodology works for this investigation because it is “connected to understanding how stories present possibilities for understanding... the complex, mysterious, even ineffable experiences that comprise human living” (Leggo, 2012, p. xix).

Stories also have a capacity for action, are potential sites for transformation, and can function as vehicles for learning. Further, during this study, I was “awash with stories” (Leggo, 2012, p. xiii), especially Landry’s. Narrative methodology is especially significant here because it “challenges and problematizes the nature of knowledge as objective and questions unitary ways of knowing” (Kim, 2008, pp. 251-252). My process of engaging in narrative inquiry began with Clandinin and Connelly’s (2000) suggestions for narrative methods, particularly with respect to reconstructing field texts to research texts via “*narratively coding*” (p. 131). I hand-coded photocopies of all data by looking for “places where actions and events occurred, storylines that interweave and interconnect, gaps or silences that become apparent, tensions that emerge, and continuities and discontinuities that appear” (p. 131). To capture these items, I chiefly followed the strategies outlined by Creswell (2014) on analyzing and coding data, as well as “Tesch’s Eight Steps to Coding” (1990), which Creswell recommends and outlines, and then engaged in thematic analysis to not only capture the prominent ideas in the data set, but to also examine differences and relationships between noted themes. However, this process was certainly not comprised of a tidy series of steps; rather, it was complex and messy. The data was revisited repeatedly as I returned to them “again and again” because “Negotiation occurs from beginning to end” (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000, p. 132) Through this dynamic narrative analytic process, I found that narrative methodology can indeed open up new ways of knowing, such as through connecting stories and unique, marginalized lived experiences. Because the literacy experiences of a gender-fluid student are explored here - an identity that importantly questions “unitary ways of knowing” (Kim, 2008, pp. 251-252) - narrative inquiry certainly thematically connects with the subject matter at hand.

### *Findings: Allyship & Accomplice Work as an Equity and/or Diversity Officer*

Landry’s responses were dynamic and rooted in their deep commitment to social justice issues - an attentiveness I had come to recognize as both their English teacher and

as the teacher researcher. Although their responses covered considerable theoretical, conceptual, and critical ground, a revisitation of the Landry's data demonstrated their successful authoring of themselves as a diversity and/or equity person, even also, as a kind of 'feminist killjoy,' deeply committed to ally and accomplice work. In doing so, Landry provided compelling commentary on and critiques of gender identities, gender violence and trauma.

### *Allyship*

One of the most encouraging findings was that students - especially Landry - began to engage in what I coded as 'ally communication' as they recognized the importance of solidarity in light of *Speak*, a novel about a rape survivor who is largely unsupported throughout the story. As we described, this might be a reflection of how, "Throughout the learning, we revisited the importance of witnessing, being allies, not defaulting to the role of a bystander" (Author & Coauthor, 2017, p. 178). Additionally, the need for connection in high school is tantamount, so observing students reaching out to create communities and foster allyship (see, for example, Case, 2013; Brown, 2015; DeTurk, 2011; Hunt & Holmes, 2015) was impressive.

Landry consistently exhibited allyship. Although there is "no [ally] blueprint" (Gaffney, 2016, p. 44) because it is a "complex and ongoing process" (p. 45), DeTurk (2011) defines allies as "people who have relative social power or privilege and who stand against injustice" (p. 570). For example, we learned about Emma Sulkowicz, an Asian American Columbia University student and artist who was assaulted in her dorm room. While her rapist remained at school, she began the "Carry that Weight" project," a kind of "endurance art piece" (Mitra, 2015, p. 386), carrying her mattress around campus in protest and as art "of pure, almost formalist, endurance, an instruction manual for getting a handle on a collapsed event's affective weight" (Chu, 2017, p. 310). I was hoping Sulkowicz would inspire students to use the bystander approach as ally work that would engage them in "empathy and perspective taking" which is "embedded in this approach" (Cares et al, 2015, p. 580). Students had to decide if this was a productive form of protest, and to leave their thoughts in the article's comments feature.

In Landry's detailed response, they first applaud Emma, characterizing her efforts as "a good way to protest peacefully, and still get media attention." Here, they assert themselves as an ally *and* hone their critical literacy skills by analyzing the protest work; it is worth noting that Landry was the only participant who picked up on how this was a peaceful protest. The added note about "still getting media attention" also showcases them taking up Ahmed's (2017) concept of the "diversity worker" - someone "conscious of the resistance of their work," which could mean, "that some strategies might aim not to cause *too* [my emphasis] much disruption" (p. 80). Landry elaborates on the importance of Emma's strategy: "Usually people don't listen to peaceful protests. If they're violent, people listen, but then discredit the protesters for being violent." This understanding of how diverse protests are 'received' demonstrates allyship emerging from "an awareness of the different aspects of power employed to perpetuate inequality, the way in which history contributes to ongoing inequality, and various efforts to deny or minimize inequality" (Brown, 2015, p. 714) - a critical component of effective allyship and diversity work. Next, Landry details their physical reaction, describing how it is "sickening that [Emma] was forced to see her assaulter repeatedly," exhibiting disgust over the detail that the attacker

threatened legal action against Columbia University because “he doesn’t want his name dirtied.” They conclude: “I think he should go jobless for the rest of his life. I don’t care if his life is ruined, how many lives did he ruin? Honestly, he deserves it.” Landry’s angry, publicly posted reaction demonstrates that not only have they critically analyzed this current event in multiple ways, but further, that they were willing to put their potentially controversial, visceral reaction online. This might be considered a moment that critical literacy pedagogue and intersectional feminist scholar bell hooks’ (1994) calls “coming to voice” (p. 148). As well, during our class discussion, Landry “sen[t] something out” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 102) by contributing a rare oral comment, somewhat angrily offering that “statistically” it is “very rare to have false rape accusation” when a peer brought the subject up during class discussion. Arguably, Landry is certainly positioning themselves as an ally and “diversity worker” - one for whom “words become tools, things you can do things with” (p. 98) because they leave something of a digital “paper trail, a trace of where they have been” (p. 104). And indeed, Landry’s “sickening” feeling in their written response and their angry tone with their class dialogue contribution showcases how “diversity work is emotional work” (p. 130).

In another example, Landry exhibited allyship during an Instagram project, where students posted thank-you messages for their allies. This assignment emerged from a character in *Speak*, who pens a card to the rape survivor protagonist that ends their friendship; their friendship is too risky - it risks her social capital. We took the opportunity as a class to express gratitude to those who are always there for us. Landry texted a friend, “thank you for always being there for me, even when it’s inconvenient or bothersome,” ending with: “You are the closest person to me and I’m grateful for you.” Here, Landry uses ally communication and recognizes the significance of allyship. Landry’s work speaks to Hunt and Holmes’ (2015) conception of “both/and” allyship, which they believe can be fostered in friendships and intimate relationships. They argue: “Friendships can provide opportunities for enacting allyship” and that such spaces “require developing trust and communication across differences, challenging one another, and creating solidarity with one another” (p. 161). Although diversity and equity workers might sometimes “end up challenging what gives security, warmth, place, and position” to become “institutional killjoys” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 113), Landry also illustrates that in this role, it is possible to facilitate such items through friendship and allyship.

Relatedly, students also wrote letters to “survivors,” like the protagonist of *Speak*. Again, Landry’s letter clearly demonstrates their ally communication. They begin with validation, in a compassionate tone, which captured the essence of this literacy work: “You are very strong willed, despite the abuse you had to endure for those eight long years.” Such validation is akin to DeTurk’s (2011) example of an ally communication strategy called “comforting targets” to be used at an interpersonal level; it includes “direct (authoritative and dialogic) responses to expressions of stereotypes and prejudices” (p. 581). Further, Landry’s characterization of the timeline of the their friend’s trauma - “those eight long years” - emphasizes Landry’s keen empathy - a key quality of allies (Munin & Speight, 2010). In fact, in another blog post, Landry chastises a character’s lack of empathy; they write: “Heather neglects using empathy to help Melinda feel better, and instead, abandons her.” This showcases that Landry is well aware of the power of empathetic interactions. Returning to Landry’s validating survivor letter, they very much initiate, or perhaps aim to sustain, an empathetic dialogue, “a rhetorical strategy invoked

by allies” (p. 579), and also, an illustration of Landry’s literacy learning with regards to effectively harnessing tone in their written response. Landry does so by citing specific details of the trauma that their friend experienced, clearly referring to previous disclosure(s) that they witnessed:

It’s okay to shake and cry when they flash through your memories. It’s okay to fear going back to the group home, but I promise you will never be going back. You will never have your hair cut in your sleep, your skin clawed, your arms slashed, by those children again.

This recollection reinforces that Landry is an effective witness to traumatic testimony, “an act of love” because it “involves the deliberate attendance to people, seeing and taking notice of that which they believe is meaningful” (Love, 2016, p. 239). Recalling details of the trauma demonstrates Landry’s attentiveness to witnessing difficult stories and to “protect [the story’s] place in the world” (p. 239). Further, the use of repetition here - the repeated phrase “it’s okay” - is a significant stylistic device; “repetition is meaning. Repetition is always meaningful” (Rogers, 1987, p. 584). This repetition, a kind of echoing, perhaps suggests that (1) Landry is employing their learning about the effectiveness of repetition in persuasive prose and in poetry, as well as (2) it might represent how Landry is “attuned to [a] beating heart,” and represents a kind of “stead[iness]” (Ronnberg & Martin, 2010, p. 674) for them. Further, Ahmed (2017) speaks to the damage heteronormativity does by means of repetition, likening it to “a chair that acquires its shape by the repetition of some bodies inhabiting it” (p. 123), and so, it is possible that Landry is using the stylistic device of repetition in their writing to insist upon a counter-narrative, in this case, to stigma surrounding mental health struggles and trauma. Finally, Landry’s ally communication in this letter is overall an example of how “diversity workers are communication workers” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 95).

Landry also exhibited allyship in classroom dialogue. During the study, and for much of the time I taught them, Landry sat with their friend, Ellie (pseudonym). In one moment, Ellie was terribly upset after receiving angry text messages from a friend who had recently moved. He was accusing Ellie of “expecting too much from him” and “pressuring him” to maintain their friendship while he trying to fit in at his new school. Then, he accused Ellie of “not really understanding [him]” because he is a trans man and so, because Ellie is a cisgender woman, she will never truly “get” him. I sat with Ellie and Landry, listening as Ellie tearfully relayed the story; all the while, Landry rubbed Ellie’s back and nodded supportively. As we read the texts, Landry closely inspected them, and continued listening attentively – arguably engaging in what Keating (2009) deems as important intersectional work - “listening with raw openness” (p. 92). They also made brief, supportive comments but were careful to focus on hearing Ellie, to avoid speaking “for... loved ones without their consent while also creating spaces in which [they] can be called on as allies when desired” (Hunt & Holmes, 2015, p. 168). As well, “Even experienced allies aren’t always sure what to say or do” but one “path to support and empowerment” is: “Do listen and ask how you can help” (Gaffney, 2016, p. 46). When Ellie and Landry took up my offer to take a walk privately, I suspected that Landry shared some insight about what Ellie’s friend might be going through as a result of their transgender identity experience. Likely, despite how experiences with gender identities carry different valence

for each individual, Landry had some important connected personal insights to share. When they returned, they were smiling and Ellie assured me that she felt “much better,” likely due to Landry’s efforts to “listen deeply” (Gaffney, 2016, p. 48) and probably, their informed insights. This encounter is perhaps also indicative of Landry’s literacy learning in the *Speak* unit; Melinda, as discussed, feels completely abandoned. Because she knows no one will listen to her, she silences herself. Landry’s deep listening here suggests that she is transferring her learning from the novel to a real-world situation by carefully attending to someone in pain.

As Landry wrote in their final assignment for the unit: “Teenagers are usually afraid... they stay silent because they are scared, want to believe they’re strong enough not to need help, or because no one will help them.” Therefore, allyship is one manifestation of equity and diversity work that is productively ‘wilful,’ and inspires ‘killjoy’ identities (Ahmed, 2017) that might help combat the fear that Landry refers to here. However, Landry also engaged in accomplice work, which some scholars deem to be more significant.

### *Accomplice Work*

In addition to ally work, Landry also demonstrated that they are an accomplice – behaviour which contributes to their authoring of themselves as an equity and/or diversity officer - and perhaps more so, a feminist killjoy (Ahmed, 2017) demonstrating that “The diversity worker could be described as an institutional killjoy” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 99). An accomplice might also be considered a ‘critical ally’ - someone who “sees [their] responsibility as being always, necessarily, a commitment to destabilizing the prevailing relations of power that structure [their] praxis” (McGloin, 2016, p. 841). As the Indigenous Action Media (2015) assert, accomplices are important because “there are so many so-called allies” and allyship does not go far enough: “Ally has also become an identity, disembodied from any real mutual understanding of support” (p. 85). They posit that an accomplice is willing to go places that allies are not; “Accomplices aren’t afraid to engage in uncomfortable, unsettling, and/or challenging debates or discussions” (p. 89) and “accomplices are realized through mutual consent and build trust” (p. 90). Powell and Kelly (2017) are also aligned with this understanding of accomplice work, arguing, “the core idea that separates... allies from... accomplices is *risk*” (p. 43). As such, Sheridan’s (2017) suggestion, that “the concept of accomplice provides a way of “becoming unstuck” and creates the potential to move from inability and inaction to dynamic existence” (p. 18), is compelling. Ultimately, Landry certainly demonstrated not only allyship but their “*unstuckness*,” their accomplice work as well in a few key moments during the study.

To begin with, Landry certainly took up Indigenous Action Media’s call for engaging in “uncomfortable... discussions” (p. 89). For instance, at the risk of becoming this classroom killjoy - the one at risk of making people say, “oh here [they] go” (p. 99) - Landry regularly took it upon themselves to contribute more than was required on the class blog. In one instance, they very mindfully called attention to a peer’s binary thinking. Here, Landry authors their diversity/equity worker role through accomplice practice because they attempt to “generat[e] the right image for the organization [in this case, the classroom], by correcting the wrong one” (p. 105). Camille (pseudonym) wrote a thoughtful post about a video clip we watched of a female sports reporter being interrupted by two men screaming obscenities and promoting sexual assault. Camille stated: “It’s offensive and degrading to both genders and we see it all the time in our world and apparently it has become ‘okay.’”



In her lengthy response, Camille demonstrates intertextual literacy skills by extending her stance to her own observations and experiences. Landry posted a “strategic work” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 97) response, perhaps risking “equity fatigue” (p. 98) by using the opportunity to teach the class about being mindful of terms when discussing gender:

Your comment looks really good. I agree with this 100%. One thing though, the term “both genders” is a little constructed as there are more than two genders (I assume you mean male and female only). There are actually very, very many, and the term “all genders” would be more appropriate.

As Powell and Kelly (2017) argue, “One of the risks we are taking as accomplices in the classroom is the risk of vulnerability” (p. 53). Landry risked vulnerability in order to take advantage of a teachable moment to “call out” gender binaries while also being very encouraging of Camille’s ideas. Though Landry’s comment was potentially a little bit “uncomfortable” (Indigenous Action Media, 2015, p. 89), something of a “*risk*” (Powell & Kelly, 2017, p. 43), Landry also understands that exhibiting respect and “building trust” (Indigenous Action Media, 2015, p. 90) while doing accomplice work effects change. Landry does not attack, but rather, validates Camille’s excellent comment while also offering a bit of extra insight in their “pushy work” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 107). When it comes to discussing gender in class, Landry exhibits how, in doing diversity work, “When we do not recede into the background, when we stand out or stand apart, we can bring the background into the front” (p. 132).

Another example of Landry’s accomplice work was during a group activity about the bystander approach as allyship (Cares et al., 2015). We looked at a party scenario called “It’s time...to help a friend” where a young female goes off with an unknown male, alone. Her friends see her leave with him and consider an intervention. The students worked together to brainstorm and recorded their ideas on sticky notes to be posted in the class for discussion. Verbal discussion is important because, as DeTurk (2011) found, “the [most] prevalent, rhetorical strategy invoked by allies was *dialogue*” (p. 579). Many students spoke from experience because they had been in such scenarios. For example, Landry’s group – of which I observed they were a clear discussion leader - demonstrated that they thought that “direct action is best” (Indigenous Action Media, 2015, p. 90) by discussing how the friends “could lead the girl away from the guy while her friends distract the guy” or “could accompany the girl and the guy outside with her friends to make sure nothing happens.” They demonstrated that they were “... *compelled to become accountable and responsible to each other*” (p. 90).

Next, to return to Landry’s survivor letter, they conclude with a plea for the recipient to accept their ongoing support and to particularly reach out during flashbacks:

You will remember these [abuses] at times and they will frighten you, but please remember that you do not have to be alone until you can manage to push them to the back of your mind once again. You are not alone! If you need someone to be there, to silently hold you in their arms until the pain stops, there will be someone there for you. You are going to be okay, I promise.

Here, Landry’s insistence on “silently” holding them is especially compelling; perhaps this



is in response to a previous request by the recipient. Regardless, “silence, or non-speech, is a text in itself” (Henry, 1998, p. 236) and so, Landry demonstrates that not only do they understand the importance of ally communication, but further, to act as an accomplice and simply *be there* - to stand by their friend’s side in the face of trauma. Arguably, Landry is offering to “maintain[ ]... strategic silence and develop[ ] strategies of resistance” (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 36). In fact, the issue of silence is one that arose in Landry’s excellent creative writing during the unit, particularly, in their poetry writing. In a piece called “Run run,” they write: “Chaining my ankles to the ground, never making any sound as/ my wings are silent and my soul has been cursed/ Oh when will this awful lie be reversed?” This poem overall details a traumatic experience, and is perhaps reflective of the ordeal that Landry’s friend endured. Landry explains that the “speaker [is] describing themselves in some kind of pain, and how their life is changing in a grotesque way. They begin to enquire about who they are... [that] the real them is locked away on the inside.” The image of “silent wings” is particularly incisive because wings carry many symbolic possibilities including “boundless freedom,” a means to “transcend the ordinary world by leaving the earth and the weight of the body” because they “lift us” (Ronnberg & Martin, 2010, p. 240). Further, wings represent the ability to see from multiple perspectives - from above and below at the same time, thus functioning to connect the two realms, and as Ronnberg and Martin (2010) argue, “intuition and inspiration seem to arrive unexpectedly on wings out of thin air” and so, they are “a sign of any creative act” (p. 240). All of these possibilities certainly connect to Landry’s accomplice work because their return to the notion of a powerful “silence” that shows up in their letter and poetry writing. This is not a “desperate attempt to make something out of nothing,” but rather, I align myself with Mazzei (2003) who urges that: “we as researchers need to be carefully attentive to what is not spoken, not discussed, not answered, for in those absences is where the very fat and rich information is yet to be known and understood” (p. 358). As such, this poetry perhaps signals Landry’s commitment to creativity, connection, freedom, ‘lifting’ others, and transcending confines of the physical body.

