



# English as a Second Language Council

of The Alberta Teachers' Association

## Accent

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**Note to ESLC members: Originally, this issue was to be published earlier, but some changes have been made to adjust to our ESLC conference date and the COVID-19 pandemic. Thank you very much for your hard work and patience!**

## President's Message

by Joan Miles



**H**ello, everyone! On behalf of the English as a Second Language Council (ESLC), I would like to extend well wishes to all of you, your families and your colleagues as you navigate uncharted waters in these unprecedented and uncertain times. While the provincial government works to flatten the medical curve that has temporarily changed our day-to-day lives, we educators are concerned about a different kind of curve entirely—the learning curve—and for many, it is extremely steep! Students and teachers

alike are grappling with the complexities of working in the online environment—a classroom structure that is very different from that to which they have been accustomed and one that is certainly not conducive to everyone. Teachers, however, are amazing! They are imaginative, hard-working and resourceful professionals. They are learning to use new tech tools, striving to keep students engaged, and breaking the barriers to student learning with creative problem solving to ensure equitable and meaningful educational opportunities for all. Every day, they bring their best selves to work while continually being asked to do more with less.

As a specialist council of the Alberta Teachers' Association, ESLC supports the wonderful work that classroom teachers across the province are doing on behalf of ELLs through our professional learning initiatives. To recap some of what took place this year prior to this publication, in October, ESLC hosted a

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miniconference and AGM in Red Deer, where attendees enjoyed an ATA-led session focused on inclusion and diversity as well as an informative and thought-provoking address by Hetty Roessingh, from the University of Calgary, on assessment practices. Also, in October, the Alberta Colony Educators special interest group (ACE SIG) hosted an extremely successful conference for over 400 educators who work closely with the Hutterite communities. ESLC PD directors also organized several local events this year, some of which you will read about in this publication.

Because face-to-face professional learning events have been halted or postponed at this time, including the ESLC conference that was scheduled for April, many of you are looking for other opportunities to learn about supports for English language learners. We want you to know we are here to help! Our council will be working together to see how we can offer resources and help you connect with each other. Please look out for further updates on our website, through our Mailchimp e-mailing list or on Facebook. If you have not signed up for updates on our new ESLC website, I strongly encourage you to do so (visit [www.eslcata.com/home](http://www.eslcata.com/home) for details).

None of the events that I have mentioned would be possible without the dedicated and selfless work of the 20 people who currently volunteer their time to ESLC. To them, I offer my sincerest thanks. Our illustrious editor, Annie Fung, keeps us thinking about ESL in the classroom on a regular basis with her digital *Tidbits* and social media updates, and by curating the articles that appear in *Accent*. Heather Kennedy, our webmaster, ensures that the information and resources you need are at your fingertips through the new ESLC website. Our PD

directors (Nancy Musica, Lisa Smith and Jessica Maloughney) create opportunities for teachers to grow their professional learning by listening and responding to what you—our members—are asking for. Our many members at large (Amanda Caporicci, Paulina Nowak, Tracey Allan, Youssra Badr, Stephanie Dodyk, Laura-Lee Toews and Purnima Lindsay) and our ACE SIG liaison (Karl Peterson) support a wide variety of local ESLC events and help to brainstorm new initiatives for our committee. We appreciate the insights offered by our Alberta Education rep, Mike Ettrich, and our ATA staff advisor, Dan Grassick, as well as the contributions made to our council by Kathy Hoehn, our PEC liaison. Finally, our table officers work hard to coordinate all of the collective work of the council and ensure that ESLC is achieving its stated mission, which is to promote best practices in education for K–12 ESL teachers so that they can assist ESL students to achieve their academic potential and become engaged citizens. Thanks to Diane Pham, Gaylene Mackay, Samantha Tomlinson, Kathy Hoehn and Dan Grassick!

Please add your voice to the work that ESLC is undertaking in ways that make the most sense for you. This might be through writing an article for *Accent*, submitting a proposal to present at our next convention or taking an even more active role by applying for one of the available positions on the council at the next AGM.

Now, more than ever, we need to come together to collaborate, share resources and support one another so that we can stay strong and maintain good mental health through these difficult days! Please be gentle with yourselves as we adjust to the new normal—let's be there for each other!

# Editor's Corner

by Annie Fung



I hope that this note finds you safe and sound at home with your loved ones. As we were preparing to submit the winter issue of *Accent* this year, we were hearing swirls of news from other parts of the world about COVID-19, and I think many of us were not

aware of how serious or fast this virus can spread. I took our original issue back to the drawing board and worked with Joan Miles and a few others to ensure that *Accent* is a little bit more relevant for you at this time. Many people are unaware of the hard work that our executive and our ATA editors do in the background to put the newsletter together. It takes time, but it's important for us to get it right. It's also important to get some of the resources out to members timely and effectively when you may need more teaching ideas since your students are not right in front of you! So please look for updates on our website, Facebook and, of course, e-mail in the coming days.