As a final note, Landry’s accomplice work also took place outside our classroom and unit of study on at least two occasions. First, seemingly channelling Ahmed’s (2017) argument that “We have to make adjustments to an existing arrangement in order to open institutions up to those who have been historically excluded from them” (p. 109), Landry and a friend decided that our school needed to be better educated on the diversity of gender and sexual identities. They demonstrate how “When we are in question, we question” (p. 133). In response, they arguably engaged in the diversity work of “institutional polishing” (Ahmed, p. 102) that made a significant impact; they started an advocacy and awareness campaign, met with administration, and then created posters with definitions of different identities such as “gender-fluid” and “pansexual” - two identities of Landry’s that they felt most students and teachers didn’t understand. Like Ahmed’s (2017) diversity worker, Landry was “attempting to transform an institution” and did so because they “didn’t quite inhabit the norms of the institution”; thus, Landry challenged the heteronormativity of our school by augmenting the (literal) “brick walls” that they “come up against” (p. 91) in our school by papering them with educative posters. I was asked to confer with Landry and the other student to proofread the posters and offer support for their campaign - or, “visceral encounter” (p. 136) - although my support was not needed because both of them are excellent writers. These posters were displayed all over the school during the time of this

study, and demonstrate Landry authoring themselves as a “diversity or equity officer[.]... who keep[s] pushing; otherwise things do not happen” (p. 109) and a resistor of “the hardenings of history” (p. 91). Additionally, Landry also shared on the class blog that they do not tolerate hateful speech or behaviour from their parents. We had just read a chapter in *Speak* where a student walks out of class in protest because his teacher is racist. I had posted an invitation for students to share what social justice issue they would ‘walk out for.’ Landry disclosed:

I have actually walked out on my parents several times for a number of things. Mainly, I... argu[e] with them about how they’re transphobic, homophobic, sexist, or ableist. It leaves quite the effective impression.

Here, Landry demonstrates that even in their own home, they are willing to take risks to stand up for vulnerable folks across a number of communities. This disclosure, which describes a far more severe response than seen in class, is perhaps evidence of how Landry as a diversity worker “‘tr[ies] on” different styles or methods of argumentation” by naming particular forms of oppression and demonstrating how “words become tools; things you can do things with” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 98), in this case, creating what they call an “effective impression.” Landry is thus doing painful but important accomplice work as a diversity and/or equity officer in their family institution because “youth voice can provide a significant impetus for parents to re-think their attitudes and thereby become allies” (Tasker, Peter, & Horn, 2014, p. 307). Further, this moment might also be understood as Landry, as a “[diversity] practitioner, claim[ing] a home” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 100).

Ultimately, Landry paired their allyship with accomplice work, proving to be a force for transformation. Landry was fearless during many difficult moments in the study; from risking their perception in the class as a something of a ‘killjoy’ to speak up when problematic discussions on gender were unfolding, to demonstrating a willingness to intervene in a potentially dangerous incident of gender violence, exhibiting strength and offering to support a traumatized friend, and even initiating education and advocacy campaigns, promoting ideas that their own parents didn’t agree with.

### *Concluding Thoughts*

I am grateful to have taught Landry. A major learning piece for myself was understanding just how much students have to teach us Landry’s fulfilling of the role(s) of Ahmed’s (2017) diversity and/or equity officer by way of their ally and accomplice work – how they exercised a kind of intersectional feminism wherein we “pick each other up” (p. 1) - was inspiring to witness and, hopefully, nurture. Educators and students alike have a lot to learn from students such as Landry - the ‘killjoys’ who enliven learning and spark important change in class dynamics and beyond.

On my last day of teaching, Landry was one of the students who made a very-much appreciated special effort to offer multiple goodbye visits to my classroom. At the end of that afternoon, for the first time, I gave up the fight and let the tears flow following the final bell before summer vacation and my move, offering well wishes and hugs to all the students who stopped by for a final quick chat. I remember Landry’s quick wave and smile before barrelling down the hall at an as always, astonishing pace. They graduated from high school last spring and from what I understand now, are pursuing a career as a freelance

writer and artist - two passions that I am certain they will thrive with. Like Taylor (2009), I feel I have “benefitted from personal [teacher-student] connection, drawing from my own social networks” (p. 199), to enhance my understanding in this study. I am so grateful to have learned from Landry, and my hope is that this paper has in a small way, revealed one gender fluid’s meaningful responses to a trauma story, and demonstrated how some gender-fluid students might bring a particularly impactful insight to learning when exploring issues such as gendered violence and identity.

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# *An Inquiry into Adolescents' Experiences with Cognitively Demanding Writing: Time Investment and the Importance of Authenticity*

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## *Abstract*

In this paper, we describe our 12-month inquiry into understanding adolescents' experiences, as they engaged in writing that challenged them to construct knowledge by making claims grounded in evidence and reasoning. As they engaged in the task of writing a research paper, participants' perceptions of time were two-fold in that they consistently identified a lack of time and a lack of understanding about the time the research paper demanded. We argue enabling students to have more temporal control over their writing is related to fostering increased metacognition about writing as a process.

## *Introduction*

I kind of use the analogy of a train...

So, a train takes a really long time to get going,  
and it's the same thing with the extended essay,  
it took a really long time to get going.

But once I got into it,  
I just zoomed.

It's the same thing with a train ride;  
it takes a really long time to get going,  
but once it does, it just zooms.

It's the same thing with my extended essay;  
a typical day, at first, was monotonous.

Trying to gather data for my analysis,  
but once I got all that data,  
and I figured out...my arguments,  
it just flew.

(Paul<sup>1</sup>, found poem excerpt, based upon interview November 13, 2015)

There is an abundance of literature demonstrating the considerable interest researchers have in understanding more about adolescents' literacy practices in and outside of school (Collie et al., 2016; Moje et al., 2008; Scott Curwood, Magnifico, & Lammers, 2013; Troia, Shankland, & Wolbers, 2012; Villalon et al., 2015) and identifying ways to engage and support secondary youth in meaningful writing practices (Benko, 2012; Bonsur Kurki, 2015; VanDerHeide & Juzwik, 2018). Our aim in this paper is to contribute to these

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<sup>1</sup> All names, people and places, are pseudonyms.

areas; to do so we maintain a focus on 10 secondary adolescents' perspectives on, and use, of time, as they engaged in the development of a demanding writing task over 12 months. The results of this study not only complement what is known about the teaching of writing and secondary youth, but, also, provide insights into what is unknown; specifically, how youth perceive and use time for the purposes of writing. Using a thematic, narrative, arts-informed approach (Butler-Kisber, 2010), this paper qualitatively explores experiences of high school students involved in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme (IBDP), as they developed a research paper. The 4000-word research paper, known as the Extended Essay (EE), offers students to engage in independent research on an area of interest within a chosen subject or combination of subjects in the IBDP (Wray, 2013). Attending to participants' understanding of time, as it was perceived and invested, provided insights into their thinking regarding this demanding writing task.

In the opening poem, a grade 12 student, Paul reflects upon the experience of developing a first-time research paper as part of his studies in the IBDP. As a high school student involved in a rigorous academic program, Paul was expected to engage in the writing of advanced disciplinary writing tasks and had ongoing opportunities to write in different genres and for different purposes (Jeffery & Wilcox, 2014). What was different about this writing task, however, was that Paul was expected to create and sustain an original argument using published literature to inform his claims. Paul described the thinking and writing needed for the EE as slow to mature; it took time to conceptualize his argument although, he noted, once this had happened, its development occurred at a steady pace. Paul's insights about his own writing process highlighted temporal elements, as he described the thinking momentum that was required for the EE's progression. Scholars of the IBDP have found that while students perceive the EE as challenging with respect to a range of factors (learning strategies, classroom context, teacher knowledge, scheduling) impacting students' potential success (Hamer, 2010), research also demonstrates the positive, long-term effects of the EE (Aulls & Lemay, 2013; Aulls & Pelaez, 2013). Scholars have found that graduates of the IBDP credit the EE with preparing them for university level writing; they were more familiar with the steps of an extensive paper, better able to gather and assess references, and knowledgeable of academic style appropriate for field of study (Aulls & Lemay, 2013; Aulls & Pelaez, 2013; Inkelas, Swan, Pretlow, & Jones, 2012; Wray, 2013;).

Echoing the scholarship about the benefits of the EE, much has been written about the multiple advantages that regular opportunities to write in school afford for secondary youth. Some examples attribute regular writing to: the development of advanced writing abilities (Jeffery & Wilcox, 2014), increased understanding of content (Graham & Herbert, 2010), overall quality of student work (American Institutes for Research, 2005, 2007), and achievement on writing (Graham, Harris, & Hebert, 2011) and standardized assessments (Matsumura, Slater, Garnier, & Boston, 2008; Newmann, Bryk, & Nagaoka, 2001). While there is strong evidence of the benefits regular writing can foster, the kinds of writing in which youth engage and produce are also important (Villalon, Mateos, & Cuevas, 2015). Tasks that challenge students to move beyond summarizing single sources to consult two or more references, with the aim of synthesizing such information to inform an argument, are critical to learning. Engaging in such kinds of writing tasks, researchers have argued, can lead to positive learning outcomes (Aulls & Shore, 2008; Thomson & Gunter, 2006; Fielding & Bragg, 2003), the development of inquiry-based literacy skills (Shore et al.,

2009), and strong student engagement (Collie, Martin, Scott Curwood, 2016; Jeffery & Wilcox, 2014). Although scholars agree that writing, and the instruction of writing, should be educational priorities, as writing engagement contributes to development of thinking, learning, and communicating (Graham & Perin, 2007; Graham, Harris, & Hebert, 2011; National Commission on Writing for America's Families, Schools, and Colleges, 2003), the teaching of challenging, extended writing tasks, is the exception in schools (Applebee & Langer, 2009; 2011; Benko, 2016; Bryk, Nagaoka, and Newmann, 2000; Fisher, 2009; Matsumura et al., 2008). Little is known about secondary youths' experiences in and perceptions of engaging in such kinds of writing.

Of particular interest to our focus was adolescents' perspectives on, and use of, time in writing extended arguments. A review of the literature revealed only a handful of studies that focused directly on time-related elements associated with the development of extended writing, with the bulk of these studies focused on the time allocation of teachers regarding their instructional practices in literacy and language arts classrooms (Fisher, 2009; Swerling & Zibulsky, 2014; Zenkov & Harmon, 2009). The remainder indirectly referenced aspects of time; for example, in how to support secondary youth at different stages of the writing process (Benko, 2012; VanDerHeide & Juzwik, 2018) and in how to engage them in writing through alternative approaches (Bonsur Kurki, 2015; Calderón López & Thériault, 2017; Price & Harkins, 2011). A rare find in our review was the work of Roca de Larios, Manchón, Murphy, and Marín (2008), in which they found argument formulation took up the greatest amount of time for adolescent and young adult learners of English. Overall, there is limited research on how secondary adolescents perceive writing (Juzwik et al., 2006), on how they sustain their efforts during the development of a cognitively demanding writing task (Benko, 2016), and, little to no research, on how they perceive and allocate time in writing extended arguments. Of importance to this study was understanding youths' perspectives and experiences, as they engaged in the writing of a task that challenged them to construct knowledge and expand on their thinking by making claims that were grounded in evidence and reasoning.

In our 12-month study, we attended to the experiences of 55 IBDP students as they worked on the development of the EE. Our focus in this paper is on 10 of these participants through the following four-fold purpose: (1) to burrow into the experiences youth reported as they developed this research paper; (2) to consider how perceptions of cognitively demanding tasks shaped participants' willingness, if any, to persist with the development of this research paper; (3) to understand how perceptions of time informed the development of the EE; and (4) to identify the presence of time pressure, if any, in response to busy schedules, and the ways this may have shaped their writing engagement. In what follows, we explore the experiences of 10 adolescents developing and writing a research paper.

### *Theoretical Framework*

Due to the nature of the Extended Essay (EE), a paper that requires students of the IBDP to independently identify a research worthy topic and sustain an original argument, it was imperative to the design of the study to inquire (Butler-Kisber, 2010) into the stories adolescents told over time of their writing experiences. Informing our thinking in this study was an understanding of twenty-first century literacy and its multi-faceted emphasis on learning and literacy practices in technologically advanced societies. Identifying literacy in this way embraces not only reading and writing, but also methods and ways of thinking

used for a variety of purposes such as comprehension, communication, critical thought, and construction of knowledge (Gee, 2001, 2007; Kalantzis & Cope, 2011; Kane, 2011; Lind, 2008; Pahl & Rowsell, 2012; UNESCO, 2008). The complexity of the social world is at the center of such thinking about literacy and acknowledges the multiple responses and behaviors that occur as individuals interact with others in particular places, shaped by contextual parameters and social requirements (Beach, Appleman, Fecho, & Simon, 2016; Downer, Sabol, & Hamre, 2010 ). To further sharpen our gaze on secondary adolescents' perspectives of engaging in a task that challenged their thinking and writing, we drew upon two central concepts in our framework: First, the EE as a cognitively demanding writing task (Benko, 2012, 2016) and second, the presence of time (Duncheon & Tierney, 2013) informing participants' understanding of the kinds of thinking and writing that the EE demanded.

Over the course of the study, participants regularly referred to the EE as intellectually and temporally demanding, with perceptions seemingly shaped by not only its research orientation but, also because it was largely self-directed and externally moderated. Benko (2012, 2016) categorized cognitively demanding writing tasks (CDLTs) as undertakings that ask, "students to (1) construct knowledge rather than restate or summarize and (2) elaborate on their thinking by making claims and using evidence or reasoning" (p. 202). As participants engaged in the development of the EE, it became apparent to them that the thinking, writing, and expectations associated with this task were far more complex than what they had previously encountered in prior schooling experiences. As we collected data and, later, in our analysis of participants' accounts, we were drawn to moments in which they made this struggle visible through their growing awareness of the task's temporal implications, particularly the time they had to invest into thinking and writing and that it was not a paper that one could competently complete quickly. Indicators of participants' thinking regarding the development of the EE were most intricately connected with concepts of time. To describe progress, if any, that was being made regarding the EE's development, required participants to articulate the decisions they made at different stages of its conceptualization. These decisions were temporally bounded in nature and tied to different stages of the research-writing process, particularly as their thinking deepened in response to the interrelated phase of reviewing research related to their topic and composing an argument that reflected the published literature as they also attempted to propose new understanding.

Lastly, further heightening our awareness of participants' time-related references as part of their writing engagement is Duncheon and Tierney's (2013) conceptualization of 21<sup>st</sup> century time constructs in which they identified three temporal paradigms important to the teaching and learning process, specifically clock time, socially constructed time, and virtual time. Of the three constructs discussed, Duncheon and Tierney described socially constructed and virtual time as subjective paradigms in which socially constructed time accounted for perceptions of "diversity, quality, and meaning" (p. 249) and virtual time lived in relationship to information and communication technologies (ICTs). Individuals' experiences using ICTs, the authors explained, are "more varied, complex and fast paced...directly contradict[ing] assumptions inherent in clock time" (p. 253). Unlike socially constructed and virtual time, clock time, is "measurable" and used to identify behaviors and perceptions associated with "quantifiable time allocations" (Duncheon and Tierney, p. 243). Duncheon and Tierney's three temporal paradigms enabled us to reflect

upon the frequency and nature of adolescents' time related references related to the planning, development, and writing of the EE. In the design of the study, we were mindful of the importance of time to participants' understanding of the EE, having encountered former students' insights and experiences with the EE in the two years (2012-2014) leading up to year of the study (2014-2015). Of particular interest were moments leading up to the completion of the EE in which participants articulated their growing understanding of their research topic in relation to the developing sophistication of their argument; in such moments, they reportedly experience a loss of time, immersed as they were in the writing. Conversely, at the outset of this process, participants also described moments where they felt a sense of stalled time, particularly when their understanding of their research topics was still developing.

Considering the interplay of CDLTs with attention to time constructs not only allowed us to further burrow into participants' thinking as it was temporally distributed (Roca de Larios et al., 2008) over the course of this challenging writing assignment, but, also enabled us to pinpoint their understanding of the time investment it demanded.

### *Methodology and Methods*

Conducted in the academic year of 2014-2015, the study was situated in an urban high school where the Authors ran a curriculum project focused exclusively on supporting IBDP students' understanding of the EE. In brief, the IBDP is a two-year academically demanding programme for grade 11 and 12 students, ages 16-19. Established in 1968, as a non-profit educational foundation ("History of the International Baccalaureate", n.d.), the IBDP is offered throughout the world and Canadian schools have experienced rapid increases over the past five years in their offerings of IBDP programmes. There are approximately 141 IBDPs and 20,000 students in Canada ("Today in Canada", n.d.); presently in Nova Scotia, the IBDP is offered in 13 public high schools ("International Baccalaureate in Nova Scotia", n.d.) and two private schools. In the IBDP, students are expected to study courses from six different subject groups; additionally, students are also expected to engage with three core elements: the extended essay (EE), theory of knowledge (ToK), and creativity, action, service (CAS). At the time of the study, there were 55 Year 1 students and 64 Year 2 students involved in the IBDP in this school. The IBDP students were part of a student body of 1350 students.

The curriculum project, entitled Project Worldview (PW), first began in the fall of 2012 and was developed in response to Heather Michael's observations that students often struggled with initial steps of the EE, particularly the importance of identifying a research worthy topic. In total, PW happened over three academic years (Year 1: 2012-2013; Year 2: 2013-2014; Year 3: 2014-2015) and each year was comprised of approximately 11 sessions in which grade 11 students explored theories of knowledge, research paradigms, personal research interests, and peer-reviewed literature related to their identified topics. At the end of the school year, PW concluded with a research showcase where students shared their research topics, proposed plans for the EE, and any initial drafts they may have



developed<sup>2</sup>. The classes scheduled for PW were not a part of any other class/subject and students did not receive grades for attending these sessions. Observing students' responses to PW, particularly its impact upon developing their understanding of the EE and the research process, encouraged us to conduct this study in 2014-2015 into students' experiences with the overall development of the EE.

### *Data Collection Methods*

As part of the larger study involving 55 IBDP students in grade 11, the data collection methods included: two questionnaires comprised of open-ended questions (administered in December 2014 and May 2015), 11 observations (22 sets of field notes) on PW sessions (December 2014-June 2015), student samples of work, and 30 audio-recorded semi-structured interviews conducted by Author A (Interview One: December 2014; Interview Two: May 2015; Interview Three: November-December 2015). Important to note is that two of these interviews occurred during PW and the final interview happened in the fall of participants' grade 12 year. The interviews, running approximately 20-40 minutes, included questions about their research and writing experiences in school as well as about the development of the EE. The 10 students who were interviewed about their experiences are the focus of this paper. The following chart depicts information participants shared about themselves. In general, the 10 adolescents could be described as academically successful, active in extra-curricular activities, in and outside of school, engaged in a wide range of interests, from middle-income families, and of European origin. Of the topics chosen for their EE, nine of 10 participants made explicit connections between their EE topic<sup>3</sup> and their personal interests and extra-curricular activities.

Table 1

### *Participants*

Names of participants	Gender/Age	Identified interests	Extra-curricular (school or community based)	Preferred school subjects (if identified)
Bryce	Male/16	Music (oboe, piano)	Band	Social studies/math
Grace	Female/16	Sports	Basketball	Unidentified
Joseph	Male/16	Sports, debating,	Debate team,	Sciences

<sup>2</sup> The overall purpose of PW was to help grade 11 students identify a research topic for the EE. The research showcase in June celebrated their efforts and required students to create an academic research poster to summarize their topic and plans for developing the paper. Students, parents, and teachers attended this event. Some students also developed drafts of their EE for this event; however, the majority wrote their EE over the summer into and fall of grade 12 and completed the EE in December.

<sup>3</sup> Participants' extended essay topics are not divulged to enhance anonymity.



		volunteer work	hockey, tutoring	
Julia	Female/16	Swimming	Swim team, works part-time	Theory of knowledge
Lori	Female/16	Music, theatre, horseback riding, Volunteer work	Student council, coaching, fund raising for local camp	Unidentified
Nicholas	Male/16	Music (piano), creative writing (sci-fi)	Band, Model United Nations, works part-time	Unidentified
Paul	Male/16	Sports, movies, economics	Football	Unidentified
Reese	Male/16	Sports, chess, space	Soccer, cross-country, hockey, chess, student council, drama, piano lessons	Math/science
Talia	Female/16	Sports	Hockey, sailing	Math/science
Yolanda	Female/16	Music (guitar), movie making, traveling, volunteer work	Community involvement (youth social justice), volunteer work	English/history/sciences

### *Analysis and Representation of Data as Found Poems*

Data was inductively analyzed throughout the inquiry to better understand participants' experiences over the course of developing the EE. Inductive analysis increased our awareness of recurring patterns across participants' narrative accounts and heightened the attention we paid to participants' perceptions of time, particularly a lack of time and the amount of time the EE demanded. The presence of this two-fold tension

seemed to influence participants' understanding of the EE, particularly the amount of time they thought they were able to invest in related thinking and writing activities. Our decision to represent the data as found poems (Butler-Kisber 2002, 2010) clustered around variations of the phenomenon (Butler-Kisber & Stewart, 2009), was based upon our aspirations to vividly display participants' thinking about the EE through perceptions of time and accounts of time use and to show pockets of learning in response to struggles (Mitton-Kükner, 2013, Mitton-Kükner, 2015; Michael & Mitton-Kükner, 2016). Creating found poetry is a creative process and entails what Butler-Kisber (2010) described as "the rearrangement of words, phrases...taken from other sources and reframed as poetry by changes in spacing and/or lines or by altering the text by additions and/or deletions" (p. 84). Developing the poems required numerous readings of transcripts to first establish common patterns, followed by identifying words and phrases (Butler-Kisber, 2010) depicting participants' descriptions of their thinking and writing engagement. Early impressions of the ideas found in the poems were shared with participants in the final interview to create an opportunity for their feedback. Only minor changes to grammar and arrangement of participants' words occurred during the creation of these poems and may be viewed as "untreated" (Butler-Kisber, 2010).

### *Findings*

#### *Adolescent Temporal Perspectives on Cognitively Demanding Writing: Experiences of Time Pressure and Willingness to Invest Time*

The following found poems<sup>4</sup> demonstrate what each of the 10 participants reportedly experienced as they worked towards the completion of the extended essay amongst competing academic demands. The selections, each about a different participant, were chosen to epitomize recurring experiences shared by all 10 participants over the course year in which data was collected and, again, in the final interview as participants looked back upon the experience. Participants' perceptions of time were two-fold in that they consistently attributed specific commitments as responsible for their lack of time, working in combination with a lack of understanding about the time the extended essay demanded. The presentation of the four themes are organized to demonstrate participants' busyness in and out of school, their initial lack of understanding about the time the EE demanded, their gradual comprehension of the time they needed to dedicate to the EE, and their perceptions of the EE's authenticity with their willingness to invest time.

#### *Mutual Experience<sup>5</sup> 1: Juggling Competing Demands: Grace*

Well, it's for sure busy, that's for sure!  
Time!! I don't have any of it,  
I love working on it [extended essay],  
it's interesting and  
I want to sit down and do it,  
but I have a million other things going on.

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<sup>4</sup> The larger data set associated with this study includes 30 poems related to 30 interviews conducted over the 2014-2015 academic year.

<sup>5</sup> The phrase "Mutual Experience" is used to describe encounters reported by all 10 participants.

I usually wake up around 7:50,  
get up,  
go to school,  
do school all day...  
really my only break is lunch where I eat,  
sometimes I can barely eat!  
Then usually I'll go home, eat, then go to practice...  
I play basketball! It's super busy!  
It's really hectic, we have really late practices.  
We usually have 8-10 practices [a week] which are mostly two hours...  
My mom lives [close to school],  
but my dad lives in [the city], and  
last week we had conditioning from 5-6,  
and then practice from 8-10,  
and I didn't get home until like 10:30...  
By the time I showered...it was 11,  
So, I couldn't do anything.  
I had a huge bio test the next day too!

It's a little stressful right now...  
November, they [teachers] said, it's going to be the hardest month  
because they're just piling everything on,  
and everything's getting due,  
and they're introducing new things.  
Chem IA [Internal assessment], the Bio IA...  
the extended essay due...a TOK essay...  
there's just so much stuff that's due!  
It's just very hectic right now...  
(Grace, found poem based upon Interview 3, November 13, 2015)

*Unpacking Grace's experiences.* For Grace, like all of the participants, finding time for the extended essay seemed to compete with other school related commitments, academic as well as extra-curricular. While Grace described a desire to work on her extended essay, particularly as Grace had personal interest in the topic, overwhelmingly a lack of time was attributed to the intensity of school life. Grace was aware of this tension and acknowledged that her schedule sometimes meant she was ill-prepared for particular assessment tasks. Viewing Grace's reported efforts to engage with her extended essay in terms of time allocation (Hillbrecht, Zuzanek, & Mannell, 2008) suggests that Grace, and the other participants, felt pressed for time throughout this process. Regular engagement in activities like part-time work, school athletic teams, the school band, volunteer work, and school assignments were reported by all participants as placing demands upon their time. Grace, and others, described this hectic pace as a regular experience in the IBDP and indicated the choices they had to make in terms of trade-offs (Hillbrecht et al., 2008) of where they felt they could allocate time in response to the structural and academic expectations of school life. In many ways, engaging in the development of the extended essay long before it was actually due meant, for Grace and her peers, sacrificing their

attention from something else. Yet, despite the intensity of their schedules, participants largely reported that their experiences taught them how to manage time and prioritize commitments.

*Mutual Experience 2: (Mis)perceptions of Time Investment and the EE: Bryce*

It took me a while to stumble onto a topic  
that was really solid.  
I had an immense amount of knowledge,  
about a broad topic,  
which didn't necessarily apply to what I wanted to do...  
It slowly evolved.  
It took a really, really long time,  
sifting through information,  
to try and figure something that really applied...

That idea of refining your information or  
knowing where to look to find information,  
that was really a big process for me.  
I've kind of gone away from...getting mega overwhelmed,  
because there is so much information,  
to finally getting to where I want.

But it's knowing where to look, and  
then knowing where to get information,  
and then what to do with it afterwards.

I was just like [initially],  
I don't know what to do with myself...  
Eventually looking through [the sources], and  
using the good old CTRL + F [function],  
I eventually found what I wanted.

Refining that information from the broad topic  
to the topic<sup>6</sup> that I have right now,  
that process I could have done from the beginning.  
If I [had] had a solid question right off the start,  
I would have probably analysed my data a little differently...  
MAYBE...

(Bryce, found poem based upon Interview 3, November 13, 2015)

*Unpacking Bryce's experiences.* Bryce was forthcoming as he described the cognitive challenge of navigating large amounts of research literature while attempting to identify an angle that would enable him to make his claim. Making time for the EE was

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<sup>6</sup> All of the participants used the word, "topic", to represent their argument in the EE.

described by Bryce, and the other participants, as multi-faceted in that there was the time needed to identify, and understand, suitable references followed by the more substantial undertaking of creating a plausible argument. In this instance, Bryce's words bring to light what all of the participants identified about the EE, in that, not only was it a time-intensive process; but, it was the kind of writing they had limited experience doing. This writing task demanded they develop a research worthy topic with the aim of constructing knowledge using evidence (Benko, 2016) from information-dense texts. Bryce explained that once he became more familiar with the field, as well as the argument he wanted to sustain, he was better able to navigate such texts, for example, in the use of keyboard shortcuts to identify key words. In looking back on the process, Bryce suggested he might have been able to go about the development of EE differently had he spent more time creating a research question on which to focus his efforts. Bryce's insight, in the moment, was tentative, as he followed the comment up with much laughter and emphasized the word, "maybe", to show his uncertainty.

*Mutual Experience 3: Closer to the End: Waking Up to the Time Needed for the Task:*  
*Lori*

You need to structure your time effectively,  
everyone will tell you to do work during the summer,  
I didn't do enough work during the summer.  
You have this big project, and  
you have a lot of time,  
but when you throw in all the other things,  
things get missed.

Some challenges are time management.  
In the IB program a lot goes on...  
Learning how to plan and prepare is a challenging thing to do.  
The evenings and weekends are definitely busy;  
I try to do more of the writing in the morning.  
However, weekends are an excellent time if  
I can just chunk of a couple of hours.  
That's certainly been helpful.  
I just block off time for writing  
as one due date gets closer that becomes the priority.

Picking an extended essay topic is not super easy.  
I'm still happy with my topic; but,  
I did have to change what I wanted to do.  
That was hard for me;  
I really liked the idea of what I had.  
But it's important to recognize what you can and can't do.  
I was a little bit ambitious.  
So that was challenging!  
My advice would be, if you are interested in collecting your own data,

you have to be really on top of the research and the timeline.

The extended essay could be a wonderful process, but  
you absolutely need to pick a topic you're passionate about.

It's an interesting way to learn about yourself,  
your study habits,

your time management,

your interests, and

also, how you work as a writer, or

how you work as a researcher.

It's good in the sense of preparing you for University!

[But] there will be some things,

I will be wishing I'd done more earlier.

(Lori, found poem based upon Interview 3, November 13, 2015)

*Unpacking Lori's experiences.* All of the participants suggested that if they were to advise someone who was about to begin their EE, they would emphasize beginning early. Lori acknowledged the importance of finding time for the EE over the spring and summer of grade 11 rather than leaving this task to be completed in the fall of grade 12. Yet, Lori and the other participants conceded beginning early was challenging to do, because of the ongoing workload in the IBDP and the amount of time and energy this kind of writing entailed. Lori's described her process of writing, as learning how to block off time for the task. During the interview, Lori was quick to emphasize that identifying one's argument in the EE was challenging to do and was not something that happened quickly. Lori, unlike the majority of participants<sup>7</sup>, at the beginning of the EE was quite intent on gathering original data through the use of a survey. However, she soon learned this would add time to the task (time she did not have) and because of this, had to revise her original aim to focus her argument more upon a meta-analysis of other research. Lori noted that passion for one's topic was critical to the development of the EE and judged the task as highly authentic in terms of her post-secondary and professional goals (Behizadeh, 2014), a point echoed by all of the participants throughout the study's duration.

*Mutual Experience 4: Perceptions of Authenticity Intersecting with Willingness to Invest Time: Yolanda*

Practicing your time management skills.

The time [needed] that's an advantage and disadvantage.

So, that's definitely a challenge, for all of us.

because everything else due in all of your other classes.

The extended essay is interesting

it's bigger than most of the standard essays we write in high school,

it just kind of brings a few disciplines together, [and]

it's great preparation for University.

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<sup>7</sup> Participants in the study relied on peer reviewed references to develop their EEs and did not collect original data or conduct experiments.



I love my topic,  
it's something I'm really passionate;  
The goal...has always been to prove that youth have the ability  
to do all these great things.  
All of them have leadership.  
My topic came because in Grade 11  
I was heavily involved in a lot of service learning projects,  
and a lot of school clubs so,  
it just kind of seemed natural to me  
do something I'm interested in.

Yet, I still have to force myself to sit down and write.  
I also love writing so it's really weird.  
At one point I was thinking,  
do I keep writing about this topic that I am passionate about?  
That requires more work?  
Or do I change my topic to something that I've already done research on?  
It'll be a lot easier, faster to write, and I could get a decent mark out of it...

I like how working with the different disciplines  
gives you different perspectives on things,  
to not be narrow-minded; but,  
to realize where you are,  
where you stand,  
and then  
after you realize your views,  
you can learn from others and how they perceive things.  
With the extended essay,  
it gives you the ability to research a specific topic,  
but look at it from different perspectives.  
(Yolanda, found poem based upon Interview 3, November 13, 2015)

*Unpacking Yolanda's experiences.* Throughout the process of developing the EE, all of the participants, as emphasized by Yolanda, juggled multiple academic responsibilities. Yolanda also acknowledged the EE was different than other essays she, and her peers, had experienced due to its length and the expectation that they would bring together an argument mindful of different perspectives. In this moment, Yolanda reiterated the points made by several participants in that while she saw the EE as highly relevant for post-secondary preparation, she experienced a dilemma when developing her topic in that she wondered: Should she work on something that demanded more work or revert to a topic with which she was already familiar? For Yolanda, and for the others who wondered about this, they ultimately chose the topic with which they had less experience. Viewing Yolanda's, and other participants', experiences through a sociocognitive perspective (Gee,

2001), particularly the concept of Discourses<sup>8</sup> sheds light onto an understanding of an identity that the participants shared in the study. Engaging in the EE meant adopting a mindset that embraced the intellectual challenge of the EE in the midst of multi-tasking other commitments. Finding time for the EE meant participants had to come to terms with the idea that this essay was far different than anything they had encountered: To be completed, it demanded their attention, their acknowledgment of alternative perspectives, and required them to base their claims on evidence. Because of everything else in which they were engaged, the development of the EE was described by participants as a process of false starts in that it was not something that could be done quickly and it needed them to be persistent if it were to be done well. Yolanda's, and the other participants', willingness to persist with the task may be viewed through simply their desire to complete the IBDP of which the EE was a key component. Complicating this view, however, is the point that all of the participants made about the EE, they were willing to persist not only because they learned about the process of developing an authentic research paper, they also learned about themselves in its creation.

*Discussion: Viewing Temporal Indicators as Insights into Adolescent Writers' Knowledge, Motivation and Perceptions of Authenticity: Pedagogical Lessons*

The purpose of this study was to better understand how academically engaged students navigated a challenging writing task over the course of 12 months. As students who had experienced success in schools and who were deeply involved in school life, we were curious about the kinds of strategies they would employ to meet the demands of the EE in relation to how they perceived and invested time. Given the importance of writing and the role CDLTs (Benko, 2012, 2016) can play in student learning, it is paramount to consider what role time investment may play upon what is presently known about adolescent writing and motivation. Much has been written about the instructional practices that have been proven to motivate and support the quality of writing produced by adolescents. Of note is Graham and Perin's (2007) in-depth meta-analysis of those intervention strategies found to positively impact the development of student writing, particularly those tasks and topics that tend to motivate adolescents and their willingness to engage in process writing. For the most part, the research shows a strong relationship between adolescent motivation to write and the following elements: freedom to choose a topic (Newkirk & Kent, 2007), engagement with online audiences (Agger, 2013; Magnifico, 2010; Scott Curwood et al., 2013), and inclusion of multimodal writing (DeVere Wolsey & Grisham, 2007; Rowsell & DeCoste, 2012). With the advent of new literacies and the presence of texts, blogs, wikis, tweets, and instant messages (Dowdall, 2006; Gee, 2004; Sternberg, Kaplan, & Borck, 2007; Witte, 2007), many have advocated for further inquiry into the conditions supporting the motivations of adolescent writers (Collie, Martin, & Scott Curwood, 2016; Moje et al., 2008; Troia et al., 2012). For example, Agger (2013) argued that in this digital era, youth writing is motivated by the rapid response of others.

Overall, the findings of this study largely affirm what is known about adolescent writers, their habits, dispositions, and motivations. Students do not expect writing to take

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<sup>8</sup> Gee (2001) suggests Discourses may be understood as comprised of "identity kits...full of specific devices...of which you can enact a specific identity and engage in specific activities associated with that identity" (pp. 719-720).

as long as it does, they have busy lives outside of school, they have limited experience with writing tasks that require research, and they are more willing to invest time in writing when the task is viewed as relevant and there is interest in the topic<sup>9</sup>. Although these ideas are largely known and regarded, as tacit knowledge embedded in the pedagogical repertoires of experienced teachers, there is little consensus regarding the purposes, procedures, and principles of writing tasks that motivationally capture secondary student commitment and interest to engage in writing. One might ask, what can be learned from high achieving adolescents and their writing experiences when they will, in all likelihood, be successful? We suggest that the significance of this study is not necessarily seen through the end products, when participants produced well-crafted writing. Scholars agree that adolescents with strong reading and writing identities tend to succeed (Hall, Johnson, Juzwik, Wortham, & Mosley, 2009; Guthrie, Wigfield, & Klauda, 2012; Vetter, 2010). The significance of the study resides in the messiness of events leading up to the completion of the EE, particularly when considering what little is known about what fuels youth stamina in the midst of developing complex writing (Benko, 2016). In light of documented adolescent resistance to writing in school (Agger, 2013; Consalvo & Maloch, 2015) and the little that is known about adolescent perceptions of writing (Juzwik et al., 2006; Spargur, 2016), let alone writing tasks that intellectually challenge them over time, this is a point of consideration. While this study reaffirms some of what is known about the motivation of adolescent writers in terms of topic interest and perceptions of task authenticity, it also highlights the ways participants temporally distributed (Roca de Larios et al, 2008) their efforts and thinking at different stages of the research writing process.

Viewing participants' writing experiences through temporal constructs (Duncheon & Tirney, 2013), revealed a critical awareness that developed over time, as participants grew to understand the relationship between their own time investment with the energy, knowledge and skills needed for the development of the EE. Overwhelmingly participants viewed the EE as an authentic task (Behizadeh, 2014a) in that they were able to identify a topic of personal interest, they saw its relevance to their future university studies, and, most importantly, they saw the opportunity to construct new knowledge in ways that were different than prior writing tasks composed for school. The ability to decide if something is authentic, Behizadeh (2014a, 2014b) argued, is a subjective act and is ultimately a decision to be made by learners, and not necessarily teachers' perceptions of a task. Teachers may view a task as authentic, but understanding if learners share this perception is somewhat elusive without insights into their thinking. Considering adolescent descriptions of their writing through a multi-faceted temporal lens, we argue, suggests there is much to be learned from indicators of time as evidence of, substantial or limited, understanding, and motivation, of how to proceed with a task. While educational researchers generally criticize the idea of treating time as a reserve to be tapped for student learning (Compton-Lilly, 2016; Vannest & Hagan-Burke, 2010), or as a universal concept (Birth, 2004), teachers plan writing to happen in the real-time of schools (VandDerHeide & Juzwik, 2018). Time in schools tends to be a largely linear, unvarying western construct, with a schedule that does not typically foster conducive writing conditions. Most students cannot write on demand as determined by the blocks of a timetable (Zenkov & Harmon, 2009). In response, the pedagogy of teachers comes sharply into focus, particularly the

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<sup>9</sup> Thank you to the anonymous reviewer who summarized this point.

importance of temporal considerations informing the didactics of writing instruction and its real-time pedagogical actualization. Teachers need to not only plan for variable time allowances at different stages of the writing process, but to also be mindful of the temporal needs of latter stages, once students have completed first drafts. For example, in our study, participants identified how time-intensive some specific writing processes were over others, particularly the stage of argument formulation and review of the literature informing the initial drafts of their EEs. Conversely, participants also described spending less time on revisions of the EE and seemingly had less interest, or awareness, about the importance of recursively polishing their writing as a way to deepen their arguments.

Researchers note that the teaching of writing is not only complex (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Graham, Early, & Wilson, 2014), but it is also influenced by contextual supports and constraints (Snow & Moje, 2010; Stagg Peterson & McClay, 2014). While a process writing approach (Atwell, 1998; Elbow, 2000; Graves, 1983) explicitly embraces the idea that thoughtful writing happens over time for learners in response to effective teacher pedagogy and feedback, in the backdrop of this complexity, are the less articulated temporal implications of writing. Indeed, cultivating a mindset for writing embraces an understanding that “complete papers are never written, only *re-written*” (Colyar, 2009, p. 422, author’s emphasis). Implied in this statement, but nonetheless important, are the varying temporal implications of different genres and tasks. Not all writing tasks are temporally, or cognitively, equal. Teachers commonly determine the kinds of real-world writing tasks in which secondary youth engage (Muhammad & Behizadeh, 2015); little is known, however, about how time informs the pedagogical decisions of teachers as they teach writing, and less still about the time perceptions of youth as they engage in writing.

Furthermore, when viewing the research about youth whose motivation to write declines, as they proceed through secondary schooling (Garrett & Moltzen, 2011; Jeffery & Wilcox, 2014; Romano, 2007), understanding time as a pedagogical tool becomes an important element. While we note, there are a myriad of factors when understanding learners who experience challenges with literacy (Bauer & García, 2002; Dawson, 2009; Ganske, Monroe, & Strickland, 2003; Phegley & Oxford, 2010; Pitcher, Martinez, Dicembre, Fewster, & McCormick, 2010), as well as how individuals motivate themselves varies widely (Troia, Shankland, & Wolbers, 2012), we do argue there is potential in considering the time investment perspectives of adolescents as they write, and to consider its role for those who struggle with writing. Enabling students to have more knowledge of how long writing can take is related to fostering increased metacognition about the writing process (Moje et al., 2008; Snow & Moje, 2010), an area, we suggest, which holds promise and warrants further inquiry.

### *Conclusion*

Throughout the study we were frequently reminded that the participants perceived the EE as truly challenging and they struggled in ways that many writers struggle when faced with the development of new arguments, including ourselves. The 10 adolescents involved generously offered windows into their worlds, as they juggled demanding schedules and workloads while completing an original research paper. Knowing how their increased awareness of time played a role in the successful development of the EE, may support the work of those involved in the teaching of writing, and its pedagogy (i.e. teachers, teacher educators), and to consider how the time investment perspectives of

adolescents reveal indicators of genre knowledge, argument formulation, and motivation into stamina and interest.

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## ***Hidden Children: Using Children's Literature to Develop Understanding and Empathy Toward Children of Incarcerated Parents***

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### *Abstract*

Research indicates that children whose parents are incarcerated are a vulnerable group of people with poor life outcomes. Yet these children are not tracked in the Canadian system, making it difficult for schools to respond with appropriate supports. How can schools be inclusive to this hidden demographic of children? Framed in theories of Ethic of Care, Reader Response, and Critical Literacy, the author proposes the use of story to develop understanding and empathy. Research shows that acknowledging these children's experiences through story helps them to feel validated while broadening capacity for empathy among other children. Can a story develop empathy toward children of incarcerated parents? To answer this question, the author wrote a picture book about a child who visits her mother in jail, and read the story to three groups of children, interspersed and followed by rich discussions. The story elicited empathetic responses from all students, suggesting the benefits of this approach.

### *Introduction*

There are many children in Canadian schools who have a parent(s) serving time in correctional facilities. These children face a range of obstacles, such as poverty, academic difficulties, and social and emotional stresses (Bayes, 2007; Dallaire, Ciccone & Wilson, 2010). Although there is a growing recognition that teachers can provide valuable support to children of incarceration, the authors of a study focusing particularly on teachers' experiences with children of incarcerated parents, say they "could not locate a single study that has investigated teachers' experiences with children with incarcerated parents" (Dallaire et al., 2010, p. 282). There is a great need for research that looks at the needs of these children, so that teachers have a better understanding of how to best support them. Without support, the challenges that children of incarcerated parents face can be overwhelming and even insurmountable. Yet, these children remain part of an unidentified demographic across Canada. As McCormick Millar, Paddock, & Cohen point out, "there is no systematic process in place to identify school children affected by parental incarceration" (2014, p. iv). How can children be supported if we don't know who they are? And how can schools help to meet their needs?

A healthy classroom culture is one that encourages children to think critically while nurturing warmth and compassion. For this reason, I have framed my study in theories: Ethic of Care, Reader Response, and Critical Literacy, and I will offer a brief explanation and rationale of these theories. Following that, I want to discuss the function of inclusive literature in today's classroom and the role it might play to help students develop in their awareness and empathy toward children of incarcerated parents, so that they will feel less isolated and more understood and included. Finally, I want to share a summary of the responses that children in three focus groups from two different schools and communities



had to the story, *Sammy's Visit*. In order to offer support, it is important to understand some of the realities and daily challenges that children of incarcerated parents face. To that end, I want to begin by offering some perspectives on who these children are and some of the issues they deal with.

*Children of Incarcerated Parents: An Unidentified Demographic*

To help situate children of incarcerated parents, we need some familiarity with Canada's correctional demographic. It is helpful to know for example, that according to Statistics Canada:

- Correctional facilities across the country are overcrowded.
- Indigenous peoples are disproportionately represented in correctional centres in Canada's provincial and territorial correctional centres.
- Mental illness, addiction, poverty, histories of abuse, and memories of childhood trauma are among the realities that many in our correctional centres live with.
- Incarcerated women have, on average, more children than other women, and Indigenous women (both incarcerated and non-incarcerated) have, on average, more children than non-Indigenous mothers.
- The majority of incarcerated men and women do not have high school diplomas.
- A large percentage of currently incarcerated inmates have grown up in settings of familial incarceration. Children of incarcerated parents appear to have a higher probability of being incarcerated in adulthood than those of non-incarcerated parents.

These realities have significant implications for our schools as they directly affect children of the incarcerated. Though numbers of children impacted are not officially tracked, Canada's high incarceration rates (106 per 100,000 adults, according to Statistics Canada, 2015) would indicate that many thousands of students in Canadian schools live with the reality of having a parent who is incarcerated. Such correctional statistics tell a dismal tale in a country that claims to honour the rights of children. All too often, these children's lives become a sad sequel to the current narrative being played out in their parents' lives.

Children of incarcerated parents are an unidentified demographic in Canada's provinces and territories as this information is neither tracked nor passed on to the schools by the Department of Justice, making it very difficult for schools to help these children deal with the issues they will face—issues that are unique to parental incarceration (McCormick et al., 2014). A 2007 research report by Correctional Service Canada recognizes “there is limited data about parents who are incarcerated. Further information on the parental status of Canadian offenders is required in order to address this issue through policy and program development” (Correctional Service Canada, 2007). Unless the children, their families or their caregivers choose to disclose such information, the schools have no way of knowing that parental incarceration could be impacting their students. This presents a major obstacle for educators who may want to offer targeted support to these children. Quoted in a blog post, McCormick, a criminology professor, stresses the importance of considering the well-being of children when sentencing their parents:

When people are sentenced to custody, there is no protocol for considering whether they have dependent children and what effect the parent's sentence will have on the child. Yet, it is important to consider the best interests of a child because maintaining family relationships can be an extremely important factor in reducing parents' chances of reoffending, as well as preventing a child's future anti-social behaviour. (Russell, 2014)

This is not to say that needs exhibited by children of incarcerated parents are never met by educators. For example, if a child suffers academically, socially or in other noticeable or measurable ways, supports can and should be put in place to help children of incarcerated parents as they would for anyone else. However, if parental incarceration is the underlying cause of an exhibited need, and teachers and support workers were to be aware of this, such knowledge could impact and change an intervention plan. For example, a child struggling to write may be more motivated if an understanding teacher suggested she write a letter to her mom or dad in jail, or arranges for projects to be taken home so they can be shared during correctional visits. If correctional visits are only allowed on weekdays, a teacher should make allowances for necessary absenteeism and encourage such visits. It would be forward thinking indeed if correctional centres were to offer incarcerated parents of school children video conference time to facilitate parent-teacher meetings. All parties could potentially benefit by such dialogues that attempt to break down barriers. The teacher would have a better understanding of where the child is coming from, the parent would have the opportunity to enter into their child's school life, and the child would have the opportunity to be better understood. By recognizing and working within their realities, children's experiences are normalized and they will feel less isolated (Morgan, Leeson, Dillon, Wirgman, & Needham, 2014). The pain that children feel when a loved one is absent, the shame and guilt that is often associated with the separation, and the "family secret" they are sometimes expected to keep all have the potential to further stigmatize and isolate these children. It is not the child's fault when a parent is incarcerated, and yet isolation and stigmatization often adds to the suffering that such a child is already made to endure (Bayes, 2007).

There are a number of examples around the world (such as the UK, Australia, USA) that politically recognize this vulnerable group of children with the purpose of offering more supports within the school community. Although such policy changes could go a long way to benefit children of incarcerated parents in Canada, the current reality in all Canadian provinces and territories is that the decision to disclose parental incarceration rests with the child, parent and/or caregiver (McCormick et al., 2014). So, how can teachers meet the unique needs of children of parental incarceration when these children are not identified as such?

#### *Theoretical Underpinnings: Ethic of Care, Reader Response & Critical Literacy*

Children bring their backgrounds with them when they come to school. The families they come from, and the social and emotional burdens they carry, will affect their interactions and performance at school. Teachers need to respond to students with compassion by showing interest in and caring for them as individuals. This includes flexibility with and broadening subject areas so as to meet the needs and interests of the child (Noddings, 2005). To do so is not to ignore the educational mandate that teachers are

entrusted with. On the contrary: “To have as our educational goal the production of caring, competent, loving, and loveable people is not anti-intellectual. Rather, it demonstrates respect for the full range of human talents” (Noddings, 1995, p. 2). Caring for our students includes creating opportunities that help to give voice to difficult experiences, in order to limit feelings of isolation they may face.

I draw on The Ethic of Care theory developed in the 1980’s by feminist Nell Noddings. What Noddings promotes is a highly relational ethic, as it takes the responses and feelings of others into account. An ethic of caring returns us to...the relations in which we all must live. A relational ethic is rooted in...natural caring” (Noddings, 1988, p. 219).

Part of developing and cultivating environments of care involves teaching students to care for one another. Teachers do this by role modeling attitudes and behaviors of care, but we must also actively teach children to care for each other. Noddings addresses the importance of this: “In a classroom dedicated to caring, students are encouraged to support each other; opportunities for peer interaction are provided, and the quality of that interaction is as important (to both teacher and students) as the academic outcomes” (Noddings, 1988, p. 223).

Louise Rosenblatt also stresses the importance of recognizing children’s backgrounds and interests, particularly as they pertain to meaning children ascribe to their reading. The background experience, knowledge, and interests of children play a profound role in how text is interpreted, understood, and enjoyed. Her work focuses on what children bring with them to the literary text. Also known as Transactional Theory of the Literary Work, Rosenblatt developed the Reader Response theory in the 1960’s in response to text-based theories that dominated the landscape up to that point. Greatly influenced by Dewey and James, she “advanced a transactional theory of the literary work, which highlights the dynamic, generative relationship between the reader and the text in the formation of meaning” (Connell, 2005, p. 69). The reader’s involvement and personal response is integral to literary theory. Says Rosenblatt, “The words of a poet remain merely black marks on the page until they are brought to life anew by his readers in the context of their own worlds” (1960, p. 304).

This research is also built on a Critical Literacy framework. Critical Literacy has grown out of Paulo Friere’s philosophy of social justice and his active work among oppressed communities in Brazil, which he wrote about extensively in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Like Noddings, Freire speaks to the importance of dialogue. He wants to ensure that those who are marginalized are part of dialogues that will impact them. To dialogue with others, one needs to be caring and loving. “Love,” says Freire (1970) “is at the same time the foundation of dialogue and dialogue itself...if I do not love life—if I do not love people—I cannot enter into dialogue” (pp. 70–71). He goes on to say that “true dialogue cannot exist unless the dialoguers engage in critical thinking” (Freire, p. 73). Freire compares the education system to a banking model, void of human emotion, and he suggests that critical thinking is neither evident nor valued in our schools. Luke (2012) summarizes Freire’s ideas and concerns well:

He argued that schooling was based on a ‘banking model’ of education where learners’ lives and cultures were taken as irrelevant. He advocated a dialogical approach to literacy based on principles of reciprocal exchange. These would

critique and transform binary relationships of oppressed and oppressor, teacher and learner. (p. 5)

Friere's life work was devoted to empowering those who were disempowered, oppressed, and marginalized. Today, Friere's vision continues to guide critical literacy theory as it focuses "on the uses of literacy for social justice in marginalized and disenfranchised communities" (Luke, 2012, p. 5).

Critical literacy has been defined in many ways. Lewison, Flint, and Van Sluys (2002) have reviewed and synthesized these definitions grouping them into the following four dimensions: "(1) disrupting the commonplace, (2) interrogating multiple viewpoints, (3) focusing on sociopolitical issues, and (4) taking action and promoting social justice" (p. 382). They point out that these dimensions are interrelated and none of them stand-alone. The goal of the first dimension: 'disrupting the commonplace' is to explore a text with a new perspective, or "seeing the 'everyday' through new lenses" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383). The second dimension: 'interrogating multiple viewpoints' asks us "to imagine standing in the shoes of others—to understand experience and texts from our own perspectives and the viewpoints of others and to consider these various perspectives concurrently" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383). The third dimension of critical literacy: 'focusing on sociopolitical issues' considers power relationships and explores how "sociopolitical systems and power relationships shape perceptions, responses, and actions" (Lewison et al., 2002, p. 383). Finally, the fourth dimension of critical literacy: 'taking action and promoting social justice' focuses not merely on action, but on *reflective* action. Students are encouraged to think critically about inequity and to find concrete ways to bring about change toward greater social justice. Dresang & McClelland speak about a fundamental shift that is happening in the way children read and think in this digital age. They have broken this down to "three major types of changes occurring: changing forms and formats, changing perspectives, and changing boundaries (in subject, character, and theme)" (1999, p. 161). Such shifts in children's thinking align well to Lewison et al's four dimensions of critical literacy.

Caring for others involves knowing and understanding others. Taking the time to know our students helps to build trust with them. In fact, it is *easier* to care for others when we understand them and are able to see things from their perspectives. Friere, Rosenblatt, and Noddings all speak about the importance of caring for and knowing our students. Freire speaks to the importance of "...understanding learners' life worlds, with the aim of framing and solving real problems" (Luke, 2012, p. 5). It is significant that Freire's book is entitled, "Pedagogy *of* the Oppressed" and not, "Pedagogy *for* the Oppressed" because it indicates that he actively involved learners in the process of learning. Rosenblatt speaks to the importance of knowing our students, and supporting them in the process of self-reflection, so that students can grow as they learn to understand their own responses to what they read. Says Noddings, "Teacher and student must know each other well enough for trust to develop" (1988, p. 223).

To help children of incarcerated parents, teachers must understand who they are and where they come from. "To shape such persons, teachers need not only intellectual capabilities but also a fund of knowledge about the particular persons with whom they are working" (Noddings, 1988, p. 221). Collecting this "fund of knowledge" about our students involves knowing and understanding our students and the realities that children of

incarceration typically live with, and this involves having at least a rudimentary understanding of who their parents are and the circumstances surrounding their parents while incarcerated.

### *The Power of Story*

Bringing greater awareness, at the school and classroom level, of the lived experiences of children of parental incarceration is a first step toward recognizing the realities that these children live with. According to Maich and Belcher (2012), “Peer awareness can be thought of as the foundation to inclusion in the classroom, paving the way for further direct interventions and opportunities” (p. 207). Such recognition has the potential, says Lea (2015) to help children in the margins feel less isolated. Picture books have the ability to deliver on that front as they can be used to support and nurture peer awareness (Maich & Belcher, 2012). Even in addressing sensitive topics such as stress and child abuse, Smith-D’Arezzo and Thompson (2006) speak to the importance of children’s literature. They write, “Children benefit greatly from reading literature that reflects authentic situations in life, situations they can relate to” (p. 335). They go on to add, “We want the messages to be healthy and authentic; to give abused children hope; and to help other children understand people and their situations; and as children get older to encourage them to be advocates for others” (p. 336). The weaving of a narrative has the potential to bring awareness to a concept in a way that a mere delivery of facts fails to do. By endowing an idea with a human face, feelings and human interactions—as is often the case with picture books—potential is created to help children grow not only in knowledge, but also in empathy and in social imagination, touching not only the mind, but also the heart. Say Lysaker and Sedberry (2015), “...it is the deep empathetic response and engagement in social imagination that creates a new relational context within a reading event that can promote learning and personal transformation” (p. 106). This underscores Rosenblatt’s theory that individual response to text is as important as the text itself. “Literature equals book plus reader” (Rosenblatt, 1960, p. 306).

It is important not to lose sight of the children and their needs in the choosing and delivery of reading materials that support the growth of emotional intelligence and the development of empathy. Reading stories to children is an effective way to broaden their experiences, while helping them to change perspectives and grow in empathy. “Extensive and intensive engagement with good literary texts through adult-mediated reading can encourage children’s empathy development, which is healthy for individuals” (Riquelme & Montero, 2013, p. 236).

For children of incarcerated parents to feel less isolated, their experiences need to be understood more widely by others. Well-told stories have the potential to cultivate understanding and empathy in other children, who may never have thought about the impact that incarceration could be having on their peers. Stories can powerfully shape the way we think, and picture books have the additional visual component that can aid children in developing greater understanding. Picture books are accessible and effective tools that teachers have at their disposal to shape young minds.

### *Stories Provide Safety*

Stories also provide a safe environment for children to learn and to enjoy vicarious experiences while exploring the world of feelings and allowing empathy a chance to take root and develop. Safety is an essential component in a healthy classroom community, and



as Sapon-Shevin (1999) reminds us, such “safety cannot be mandated; it must be created” (p. 37). Reading stories to children is an excellent way to create a safe space for children. Stories that focus on *another* have the potential to help children of incarceration to feel safe and less vulnerable. While it is important that the story character parallels some of the difficulties experienced by children of the incarcerated, the use of story also deflects attention off of the self and helps to create a comfortable distance for these children. Smith-D’Arezzo and Thompson (2006) speak to the importance of such separation. Though they speak specifically about stress and child abuse, this principle might be generalized to other difficult situations such as learning to cope with challenges associated with parental incarceration. Smith-D’Arezzo and Thompson argue:

Sometimes, when the abuse is separated from the child’s life and is happening to someone else, for example the characters in a children’s book, the topic may be discussed more easily between adults and children, and children may be more apt to talk about what is happening in their lives. (p. 337)

Stories can be an effective instructional strategy to promote peer awareness, as they have the ability to provide not only a creative outlet, but also a sensitive avenue in that picture books telling the story of *another* might prevent a teacher from inadvertently inflicting more shame and unwanted attention than children of the incarcerated may already suffer.

#### *Stories Develop Understanding & Empathy*

Stories have been used effectively to help children learn about a whole array of human conditions, such as: autism, race, sexual orientation, and poverty. Such stories help children learn about people both like and unlike themselves, and can help to develop greater understanding and empathy. For example, in a research project involving three groups of grade two children (70 in total), Dever, Sorenson, and Brodrick (2005) used picture books “as a vehicle to teach young children about social justice” (p. 18). *Fly Away Home* by Eve Bunting is a story about a homeless father who lives at an airport with his young son because he cannot afford to pay rent. This story evoked empathetic responses when it was read to the groups of children; many “were saddened and decried that it is not fair that some people are homeless” (Dever, et al, 2005, p. 20). *Amazing Grace*, by Mary Hoffman and Caroline Binch is a story of a young girl who loved to act and hoped for the role of Peter Pan in their class production. “Grace’s classmates tell her that she can not play Peter Pan in the play because she is a girl and she is black” (Dever, et al, 2005, p. 19). Saddened but not dissuaded, her practice paid off and she was finally rewarded with the role she had hoped for. Children in the research project “were not only empathetic, but were moved by this story to take action and advocate on Grace’s behalf” (Dever, et al, 2005, p. 21).

When children read stories about children like themselves (Miller, D., 2012)—characters that they can relate to—it helps them to connect with literature, and it normalizes experiences that can otherwise be very isolating (Lea, 2015). Acknowledging children’s experiences with creativity, integrity, and sensitivity has the potential to help children of incarceration feel less alone and more understood, essential components for healthy child development (Lowe, 2009).

It is equally important for children whose experiences are quite different from those of the fictional character to read such stories so that their perspectives are given a chance



to change and grow. Stories about troubled lives or about children with disabilities have been used to broaden the worldview of those who may have no understanding of, or given little thought to an issue. Also known as inclusive literature, such stories have been used effectively to help others develop understanding and empathy toward children who may be misunderstood. Picture books are a wonderful way to enlarge a child's experience, and in so doing, develop empathy. In bringing a human face to the difficult topic of incarceration, and in telling a story in an age appropriate way, we as educators have a wonderful opportunity to help children enter into the experience of others. For empathy to have a chance to take root and develop, children's perspectives need to be challenged. For example, viewpoints may unknowingly be based on fear and misinformation; a child's perspective about prison could well be shaped by images and messages seen in the mass media. Images of dangerous offenders may come to mind, even though in reality, this particular demographic is relatively small. (According to Statistics Canada, 2010/2011, 76% of provincial and territorial sentenced offenses are of non-violent nature). If this same child reads a story about a little girl who misses her mother, a mother who regularly reads stories to her, the fact that she is serving a prison sentence may be seen in another light, because now the reader has a better chance of relating to this domestic and comfortable scene. There is still tension in this story to be sure, but there is enough familiarity in place for the reader to begin to form new perspectives. With new perspectives, hopefully students will "begin challenging stereotypes and misconceptions" (Labadie, Pole, & Rogers, 2013, p. 313).

When new perspectives give readers greater understanding and empathy, then children of incarcerated parents may open up, and trusting, caring relationships between themselves and other children may start to form. If stories have the potential to help children become more empathetic, as Lysaker and Sedberry (2015), Nikolajeva (2013), Maich and Belcher (2012) claim, then sensitively told stories about incarceration have the potential to help children become more empathetic toward those who are impacted by parental incarceration. The hope of course would be that such understanding would lead to greater social inclusion, so that children of incarcerated parents might feel less isolated. To feel understood and socially included could be an important first step toward helping children of incarcerated parents to be successful in school. Inclusionary practice is important for these children. Healthy beginnings and success in school will reduce chances of their future incarceration and increase the possibilities of living productive and meaningful lives.

Table 1

*Picture Books on Incarceration Theme*

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>ISBN-13:</b>	<b>Date</b>
Amber Was Brave, Essie Was Smart	Vera Williams	978-0060571825	2001
Far Apart, Close in Heart: Being a Family when a Loved One is Incarcerated	Becky Birtha	978-0807512753	2017
Hazelnut Days	Emmanuel Bourdier	978-9888341542	2018

Letters to a Prisoner	Jacques Goldstyn	978-1771472517	2017
My Daddy's In Jail	Anthony Curcio	978-0692470435	2015
My Daddy's In Jail	Janet M. Bender	978-1889636481	2003
The Prison Alphabet: An Educational Coloring Book for Children of Incarcerated Parents	Dr. B. Muhammed & M. Muhammed	978-1939509093	2014
The Night Dad Went to Jail	Melissa Higgins	978-1479521425	2013
Visiting Day	Jacqueline Woodson	978-0147516084	2002
When Dad was Away	Liz Weir	978-1845079130	2013

Novels:

I am a Taxi	Deborah Ellis	978-0888997364	2006
Jakeman	Deborah Ellis	978-1550415759	2007
The Same Stuff as Stars	Katherine Paterson	978-0618247448	2002

*Sammy's Visit: A Read-Aloud*

Research shows that acknowledging children's experiences through story helps them to feel validated while broadening capacity for empathy among other children. Can a story develop empathy toward children of incarcerated parents? I set out to look for some answers, but as there are a limited number of picture books for young children on the topic of parental incarceration, and as there are even fewer picture books written by Canadian authors or written from the perspective of maternal incarceration, I decided to write the story, *Sammy's Visit*.

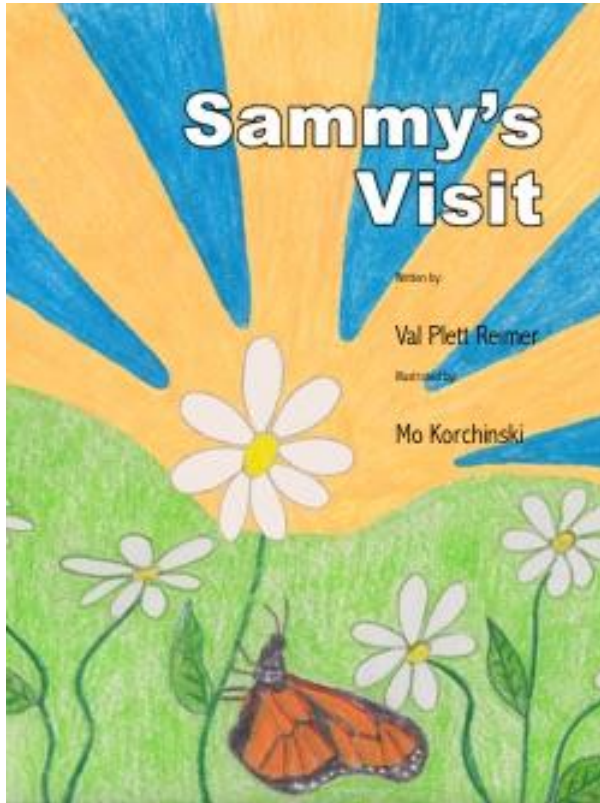


Figure 1. Cover Image

The writing of *Sammy's Visit* was inspired by an interaction I observed early on in the six years that I spent teaching in a women's correctional centre. As I was leaving work one day, I walked through a room where a guard was supervising an inmate having a visit with her two children. The mother—a woman about my own age—held a baby on her lap. While rocking her baby gently, she stared into the room. A young girl, who looked to be about 9 years of age stood awkwardly at her side. The mother was a student of mine for a short while before she was released, and though I hadn't had the opportunity to know her well, I witnessed, ever so briefly, a side of her that I'd never seen in the classroom. I knew her to be a hard working, quiet and friendly woman. What is etched in my memory is the look of deep sadness I observed in that moment. "And the child? What of the child?" This was the disquieting question that would not go away. As I was to learn later, this mother was one of the 'lucky ones'. While many incarcerated parents are denied physical contact with their children, she was able to hold her child. She also had a loved one in her life who brought her children to the facility for visits. These are the hopeful images I held on to and wanted to portray in *Sammy's Visit* in hopes that the story would not only compel, but would also resonate with young readers.



Figure 2. Sammy and her Grandma Approaching Correctional Centre

Mo Korchinski, a former correctional inmate and now a counselor to those dealing with post-release trauma has illustrated the story, *Sammy's Visit*. Her illustrations carry a child like quality. I got to know Mo when she was a student during her time of incarceration. She understands well the pain of being separated from ones children, and brings a level of authenticity to her drawings.

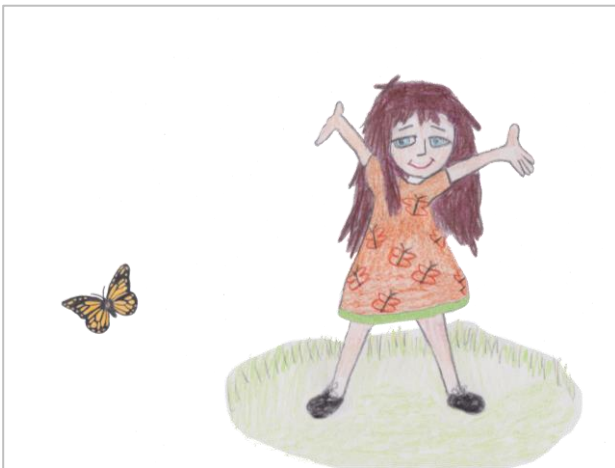


Figure 3. Sammy Dances with a Butterfly

*Sammy's Visit* is a realistic story about a day in the life of a child with an incarcerated parent. Sammy lives with her grandmother, who struggles to afford life's essentials. Lonely and missing her mother, Sammy struggles emotionally. The ache that sets in after each prison visit becomes unbearable, and consequently Sammy begins to resist these visits. Yet she loves her mother and values the intimate reading moments together,

qualities that many children can relate to. Sadness, playfulness, confusion, and hope; a multiplicity of human emotions are woven together, inviting dialogue with respect to the first two dimensions of critical literacy.

The first dimension of critical literacy focuses on a shift in perspective. A typical perspective of jail might be one that regards all incarcerated people as “bad” or “scary”. *Sammy’s Visit* offers another view, that of someone who has a loving relationship with her daughter where fairy tales and poetry are positive points of connection.

The second dimension of critical literacy focuses on entering into the experiences of another. As children read the story, they follow and observe Sammy, and are also given access to her thoughts and feelings, making it easier to ‘step into her shoes’. If *Sammy’s Visit* has the potential to develop understanding, empathy, and a new perspective toward children whose parents are incarcerated, then such stories deserve to be told and have a place in Canadian schools.

### *Methodology*

After receiving Ethics approval to conduct the research, I contacted schools and obtained consent at various levels for student participation, including: the divisional superintendent, school principals, parents, and students themselves. I worked with three focus groups of 5-6 student volunteers each, in the grade 3-5 range. I read this story to three groups of children in two schools and from two diverse communities. Students from Groups One and Two are from a rural, economically disadvantaged community where Child and Family Services are very active. Students from Group Three are from a rural, wealthy, middle-class community, where many of its residents are professionals. All three read-alouds were followed by rich discussions that were guided by a set of questions.

I introduced the story to each group by showing students the cover page, asking them to make predictions as to what they thought the story would be about. I also stopped throughout the reading of the story allowing students the opportunities to make new predictions and to express their thoughts. Says Rosenblatt, “To lead the student to have literary experiences of higher and higher quality requires constant concern for what at any point he brings to his reading, what by background, temperament, and training he is ready to participate in” (Rosenblatt, 1960, p. 307). After reading the story, I lead the groups in discussions, and students were again invited to share their thoughts and feelings. Guiding students in their reading says Rosenblatt, “means helping the student primarily to reflect on what he has made of the text.” (1960, p. 309). These sessions were audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. I was interested to find out whether understanding and empathy would be expressed toward children of incarcerated parents and whether thoughts expressed by the children engendered feelings of inclusivity towards children of incarcerated parents.

### *Findings and Discussion*

The children in all three groups appeared to be engaged throughout the activity and seemed to enjoy listening to and discussing the story. Students were able to work through the questions I posed and dynamic discussions emerged in each of the three groups. Students identified with Sammy, albeit to a greater or lesser extent; that is, most were willing to be friendly and comforting toward her, while many—but not all—went further and were eager to extend friendship. Upon considerable reflection and analysis of the

transcriptions, I categorized the children's comments and responses into five overarching themes. I will briefly discuss each of these. Children's quotes are sometimes used to illustrate a point and to provide greater depth and meaning to the overall discussion; all names have been changed to protect the identities of the children.

*Theme # 1: Life Experiences Impacts Empathy*

Consistent with studies showing that children are able to empathize with others at a young age (examples: Dixon, Murray, and Daiches, 2013; Smith-D'Arezzo and Thompson, 2006), all the children who participated in this study expressed empathy toward the story's main character, Sammy. However, it was clear that their starting points were not the same. Community demographics appeared to impact the way in which the children responded to various aspects of the story, *Sammy's Visit*. Most notably, understandings of the world of poverty and incarceration appeared to be quite different from one group to another. For example, when a food bank is referred to in *Sammy's Visit*, the children were asked if they knew what this was. No one in Group Three seemed to know, whereas there were many knowing nods among children from Groups One and Two. Here is a sample of responses from Group Two:

- Alex: Isn't it like where people donate food and other people can pick up food from there?
- Amber: I think a food bank is, like for people who don't make a lot of money. It's kind of like a charity where you just drop off stuff for people who really need it.
- Thomas: Where you get food for free.

Children in Group Three, on the other hand appeared to understand neither the concept nor function of a food bank, as seen in the following excerpt:

- Morgan: A food bank is um, like uh, grocery store.
- Annie: It's um, so it's where you go shopping at like in the day and you buy food.

Children from Groups One and Two seemed more familiar and even at ease with the concepts of poverty and incarceration. For example, words used at their own initiative and not found in the story, such as "foster" and "house arrest" reflect such understandings. Lacking in this same kind of knowledge and experience, the children from Group Three seemed to rely on the stereotypic images of jail as reflected in some of their responses. For example—pointing to an illustration, Brett said, "So like, they said they sat on a couch there. But there is no couches at jail."

On the other hand, other parts of the story elicited more knowledgeable responses from children in Group Three than from the other two groups. For example, early in the story when Grandma is cooking soup, she teases Sammy: "...it's stone soup, like the story your mom read to you last time." When I asked the children if they were familiar with the story *Stone Soup*, all of the children in Group Three responded positively, and seemed eager to discuss it, while I was faced with blank stares from the children in Groups One



and Two. Children's interest to the different aspects of the story depends on the backgrounds they bring to the story. Says Rosenblatt, "The quality of our literary experience depends not only on the text, on what the author offers, but also on the relevance of past experiences and present interests that the reader brings to it" (1960, p. 305).

### *Theme # 2: Identifying with Mixed Emotions*

All participants from the three focus groups talked about the emotions—often mixed emotions—that the protagonist, Sammy experiences and exhibits throughout the story, *Sammy's Visit*. Words that the children used to describe her feelings include: sad, happy, droopy, mad, scared, angry, frustrated, worried, alone, nervous, shy. Alice described her feelings metaphorically, "Her feelings kind of go up and down like waves." She also reflected on Sammy's inability to express her feelings: "Sometimes, I think that sometimes she can't let out her feelings like something's blocking her way."

When the children were asked if they had ever experienced mixed feelings, there were many nods as stories were freely shared. Children in all three groups identified feelings that come from the death of a loved one (including pets) as similar to the feelings of separation that Sammy experiences. Alice, a particularly expressive student from the first focus group had this to say, "Sometimes, like when one of my loved ones pass away, and you're sad, and—but then when you think of the happy things you did together, it kind of brightens you up."

### *Theme # 3: Perceptual Shifts: Fear Turns to Warmth*

The first sentence of the story, *Sammy's Visit* elicited two very different responses from children representing the two communities. After some initial conversation where children made predictions about the story and talked about who Sammy might be, I began to read to Group Three.

Researcher: " 'Grandma, I don't want to visit Mom tomorrow', said Sammy as she shuffled, barefoot, into the kitchen of their tiny apartment." So who is Sammy?

Annie: That girl [pointing to the picture of Sammy]. But *why* doesn't she want to visit her mom? [voice rising] Sammy's mom is the one who made her!

Using the same story prediction process, by reading only the first sentence of the story as with Group Three above, the children from Group Two had a lot to say about why Sammy may not want to visit her mom. Note how differently the children in Group Two viewed Sammy's mother:

Kylie: Maybe because she's bad.

Researcher: Maybe who's bad?

Kylie: Her mother.

Alex: Maybe her mother beats her.

Kylie: Or abandons her. Maybe her mother abandons her.

At this point in the story, all that is known is that Sammy doesn't want to go visit her mother. It is interesting that a child from each of these groups instinctively took "sides" with either Sammy or her mother. Annie from Group Three rebuked Sammy for not wanting to visit her mom. Conversely, Kylie and Alex from Group Two appeared to assume the worst in Sammy's mother.

As the story progresses to the next page, the difference in the way Sammy's mother is perceived continues, albeit subtle. Brett from Group Three said: "So maybe she like slept over at her granny's, and she likes sleeping over there, and yeah." Courtney agreed, "I think she doesn't want to do that because um, she likes to stay with her grandma longer and stuff." According to these responses, Sammy is having a good time at her grandma's house, and doesn't want to leave; the comments suggest that her reluctance to leave has little to do with her not wanting to see her mother. Group Two on the other hand had already decided that the mother is "bad," and they continued to develop this scenario. Susie suggested, "Maybe Sammy's a foster child."

Simon and Alice from Group One did not appear to side with one or the other, but simply tried to understand the disconnect between mother and daughter as seen in this thoughtful exchange:

Simon: Um, because maybe there's something going on in her life or with her mom.

Alice: Maybe she misses her mom.

By the time it becomes apparent in the story that Sammy's mother is in jail, not only had children in Group Two predicted that she is in jail, but Raylene and Kylie had also predicted *why* she is serving time: "She went to jail cause she did something bad, like...murder." However, the children in Group Three expressed astonishment when they discovered that Sammy and Grandma's destination is a correctional centre.

Children from all three focus groups expressed nervousness and in some cases fear of Sammy's mother. Yet, once the children had met Sammy's mother or at least by the end of the story, they all said softer and warmer things about her. For example, at the end of the story, when asked what they thought about her as a mom, this idea was expressed:

Courtney: She seems like, um like a really nice mom. And she doesn't like being in jail away from her daughter. And she wants to get out and be free and stuff.

Alex: She's a very nice mother.

Amber: Like how you think something really bad about her, but then you actually find out that at the end it's all good. And if you're mad at somebody then you could just say at the end, it's good.

When asked how they would feel if their mom or dad would go away for a really long time, responses from children in all three groups expressed sorrow. For example:

Annie: My heart would be broken.... I LOVE my parents!

Many voices: Alone, sad, afraid, scared, lonely.

Simon: You could be scarred for life because you don't know if your parents

are coming home or not.

Perceptions about Sammy's mom shifted in all three groups. Such perceptual shifts characterize Lewison et al's (2002) first dimension of critical literacy—that which disrupts the commonplace. These perceptual shifts, however had different starting points. The children in Group Two who initially expressed harsh judgment toward Sammy's mom expressed more grace and compassion toward her by the end of the story. On the other hand, the incarceration of Sammy's mom is not something that was anticipated by the children of Group Three. They had expressed no ill feelings toward her up to that point and found the revelation of her incarceration to be unsettling. At this point, they expressed nervousness and fear, but by the end of the story, they too were expressing greater compassion. Children in Group Two were somewhat surprised to learn of the mother's incarceration, and they were saddened by it. Their feelings of nervousness also shifted to care and compassion. Figure 4 illustrates perceptual shifts that occurred with all of the groups. Groups One and Two shifted from negative to positive feelings, while Group Three shifted from positive to negative feelings and slowly shifted in a more positive direction again. Although children from Group Three were less positive about Sammy's mom at the end of the story than children from the other two groups, the perceptual shifting they experienced was in fact greater.

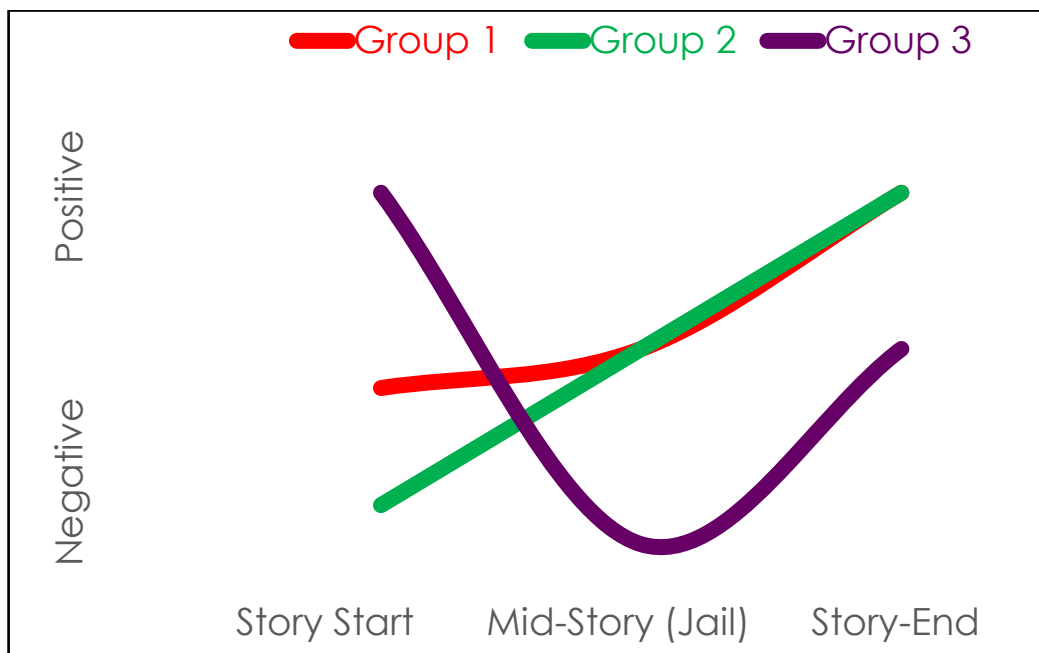


Figure 4. Perceptual Shifts

The third dimension of critical literacy is also evident here. Encountering Sammy's mom had the children thinking and talking about the justice system, which Sammy's mother is a part of. As the children came to know and like Sammy's mom, they also became more upset by her incarceration. While some suggested her arrest and imprisonment might be an "accident" and preferred to believe that she was falsely accused and sentenced, others assumed wrong doing and tried to understand it, as Morgan's comment reflects: "I think she mighta got into jail because maybe she didn't have enough money and she had to steal

money and then she got into jail.” This touches on Lewison et al’s (2002) third dimension of critical literacy: focusing on socio-political issues. Though the children didn’t pursue the discussion further by questioning the fairness of the judicial system, the groundwork is being laid for future engagement in such critical and important conversations.

*Theme # 4: Embodying an Ethic of Care: Story Elicits Empathy*

After children identified that Sammy has a problem, they were asked what they might do to help her feel better. There were no end of suggestions from the children in Group One and Two as they offered cookies and cupcakes and expressed eagerness to play with her, embodying the ethic of care that Noddings speaks about.

Many of the children in Group One seemed to recognize that people who are sad require two things: an antidote of happy distractions as well as the opportunity to talk about one’s feelings. Alice included both of these ideas in the same sentence, “I would talk about how she feels so that I can think of a way to help her and then play with her or something.” Simon, expressing a deep understanding of human needs, took this a step further and said, “We could tell her how *we* feel, so she’s more comfortable to tell us how *she* feels.” He expressed empathy as he tried to imagine how she would feel and what her needs might be. He also recognized the important role that Sammy’s grandmother plays in helping Sammy, as seen in this comment: “She’s trying to keep strong in front of Sammy.” Simon did not have difficulty looking at things from the perspective of others, which is an example of Lewison et al’s (2002) second dimension of critical literacy, that of interrogating multiple viewpoints. Courtney, from Group Three, also expressed empathy as seen in her comment, “Include her in all your games that you play and get her mind off her mother.” But other responses from this group reveal that they had difficulty looking past the fact that Sammy’s mother is in jail. To help her, they felt a need to address this problem. Brett proposed to help Sammy feel better by convincing her of her mother’s innocence. Though this kind of “help” would almost certainly be harmful, what is clear in his tone is that it was offered from a heart of compassion. Morgan suggested he would ‘buy’ her mother out of jail. Neither realistic nor helpful, like Brett he offered this suggestion because he felt sorry for Sammy. These children were troubled by the plight of Sammy as seen by these responses:

Annie: My heart would be broken.

Brett: I’d say “God please bring back my parents!”

I probed further by asking whether it would be a good story for children like Sammy to read. The responses from the children in Group Three were decidedly against this idea as they wanted to shield Sammy from the feeling of sadness in the story. Students in Groups One and Two however did not seem so afraid of sadness, recognizing that it is part of life.

Group Two went on to talk about the hope found in the story. Said Kylie, “It would let them know that there’s still hope. There’s hope to come home. There’s still hope.” Amber said, “If you’re going through something like that, this book’s good. That way you’d know that you’ll probably be ok at the end.”

*Offering friendship: Enthusiasm vs reluctance.* Reaching out to Sammy in kindness and friendliness is a first step toward reaching out in friendship, a deeper type of reaching

out. Students were asked whether they would want to be friends with Sammy if she went to their school. Children in Group One and Two were eager to befriend her. When asked what kind of things they would do with Sammy, the answers came in quick and excited succession with a focus on play and having fun—important components of friendship. Sleepovers and play dates with Sammy were discussed. Kylie had this to say: “I’d want her to come over. I’d ask her for her number. I’d invite her to eat lunch. I’d ask her if she wanted to play and if she wanted to be friends.” They went on to suggest many games and activities they would play with Sammy. Noticeable in this list were activities, which took into account Sammy’s enjoyments, such as making paper butterflies and writing poems. These children had paid careful attention to the story. Judging by the desires expressed to actively engage in friendship with someone who is lonely and marginalized, these children seemed ready to embrace Lewison et al’s fourth dimension of critical literacy: taking action and promoting social justice (2002).

The responses from children in Group Three were surprisingly different than those from Groups One and Two. While one student expressed compassion and a desire to be Sammy’s friend, four of the children voiced reluctance to do so. Of the four, Sheldon had initially said he would be her friend, but then he changed his mind: “I wouldn’t want to hang out with her, but whenever you talk with her or something, try to cheer her up or something.”

Morgan was also hesitant. He responded with, “Hmmm, let me think here. If my friend had a mother in jail then I’d probably be nice to her, but she wouldn’t be like my ‘friend friend’.” This demonstrates the difference between being friendly and being friends; they were willing to be friendly, but more hesitant to engage in friendship. Both Morgan and Sheldon were moved by Sammy’s loneliness, felt for her, and wished her well. To offer friendship however, seemed beyond their comfort levels. Though most of this group was not ready to offer unequivocal friendship to Sammy, the topic of this story had unsettled them. They felt compassion for Sammy, but they also felt fearful to reach out in friendship.

Though the children warmed up to and liked Sammy’s mom once they came to know her, they were still uncomfortable with the fact that she is in jail, and this colored their desire to be a friend to Sammy. (It is interesting to note that when one of the children suggested that the mother might be in jail *accidentally*, all of the children in Group Three were more comfortable with the idea of being Sammy’s friend.) When asked about being a friend to Sammy, over half of them were caught in the middle. Brett’s response represents this dilemma well. Brett clearly enjoyed the story. He was positive about it from the very beginning, interrupting with, “I like this book” and again mid way through, “I like this. I like this book so far.” Yet he became uncomfortable with some of the questions like, “Would you want to be Sammy’s friend?” He said he would want to be her friend, but not too close a friend to her. When he was asked to explain himself, this is the dialogue that followed:

Brett: Because her mom is in jail and she might be a criminal.

Researcher: Who might be a criminal?

Brett: Her mom! Cause she’s in jail.

Even though no one felt that Mom’s incarceration was Sammy’s fault, it still caused apprehension about a general willingness to befriend Sammy, as indicated by

Morgan's comment: "...she might follow through with her mom or something." The conversation with Brett continued:

- Researcher: So if you say, "No, I wouldn't want to be her friend because her mom's in jail", can you tell me what you mean by that?
- Brett: K, maybe I got a different reason, but maybe I just like got lots of friends and I just got enough.
- Researcher: You have enough friends?
- Brett: Or maybe I could have some more, but...

I sensed an internal struggle. Early in the story (before the students were aware that Sammy's mother was in jail), Brett said that he really liked the story. Despite the fact that aspects of the story troubled him, at the end he was still positive about the story as seen in this interaction:

- Researcher: Tell me what other kids your age would think about this story?
- Brett: They would like it. [Unhesitatingly]
- Researcher: Yeah? Tell me why? Did you like it?
- Brett: Yeah!
- Researcher: What did you like about it?
- Brett: I like it because it's like a good story, and um it's ... yeah. I like it. It's a good story.
- Researcher: What is good about the story?
- Brett: Well, there's a butterfly.

#### *Theme # 5: The Role of Literary Hooks in Critical Literacy*

Brett had made numerous comments regarding butterflies throughout the discussion. For example, he commented on all the butterflies on Sammy's dress, with a cheerful, "I know why the butterflies like her. Cause she's nice. She helps the butterflies. She feeds them every day." His awareness of the migratory patterns of monarchs and his enjoyment of butterflies in general were apparent throughout the reading. Though Brett had been challenged with some uncomfortable ideas, the butterfly offered a point of connection to the story that may have helped to sustain his positive feelings to the end:

- Researcher: How would you feel if your teacher would read this story to your class?
- Brett: Oh yeah, I'd like that!

Brett was not alone in connecting with the aspect of butterflies in the story. A number of other children in this group expressed knowledge of and interest in the life cycle of butterflies. The group expressed distress at the thought of Sammy wanting to catch and restrain the butterfly.

When children in all three groups were asked whether Sammy reminded them of somebody they know or of a character from a book, responses from children in Groups One and Two showed that they understood Sammy's struggle. Some for example shared a memory of a person they knew who was in jail. In Group Three however, the responses to this question were quite different, and the connection to the butterfly once again emerged. Sheldon said, "She reminds me of—I forget the story—someone—who likes



animals cause she likes butterflies.” Connecting to Sammy’s struggle may be incomprehensible to the children in Group Three as they were unable to name any person—real or fictional—that reminded them of someone from the margins of society. The experiences and daily realities of these children in this middle-class neighborhood school are very different than those from the more economically depressed community, serviced regularly by Child and Family Services. Learning about issues such as the one Sammy faces and learning to understand and identify with this story character, especially if it feels uncomfortable, may take some time, and may require other avenues of connection to the story for some children—and interestingly the butterfly seems to have been that point of connection for many in this group.

### *Conclusion*

The question that I set out to explore was whether or not a picture book can help children to understand and be empathetic toward children such as Sammy, a child of an incarcerated parent. Consistent with studies showing that children are able to empathize with others at a young age (examples include: Dixon et al., 2013; Smith-D’Arezzo and Thompson, 2006), children who participated in this study expressed empathy toward Sammy. Though I found that these children all grew in their understanding and empathy toward Sammy, the starting points or background knowledge of the group participants was not the same. That is to say, the experiences and understandings of the world of poverty and incarceration appeared to be quite different from one group to another. Those from the community with a lower socio-economic demographic readily expressed empathy for Sammy, as seen particularly in their desire to befriend her. Though children from the middle-class community expressed reluctance to befriend Sammy, they actually experienced the greatest perceptual shifts as can be seen in Figure 4. Feelings of empathy among these children were still evident. For example, these children not only articulated Sammy’s mixed emotions and feelings of sadness, they also expressed their own sadness for her. Even while expressing their reluctance to befriend Sammy (for reasons that included fear), other avenues of “help” for her were offered. Though many of their suggestions to help Sammy were neither realistic nor helpful (and were in some cases potentially harmful), the study reveals that the children were touched by Sammy’s plight. Their lack of knowledge and their fearfulness show the need to develop greater awareness of the issues surrounding incarceration and its impact on children.

That a lack of experience affects one’s ability to be empathetic is consistent with the findings of Dever et al. In their 2005 study, *Using picture books as a vehicle to teach young children about social justice*, they compare children’s responses to Hoffman and Binch’s *Amazing Grace* (the story of the African-American girl hoping for the main role in a school play) and Bunting’s *Fly Away Home* (the story of the young homeless boy living in an airport with his father). Though Dever et al make a point of saying that both of these stories generated empathetic responses from children, they also add:

Children were better able to put themselves into the character of Grace than the homeless boy which may have assisted them to become advocates. This is probably because the context of a classroom and participation in a school play were within their realm of experiences, while living in an airport was not. The children in this project had never experienced homelessness any more directly than perhaps

observing homeless people in their communities. Even then, they may not have been aware of what they were observing. Furthermore, they may have easily identified with Grace if they had personally experienced hurtful remarks from classmates. (p. 21)

Similarly, the concepts of both poverty and incarceration seem to be far away from the experiences of the children in Group Three, and they will need to hear more stories with such themes to grow in their empathy and understanding. The implications for learning are significant. When children's background experiences and knowledge are neither acknowledged nor welcomed, their literary experiences will lack meaningful connections to their lives. When schools insist on standardized, prepackaged reading materials that do not reflect the diverse populations that they serve, students will struggle to find linkages in what they read and will not know how to respond.

This study highlights the important role that broadly compelling and appealing story elements, sometimes referred to as "literary hooks," play in maintaining student interest. The more such hooks that are available, the better a chance that children will find avenues of connection, which will help to ensure that everyone is able to relate to the story at some level. For example, while some children felt at a loss to understand Sammy and her mother's reality, they connected with the theme of the butterfly (in this case, the butterfly is the 'hook'). When I wrote *Sammy's Visit*, I incorporated references to fairy tales, poetry, and ecology (butterflies) in part to offer teachers several avenues to other conversations that could be had with students. Yet, I was surprised when—without any prompting—I saw the children engage independently and with obvious pleasure with some of these motifs in the story. Rosenblatt speaks to this when addressing limitations of an author, who "may plan a particular book, but one cannot plan what children will take from it" (2001, p. 272). Critical literature will challenge students. While it is important for students to be challenged, stories that are too far from the reality of children make the stories too inaccessible for them. Students need to be pushed slowly, with patience and with gentleness. Connection points or hooks can allow students to focus on other areas of interest in a story, while giving the challenging themes the time they need to be processed. Some children will require more vicarious experiences through literature to give empathy time to grow and develop. Murris (2014) points out that since children have not had a lot of experiences, vicarious experiences can be offered to them through picture books. Smith-D'Arezzo and Thompson (2006) remind us that reading books with believable characters helps children to grow in empathy.

The implications for teachers are broad. Teachers need to know their students and know what their interests are so they can encourage their students to pursue such topics of enjoyment. This in turn creates an atmosphere that allows teachers to introduce to their students new and perhaps uncomfortable themes in hopes of advancing student understanding and empathy. According to Noddings (2005) and Freire (1970), knowing our students is foundational to effective teaching; taking the time to know our students, helps to build trust.

Trust is needed for students to feel safe, especially when they are asked to venture into unknown or uncomfortable territory. For example, when students in Group Three were asked who would want to be a friend to Sammy, Sheldon initially put up his hand. When asked to elaborate on this, he looked embarrassed, and changed his answer to, "Ah, well,

half and half. I would want to be a friend to her, but I wouldn't really be a friend." This caused a response of mild ridicule from another student: "That makes no sense." I needed to assure him—while explaining to the girl who ridiculed him—that just like Sammy, we all have mixed feelings at times. Sheldon seemed to relax and was able to express himself more freely saying that he would be nice to Sammy, while admitting he wouldn't really want to hang out with her. Assuring Sheldon that mixed feelings are normal is what seemed to help him to feel safe, and I believe this allowed him to be more honest about his feelings.

Murris (2014) says that picture books should not be used as a platform to moralize. Teachers should not get in the way or short circuit the process of students trying to understand their emotions. Only when students have a sense of understanding their own emotions, can we help them to move forward. Rosenblatt speaks to the importance of encouraging students to respond to text; in so doing, children develop the ability to reflect and know themselves better. Furthermore, dialoguing with other students about a story will highlight different views and perspectives and will lead to further self-discoveries. Rosenblatt (2001) sums this up well: "Discovering that others have had different responses, have noticed what was overlooked, have made alternative interpretations, leads to self awareness and self criticism" (p. 276).

#### *Final Thoughts*

Discussions around incarceration and its impact on children and learning have not been a part of the dialogue in many education circles. As the incarceration rates across the nation continue to climb, we as educators must do everything in our power to help the children of those in custody to be successful. Stories that focus on the experiences of children who are marginalized not only authenticate their realities, but the use of such literature can develop greater awareness among those who are not personally impacted by parental incarceration. When discussions are guided with sensitivity and care, such awareness can lead to greater understanding and empathy among children. By supporting our students to grow in their understanding toward the needs of children whose parents are incarcerated, we continue to create—together with our students—an ethic of care and a climate of inclusivity for all.

To order a copy of *Sammy's Visit*, please visit: <http://www.sammysvisit.com>. To get in touch with the author, email Val at: [valmpr@icloud.com](mailto:valmpr@icloud.com).

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#### *Author Biography*

**Val Plett Reimer** began her education career in an elementary classroom in Canada's arctic and has since worked in areas of Learning Resource, EAL, and Adult Education. The years she spent teaching high school courses in a women's correctional centre in British Columbia inspired the writing of *Sammy's Visit*. As women in the centre shared their stories about their children and families, the plight of Canada's "hidden children" became more clear. In response, Val combined her passion for children's literature with the desire to develop greater awareness and understanding of this hidden demographic of children. Together with her husband—also a teacher—Val currently teaches in a 2-room school in a small northern Manitoba community. They have three adult children.





# *Engaging Minds and Hearts: Social and Emotional Learning in English Language Arts*

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## *Abstract*

This article explores English language arts (ELA) as a tailor-made venue for the integration of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) into existing curriculum. Using the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) model of SEL, a review of the literature highlights that the natural affinity between ELA content and SEL objectives facilitates adaption with minimal disruption to ELA curriculum and provides mutually beneficial impacts. By reviewing existing ELA-based SEL programs and examples of effective integration of SEL concepts by teachers, the author makes a case for developing unscripted, versatile, and integrated approaches to SEL that build on teacher expertise and student feedback. Additionally, opportunities for integrated learning are outlined through the British Columbia ELA curriculum with implications for other jurisdictions. A case is made for a truly integrated model being necessary for creating a fundamental and lasting culture shift towards embedded SEL.

## *Keywords*

Social and emotional learning, English Language Arts, SEL, integrated curriculum

## *Introduction*

The importance of social and emotional learning (SEL) to student growth, academic learning, and life success is well established in the research prompting standards for the incorporation of SEL into curriculum outcomes in Canada (e.g. Alberta Education, 2016; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015a). While strategies for supporting skill development in areas such as empathy, self-regulation, and conflict resolution have traditionally been the purview of school counsellors and mental health professionals, the literature points to classroom teachers as the most effective and appropriate agents to engage young learners in SEL (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2017). The challenge is in discerning academic SEL theory and practice from more colloquial forms and in determining strategies to accomplish the task, as SEL continues to take an increasingly prominent role in teacher education (Schonert-Reichl, Kitil, & Hanson-Peterson, 2017). While all content areas provide opportunities and integrated SEL should be explored across the curriculum, English language arts (ELA) is a natural starting point to deliver SEL content with the least disruption, given appropriate SEL training for teachers.

This article will review stand-alone SEL programs that employ ELA materials, consider examples from select ELA teachers who have incorporated social/emotional content, and examine research that relays the often-unheard student voices on the impact of literature in their lives. A case is made for focusing on unscripted, versatile, and fully integrated approaches utilizing the natural connection between SEL and ELA that builds

on teacher expertise and reinvigorates ELA pedagogy. Such an integrated model has the potential for creating a fundamental and lasting culture shift towards embedded SEL. Examples of the natural opportunities for integrated learning are highlighted in the British Columbia ELA curriculum. With the 2016 redesign, BC is leading the way in Canada for holistic education integrating SEL in the Core Competencies that underlie the entire curriculum as well as in the wording of content outcomes (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2017; Schonert-Reichl, 2012). An examination of SEL in this curriculum is useful to educators, researchers, and policy makers as other jurisdictions follow suit seeking cohesive ways to support students in developing essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (see: Alberta Education, 2016; Canadian Mental Health Association, 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014).

### *A Case for Social and Emotional Learning*

Social and emotional competence supports a person's ability to realize personal, career, and life satisfaction. According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL),

...social and emotional learning (SEL) is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions. (CASEL, 2016)

CASEL is a U.S.-based collective of academic, educational, and institutional partners focused on advancing the inclusion of SEL in K-12 education through evidenced-based research, policy, and best practices. In an effort to narrow and categorize the vast range of SEL skills for educational programming, CASEL has identified five core areas of competency. *Self-awareness* refers to the ability to identify and assess the impact of our thoughts and emotions, to recognize our own strengths and limitations, and to develop confidence and optimism. *Self-management* includes emotional, mental, and behavioural self-regulation, stress management, impulse control, self-motivation, and pursuing personal and academic goals. *Social awareness* involves understanding social and ethical behavioural norms, empathizing with and considering perspectives of diverse groups, and identifying available resources and supports in one's life. *Relationship skills* use communication and interpersonal skills to create and maintain healthy, rewarding relationships with a variety of people and navigate conflict and social pressure. *Responsible decision-making* means making constructive and respectful social and behavioural choices considering ethics, safety, norms, and consequences for self and others (Collaborative for Academic Social and Emotional Learning, 2016a).

The interdisciplinary roots of SEL weave together decades of advances in developmental psychology and progressive educational theory including holistic approaches to learning and the increasing need to deal with a range of student health and well-being concerns in school. The field of SEL coalesced in the early 1990's with the formation of CASEL and was brought to public attention by Daniel Goleman's book, *Emotional Intelligence*, in 1995. Since that time, research on the important role of social

and emotional development has prompted educators to include social and emotional skills as necessary for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners.

There is compelling educational and psychological research and practical confirmation that SEL is a key facilitator for student pro-social behaviour and life success. Sometimes called the “missing piece” of education policy, (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012) SEL has been recognized as both foundational to and intricately interrelated with healthy child development. Improvement in social and emotional skills translates into significant improvement in other areas of development, most notably, academic achievement (McCormick, Cappella, O’Connor, & McClowry, 2015; Oberle, Schonert-Reichl, Hertzman, & Zumbo, 2014; Reyes, Brackett, Rivers, White, & Salovey, 2012).

An extensive examination of studies on the impact of SEL initiatives found a myriad of benefits for K-8 learners of diverse cultural and ethnic origins, those that had behavioural or emotional issues as well as those that were not so identified, in urban and rural settings (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011). Researchers found that multiyear SEL programs can have a strong impact on social competence, academic engagement, and a preventative impact on aggression in elementary students (Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group, 2010). Researchers considered SEL programs to be very effective in improving attitudes and school conduct, fostering positive social behaviour, and reducing emotional problems. For example, Jones, Aber, and Brown (2011) found that following two years of participation in the 4Rs Program, a K-5 integrated SEL-literacy curriculum, teachers reported significant reduction in rates of aggressive behaviour, declining ADHD and depressive symptoms, and increased social competence in their students. Similarly, findings have indicated that SEL improved student academic performance on standardize achievement test scores and overall GPA by 11 to 17 percentile points (Payton et al., 2008).

The benefits of SEL also extend to other domains. SEL programs have been found to improve teachers’ provision of emotional support including their sensitivity, consideration of student perspectives, and facilitation of positive classroom climate. SEL programs also improved teachers’ classroom organization including behaviour management and productivity (McCormick et al., 2015). Further, the value of the investment in SEL programs has been validated by benefit-cost analysis revealing an average 11 to 1 rate of return (Belfield et al., 2015).

### *Why English Language Arts?*

The ultimate goal is for SEL to be integrated into all subject areas, however, the nature and content of ELA is particularly suited and easily adapted to the task making it an obvious place to begin. Educator Barbara Tuchman said, “Books are humanity in print” (Tuchman, 1980, p. 16). While many teachers already explore social and emotional ideas to help students connect and engage, there is a substantial difference between intuitive adaption of materials and the intentional and deliberate integration of SEL. The latter calls upon theoretical knowledge and evidence-based approaches consistent with best practices in literacy and numeracy development. ELA is predisposed to the integration of SEL because curriculum content and assessment methods align with SEL outcomes. This symbiotic relationship provides developmental cascades in both domains with work in one area naturally supporting outcomes in the other.

Theoretical foundations for the connection between emotion, intellect, and literature can be traced to fundamental thinkers in educational and literary theory. For example, Dewey (1933) envisioned educating the whole person, arguing "there is no integration of character and mind unless there is fusion of the intellectual and the emotional, of meaning and value" (p. 278; Cohen, 2006). Later, Vygotsky (1971;1986) recognized the value of literature not simply for moral education, but for helping children to explore and interpret life experience (Lindqvist, 2003). Bruner (1991) also viewed narrative as a valuable mechanism that helps us to explain our experience and understand those around us. Moreover, Rosenblatt (1982) underlined the connection from the perspective of literary theory emphasizing "the potentialities of literature for aiding us to understand ourselves and others, for widening our horizons to include temperaments and cultures different from our own, for helping us to clarify, our conflicts in values, for illuminating our world" (p. 276).

Literature encompasses an infinite variety of human emotion and experience that readers can access and experience vicariously. ELA provides ample opportunity for meaningful personal engagement and connection, meaning making, and reflection. The pith and substance of ELA involves matters that are intricately interwoven with social and affective experiences. Exploring and deconstructing topics such as emotion, relationships, conflict, motivation, decision-making, point of view, and worldview are an important part of conventional ELA curriculum when studying various literary genres. Literary characters provide an opportunity to understand and, at times, virtually see through the eyes of another person, hear their thoughts, analyze their motivations, analyze their behaviour and share their experiences.

With respect to methods and assessment, strategies commonly employed by language arts educators provide natural opportunities to engage in SEL through creative, persuasive or reflective writing, reading and analysis, debate and dialogic talk, or projects and performances. Many examples of the compatibility of ELA strategies and SEL are found in the literature including the use of discussion, questioning and dialogue (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006; Jamieson, 2015), journaling and blogging (Beland, 2007; DiPardo & Schnack, 2004; Seglem & Bonner, 2016) and other forms of writing response (Vadeboncoeur & Collie, 2013) to develop empathy, communication, and metacognitive skills.

Similarly, reading has been identified as an effective therapeutic tool in and outside of the school system. Studies of bibliotherapy highlight the power of literature to generate reflection, insight, and empathy, particularly in children (McCulliss & Chamberlain, 2013; Rozalski, Stewart, & Miller, 2010). Reading also improves Theory of Mind (TOM) which encompasses the ability to consider different perspectives and explains "how we come to understand social action in both ourselves and others" (Bosacki, 1999, p. ii). TOM focuses on the ability to "mentalize" or read others and predict their behaviour, mood, and thoughts based on social feedback. SEL theory prioritizes this ability for children to compare their own perspective to those around them and to learn that the same situation can be experienced differently by different individuals (Bosacki, 1999; CASEL, 2015). This ability is also valuable with respect to promoting positive self-concept and peer relationships (Bosacki, 1999; Kidd & Castano, 2013).

An example of this powerful reading experience for students is seen in Nikolajeva's (2014) cognitive-based discussion of empathy and identity in Young Adult literature in

which she emphasizes adolescence as a dynamic and sensitive phase of neuro-psychological development. Using the novel *Slated*, the author explores the impact of nuanced features of writing including tense and voice that help the reader to connect and interact with the text. For example, she notes the opportunities presented in literature to assist youth in learning from characters that mirror their own developmental stage:

Young readers may not have mastered the ability to empathise yet, but they are in the process of developing this skill. Their involvement with young fictional characters, whose theory of mind is also in the making, is still more complicated than adult readers' engagement with adult fictional characters. (para 18)

Nikolajeva's research demonstrates that social and emotional skills can be purposefully targeted and unpacked within the context of exploring the literary devices and elements often featured in English curricula (e.g. Alberta Learning, 2000; Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 1998; British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016; Manitoba Education and Training, 2004).

Similarly, in her analysis of *Emma*, psychotherapist and former English professor Wendy Jones (2008) discusses how Jane Austen's 19<sup>th</sup> century narrative depicts experiences and behaviours that accurately reflect scientifically supported contemporary knowledge about emotions, communication, and relationships (p. 317). She highlights Austen's ability to depict "mentalizing" or reading the emotions and responses of other people to understand their mental state:

... as involuntary ventriloquists of Emma's thoughts, as well as those of other characters, we experience, to some extent, being someone else... When we respond strongly to literature, the emotional components of our neural maps become active: neurons fire along pathways within and between emotion centers of the brain, thereby altering our feelings, our thoughts, our moods—and perhaps, cumulatively, our actions and characters. (p.338)

Here, Jones highlights the transformative effect of literature and the potential for targeting SEL skills including perspective-taking, recognizing and regulating emotions, empathizing, and the emotional experience embedded in texts.

In an example taken from outside of the school context, McLaughlin, Troustine, and Waxler (1997) explored this deep emotional response using literature to create SEL opportunities for incarcerated offenders. They describe a powerful and transformative learning experience in the inmates' ability to relate and reflect through the events of the novels. Excerpting from class discussion, the authors highlight the power of literature to teach empathy, moral judgement, community, perspective-taking, decision-making, critical thinking, self-reflection, communication, and empowerment. In one account, an inmate described his ability to put himself "in the characters' places" when reading the novel *Deliverance*, a survival story of men who are changed by the events of a wilderness trip. He particularly identified with the character Ed because they both "do what has to be done" (p. 10). The researchers reflected on the shared experience of learners and facilitators saying, "We shaped our own characters by recognizing and forming the boundaries and limitations of the fictional characters we were discussing" (p. 10). The inmates regained a



sense of voice, perspective, and hope for their futures (p. 11). This report highlights the value of the targeted exploration and development of social and emotional skills that promote self-awareness, social awareness and responsible decision making through language arts strategies.

Another key area of SEL is the ability to manage interpersonal conflict. It requires the effective use of a range of social and emotional competencies including relationship skills, self-awareness, and social awareness. Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, Laginski, and O'Coin (1996), examined the impact of teaching conflict resolution skills to Canadian high school students through an ELA unit on the novel *Days of Terror* by Barbra Smucker. Compared to their peers who did not receive conflict resolution training, these students showed improved knowledge, retention and application of conflict resolution skills, a shift in their views about conflict and improvement in academic learning and achievement (Stevahn, Johnson, Johnson, Oberle, & Wahl, 2000; Stevahn, et al., 1996).

Additional support for the efficacy of SEL-ELA integration is seen in cases where ELA has been adapted to impact targeted purposes such as empathy development (Aronson, 2002; Mar, Oatley, & Peterson, 2009), and improving pro-social behaviours (Jones et al., 2011). Furthermore, students who participate in an ELA curriculum enhanced with SEL components have been found to have improved relationships, behaviour, motivation, and better content knowledge than those exposed to conventional teaching (Masten & Cicchetti, 2010; Shechtman & Yaman, 2012).

ELA is a content area that facilitates in-depth exploration of social and emotional matters prompting students' close examination of emotion, point of view, identity, character, relationships, individual and group conflict, motivation, decision-making and consequence and allows students to explore, deconstruct, and judge (e.g. British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015b; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). ELA connects universal themes to the interests, concerns and experience of students and allows opportunity for individual student voice and therefore makes an ideal complement to SEL to support outcomes in both domains.

#### *Existing Models for SEL in ELA: Stand-alone Programs vs Integrated Approaches*

A number of the current SEL interventions are stand-alone programs targeted at problem behaviour and delivered to a discreet population, or to whole classrooms in blocks of directed lesson. Efforts that have combined SEL with elements of literacy, primarily at the elementary level, use books, videos, and role-play, during regular curricular time. An overview of three frequently cited models, the 4Rs, PATHS, and RULER, reveals that while the success of these programs support ELA as an appropriate vehicle for SEL, there are also aspects of concern that point to the need for integrated design such as the erosion of academic time and focus.

*The 4R's Program:* Reading, Writing, Respect and Resolution created by Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility, is a program designed to facilitate SEL in 41 New York ethnically diverse inner city elementary schools (Jones, Brown, & Aber, 2011). SEL is combined with lesson plans developed around pre-selected children's books focusing on one or more social, emotional, or behavioural theme such as emotions, relationships, and conflict. With comprehensive professional development and ongoing support, teachers read aloud, elicit discussion, draw life connections, and engage students in role play and activities designed to practice skills for 40 to 50 minutes per week (Downer



et al., 2013). Compared to their peers, students who participated in the 4Rs program have been found to demonstrate reduced aggression, improved attention, and increased social competence (Jones, Brown, & Aber, 2011).

**PATHS:** Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies was developed at Washington University by Greenberg et al. in 1995 and updated in 2011 (Kusché, 2012). Targeting elementary-aged children, teachers and counsellors facilitate a battery of interactive activities for classroom and home use in 30 minute sessions, two or more times per week across the school year (Greenberg et al., 1995). Developers also created a “Fast Track” program focused on immediate intervention for aggression and conduct issues (Kusché, 2012).

The positive impacts of PATHS have particularly been reported in specific populations such as special needs students (Kam, Greenberg, & Kusché, 2004) and girls at risk for school failure (Doren, Lombardi, Clark, & Lindstrom, 2013). Similarly, a trial at low-income schools reported that students involved in PATHS were more emotionally knowledgeable, socially competent, and less socially withdrawn (Domitrovich, Cortes, & Greenberg, 2007).

By contrast, UK researchers Berry et al. (2016) and Humphrey et al. (2016) found little significant impact in large sample, longitudinal studies based on teacher observations and reflections and PATHS coach feedback. In a follow-up to their 2016 study, Humphrey, Barlow, and Lendrum (2017) offered the insight that such findings might be related to the quality of program delivery including initial training and in-program support as well as number of participant respondents. Other PATHS researchers have similarly emphasized the vital role of administrator support and consistent classroom implementation for successful outcomes (Kam, Greenberg, & Walls, 2003) and advocate for SEL that specifically promotes integrated “executive functioning, verbal processing, and emotional awareness” in early development (Riggs, Greenberg, Kusché, & Pentz, 2006, p. 92).

**RULER:** Developed out of Yale University’s Centre for Emotional Intelligence, the RULER program focuses on recognizing, understanding, labeling, expressing and regulating emotion. It is comprised of teacher education, family workshops, and student learning components for grades K-8. The “Feelings Words Curriculum” aims to support national learning outcomes with formal literacy-based lessons. The curriculum teaches children to recognize, understand, label, express and regulate emotions incorporating instructional tools for daily use and prescribed lessons throughout the school year (Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2010, p. 218). Large-scale longitudinal support for the efficacy of the RULER program with grade 5 and 6 students demonstrated an increase in emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support (Hagelskamp, Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2013, p. 3; See also Brackett, Rivers, Reyes, & Salovey, 2012; Nathanson, Rivers, Flynn, & Brackett, 2016). The RULER program emphasizes teacher education but also relies on extracurricular family workshops and parental participation to support children’s SEL which may impact implementation in many school districts.

These models, while in the ELA purview, are not focused on ELA curriculum but are in fact adjunct programs targeting SEL skills in isolation requiring dedicated time commitments and reducing regular curricular time. The models import emotions-focused texts and targeted materials with set lessons and directed learning rather than using the organic opportunities available in everyday classroom reading, writing, and dialogic learning primarily focused on ELA subject matter and skills. While these programs have

yielded encouraging results, the gap between the current guidelines for effecting SEL and the actual implementation in classrooms remains wide (Cohen, 2006; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Part of the problem may be that the design of these programs is reminiscent of “fad” curriculum lacking depth and longevity with respect to the program’s ability to achieve culture-shift and establish SEL as a cornerstone of our classrooms. This is largely because of the disruptive and prescribed nature of these programs. SEL researchers recommended more integrated programs and the development of school wide environments (Zins & Elias, 2006).

Further, research by Vadeboncoeur & Collie (2013) suggests that the current trend of implementing fragmented, individualistic, and interventionist programming that emphasizes self-control and desirable behaviour is contrary to Vygotsky’s holistic view of learning. Instead they call for an approach that emphasizes emotional experience, relationships, and interaction to foster unity of the intellectual and affective domains and establish a learning environment conducive to “making real change” (p. 222).

*An Integrated Approach to embedding SEL in ELA Curriculum.*

Since SEL is most effective in integrated programs taught by classroom teachers (Bridgeland et al., 2013), and teachers feel constrained by scripted programs and doubt their efficacy (Dresser, 2013; Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004), an integrative approach would capitalize on the expertise and creative potential of teachers. Teachers have a significant influence on the emotional context and experience of students in relation to reading and learning and are engaged in interpreting student emotional responses to text (Lewis & Tierney, 2011; Winans, 2012). In developing an integrated SEL curriculum, it is essential to consider feedback from educators both as experts in student learning and with respect to their professional needs. Teachers and academics alike are calling for change in ELA classrooms to better engage students by employing ideas and concepts in line with SEL (Dresser, 2013). They also indicate the need for culturally-relevant materials and the importance of fostering safe and encouraging student-teacher relationships and classroom environments (Slaten, Irby, Tate, & Rivera, 2015).

Guise and Thein (2015) diverge from the traditional focus on uncovering student’s individual emotional connections to texts. Instead, they promote a sociocultural approach that acknowledges the emotion existing within the text and the “emotional rules” of the learning environment that is an integral part of the classroom that guides student learning (p. 202). This perspective considers the exchange between students, their classmates, their teacher, and the text while “focusing on emotion as it moves among bodies and texts and sticks or becomes sedimented in social contexts” (p. 200).

The impact of supportive relationships and safe classroom environment was highlighted in Dresser’s (2013) exploration of SEL-ELA integration through pre-service teachers. In their task of developing integrated SEL lesson plans in ELA for their K-5 classrooms, participants gained an appreciation of their impact as teachers on student learning and, in reflecting on their own learning experiences, prioritized establishing safe, positive learning environments for their own students. Interestingly, all pre-service teacher participants chose to use books and hands-on activities and focused on topics such as bullying, cooperation, and respect. Dresser also noted that teachers became overwhelmed by all of the competencies and tended to focus on social awareness, self-management, and relationship skills. A telling conclusion of this study was the reflection of pre-service

teachers that the most valuable part of their own learning experience in this course was the relationships and the support and respect amongst the cohort that helped them through their challenging tasks.

Curriculum documents outline the essential learning outcomes for each subject, but it is teachers who provide the imaginative, creative, and effective methods that facilitate student learning. The focus should shift to conceptual and skill-based development that can be versatile enough to be integrated into a variety of lessons, debates, writing classes, and novel studies. Providing teachers with quality professional development in SEL theory and strategies fortified with a series of targeted, flexible activities offered by ELA subject specialists is a more reliable formula for student learning. This format would provide the knowledge and skills to teachers as frontline interceptors as well as sample tools to support students' social and emotional needs and learning. It also serves to protect creative autonomy allowing teachers to continue as the facilitators of student learning and empowering them to fuse SEL and ELA content in their own lessons to meet delineated outcomes.

Further, embedding SEL within the curriculum would not add a separate subject to the already full agenda of teachers or detract from class time for conventional ELA rather it would cover the same technical elements but use a SEL perspective to consider the material.

#### *Examples from the Classroom in the Literature*

Further support for the SEL-ELA integration arises from examples in the literature of select innovative classroom teachers who have creatively cultivated this connection. The cases described below highlight some of the ways in which educators have fortuitously identified the natural affinity between ELA and SEL and the value and abundance of opportunities to explore social and emotional topics through literature, writing, and dialogue.

Jamieson (2015) described her experience exploring empathy, relationships, and perspectives through *Oliver Twist* with her grade 11 students. She highlighted the importance of fostering a safe space for learning through literature. This atmosphere allowed her students to use the themes of social justice and interpersonal relationships in the novel as a mechanism to explore empathy and understanding in the classroom. Similarly, Vogel (2008) described a teacher using literary characters like Jonas in Lois Lowry's *The Giver* to allow students to explore conflict, relationships, and to build emotional intelligence in their interaction with the novel.

Beland (2007) described another teacher who exemplifies the type of creative integration that is natural to many educators. Amy Corvino incorporated SEL ideas into a study of *Romeo and Juliet* by evoking self-awareness and reflection in her grade 9 ELA students. She asked them to complete a stress-focused questionnaire from both their personal perspective and then from the perspective of the main characters. Through reflective questions students compared themselves with *Romeo and Juliet* and with one another. They considered the origins of their stress, the physical and emotional toll stress takes, and an examination of what contributes to their happiness.

In these examples, educators employ social and emotional *concepts* to make ELA content relevant and interesting by engaging students at a personal level and helping them to connect and make meaning in an effort to meet ELA outcomes. Any SEL that occurs is

largely a coincidental by-product of that endeavour. Few ELA teachers have SEL training or knowledge of efficacious methods to meet SEL outcomes (Bridgeland et al., 2013; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). However, these examples of independent teachers using social and emotional content to improve ELA support the case that classroom teachers with professional development in SEL theory, strategies, and outcomes could adapt current ELA curriculum to meet both the delineated ELA and SEL outcomes with minimal disruption.

### *Considering Student Experiences*

Additional evidence of both the complimentary relationship between SEL and ELA and support for developing embedded curriculum can be garnered from students' reflections on their ELA learning experiences. For example, Ivey and Johnston (2013) gathered feedback from students who participated in an engaged reading model that offered autonomy in choice of text, reading timeline, and response format. They found "that while constructing meaning from text, students were also using text to construct meaning in their lives" (p. 270). Student feedback showed significant evidence of engaged peer discussions, meaningful personal connections, and transformative interaction with the text. For example, one student described forming a connection with the main character of *Delirium* by Lauren Olive: "Cause right now she's having problems of her own...It's like I'm helping her with her problems, as well as she's helping me" (p. 261). This comment highlights the student's growing self-awareness and illustrates the power of that experience for students' social and emotional skills.

This link between literature and social and emotional development is also demonstrated by Howard (2013) in her examination of recreational reading in Canadian junior high school students. The author observed that, in addition to entertainment, escape, and stress-relief, young readers expressed being drawn to reading because it offered reassurance about their feelings and experiences. Howard also identified that, "in their pleasure reading, teens gain significant insights into self-identification, self-construction, and self-awareness, all of which aid them in the transition from childhood to adulthood" (p. 53). This underlines that students recognize the social and emotional power of literature and are primed to engage in personal exploration and competency development through ELA.

Students' desire to engage in SEL can also be seen in their feedback about their learning preferences in an ELA context. Through accounts from her grade 8 online English class, Rose (2011) identified that students sought engaging and relevant connections with their life, the ability to recognize themselves in the literature, and choice and autonomy in that self-exploration (p. 21). They also preferred an interactive model of learning that would allow peer collaboration and allow them to "see what kinds of things are happening in others' lives." (p. 22). Students also sought hands-on, engaging, dynamic activities with room for creativity and originality and "real world" connections in assignments and materials (p. 24).

An embedded SEL curriculum that targets relationship skills, self- and social-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making provides ample opportunity to incorporate the connection, personalisation, and active learning these students desire. As seen above in the 4Rs, PATHS, and RULER curriculum, SEL commonly features interactive strategies such as role play that help students draw personal and social connections, engage in perspective-taking, and reflect on real-life situations (See also

CASEL, 2015; Domitrovich, Durlak, Goren, & Weissberg, 2013; Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

### *Comparing Social and Emotional Competencies to Curriculum Outcomes*

Building on the evidence provided in the literature regarding the need and suitability of ELA for SEL, the next step requires an examination of the formal learning context. Ample opportunity and support for integrated SEL can be found in the 2016 redesigned British Columbia curriculum which provides a strong example of how ELA and SEL outcomes are mutually beneficial encouraging learning in both domains. The following overview of the new curriculum framework as well as closer investigation into learning outcomes using the specific example of grade 6 English language arts will identify clear connections to CASEL's five core areas of SEL competency (CASEL, 2016a).

The overall structure laid out by the BC Department of Education incorporates a multi-layered approach to learning including overarching goals for core competencies of student development as well as "Big Ideas" and specific learning standards for each grade and subject area. Within this framework, the overarching core competencies aim to help students gain "sets of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all students need to develop in order to engage in deep learning and life-long learning" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2015b). The areas of competencies are communication, creative thinking, critical thinking, positive personal and cultural identity, personal awareness and responsibility, and social responsibility. These categories strongly parallel CASEL's core competencies of self awareness, self management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making and establishes an impetus for all educators to incorporate social and emotional learning in their classrooms.

Delving into subject-specific outcomes, the example of the grade 6 English curriculum reveals the explicit incorporation of communication, thinking, personal and social competencies. At the highest level, the general learning outcomes referred to as the "Big Ideas" for grade 6 include the idea that "exploring stories and other texts helps us understand ourselves and make connections to others and to the world" and that "exploring and sharing multiple perspectives extends our thinking." These goals directly import self-awareness and social-awareness skills including self-perception and perspective-taking and arguably invoke the relationship skills and responsible decision-making skills such as communication and reflection that are required to listen and contribute respectfully.

These links are even more evident within the specific Grade 6 curricular competencies which call, for example, for students to:

- "Recognize and identify the role of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values and perspectives in texts."
- "Recognize how language constructs personal, social, and cultural identity."
- "Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and the world." (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2016)

The familiar key words in these outcomes including "perspectives", "identity", and "connections" demonstrate opportunities to unpack and purposely explore social and emotional concepts within a wider examination of language and texts. Through these carefully crafted learning goals, the ministry presents a vision of integrated social and



emotional learning recognizing the affective impact of texts and the ability of texts to contribute to personal, social and cultural development.

The 2016 redesign of the BC curriculum specifically contemplates the integration of SEL within content areas. The underlying ideas that facilitate this synthesis are evident in many language arts programs and, as highlighted above, inherent in popular literary texts and creative English classrooms in the western world. This includes other Canadian provinces such as Alberta (Alberta Learning, 2000), Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006), and the Atlantic region (Atlantic Provinces Education Foundation, 1998) as well as the US Common Core curriculum which also recognizes the importance of “attention to such matters as social, emotional, and physical development” (National Governors Association Center for Best Practice & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010, p. 6). The BC curriculum provides a strong example for other jurisdictions seeking to embed SEL into the curriculum in a way that offers the necessary scope to maintain rigour and encourage innovation.

### *Conclusions*

The literature supports the myriad educators and researchers who advocate for SEL integration (e.g. Boston Consulting Group, 2016; Bridgeland et al., 2013; Evans, Murphy, & Scourfield, 2015; S. M. Jones & Bouffard, 2012; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). Through its revisions to the provincial curricula, the government of British Columbia has signaled their support for this culture shift and mandated the incorporation of SEL into our classrooms. Other jurisdictions are following suit as educators, researchers, and policy makers across Canada, the US, and other western countries increasingly recognize the importance and value of embedding SEL in the classroom (see: Alberta Education, 2016; Bridgeland et al., 2013; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014; Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017). The present article provides support for beginning this process in the English language arts classroom due to the complimentary nature of the content, format, materials, strategies and lessons as well as the mutual benefit for academic and social and emotional learning.

Rather than relying on a trial and error process of choosing a prescribed program to implement only to be replaced by the next best idea, it is essential to harness the creative power of teachers and empower them to both facilitate and support students in SEL in their own classrooms. While the research indicates that teachers are the most effective purveyors of SEL and they are now being tasked with the introduction of SEL in the curriculum, there is limited research available on the role of teachers as “agents” of SEL (Dresser, 2013). The next step in the process is to apply the evidence together with input and creative contribution from teachers and students to design a flexible, versatile, integrated model for SEL in ELA. Particularly at the middle and high school level, more research is needed on how best to support teachers integrating SEL through adapting, refocusing, and enhancing their ELA lessons rather than increasing their workload with new directed programs.

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