For teachers (aka superheroes) who fly at full speed, being forced to slow down can be hard! I do think that we are more prepared than others, not just because we are superheroes in disguise, but because we are also trained to see the potential in children to adapt quickly and to look for the little positive things! I don't know about you, but I am really learning to make time to smell the (imaginary) roses. It may be uncomfortable at first, but it is sort of refreshing at the same time to truly slow down. Consequently, I am able to appreciate my colleagues' resilience, sense of humour and resourcefulness at play even more. I am learning how to draw better and "doing" art resin. I don't even know how you are keeping track of all of the TV shows that everybody is recommending (that one about some tiger—I'm too afraid to touch that yet!). We no longer have daycare, so I tried to do

circle time with Henry who is now almost four. When he refused to watch his teacher's circle time on the iPad, I asked him to "give" me circle time instead. After all, I did pay a lot for him to do this every day for the last three years, no? He should be a circle time connoisseur! And wow! Did you know that toddlers can meditate? He literally told me to close my eyes and to "breathe in, breathe out." Whoa. I'm retiring next year; my job as a working mother is done! Teachers, you are amazing—at school or at home!

There are times though when we may all just be trying to make it through to the next hour or day too. And that's OK! Let's make a pact to be gentle with ourselves and our families (since we are kind of stuck with them for a while, eh?). I was enlightened by what someone said at a webinar this week. Instead of asking people, "How are you feeling?" try asking "Are you feeling enough for now?" "And it doesn't matter because we are here for you!" That was a nice reminder.

I am going to send you some of my favourite resources along with our executives electronically so it'll get to you faster. Since we've been talking about wellness and less screen time, I leave you with these tools that may help just a little:

## Wellness Podcasts and Apps

- Headspace ([www.headspace.com/covid-19](http://www.headspace.com/covid-19))\*  
Weathering the storm is a free meditation app. Information from the website: "It includes meditations, sleep, and movement exercises to help you out, however you're feeling. It's our small way of helping you find some space and kindness for yourself and those around you."
- Meditate for free with Oprah and Chopra (<https://chopracentermeditation.com/>)\*  
21-Day Meditation

Note: These have been made free for everyone, so we are just sharing the information. Our council and the ATA are not affiliated or compensated in any way for passing this on.

## Educational Podcasts

Tired of webinars? Eyes falling out? Why not try listening to these podcasts while you take Scruffy for a walk or fold laundry?

- “Classroom Q&A with Larry Ferlazzo” (As a big name in ESL, some are very specific to ELLs and their teachers): <http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/>

[classroom\\_qa\\_with\\_larry\\_ferlazzo/2020/04/three\\_podcasts\\_supporting\\_teachers\\_during\\_the\\_coronavirus.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom_qa_with_larry_ferlazzo/2020/04/three_podcasts_supporting_teachers_during_the_coronavirus.html).

- “The Cult of Pedagogy Podcast,” by Jennifer Gonzalez: [www.cultofpedagogy.com/pod/](http://www.cultofpedagogy.com/pod/).

Best wishes to you and yours! Stay well and stay safe! Like Her Majesty The Queen said, “We will meet again!” Soonish. Promise!

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# Get to Know Your ESLC Executives

A full list of your ESLC executives can be found at [www.eslcata.com/council-executives](http://www.eslcata.com/council-executives). Contacts can be found on the last page of Accent.

## SAMANTHA TOMLINSON, President-Elect



Any information you'd like to share about your work: I work as a consultant in instructional services for English language learning.

One ESL resource that you cannot do without: The website [teachingrefugees.com](http://teachingrefugees.com) is most suitable for teachers and administrators working with English language learners who have interrupted schooling or limited formal schooling. I use this resource to get strategies and insights to culturally responsive strategies as well as look at alternate benchmarks and additional teaching resources.

## STEPHANIE DODYK, MAL Northern Alberta



Any information you'd like to share about your work: I am the ESL and second languages consultant with Elk Island Public Schools. I support K-12 teachers across the division who have English learners in their classroom.

One ESL resource that you cannot do without: I cannot do without *7 Steps to a Language-Rich Interactive Classroom*, by John Seidlitz and Bill Perryman. This quick read gives seven research-based steps for teachers to implement at any grade level and content area. The steps provide a road map to creating a classroom environment where every student participates in academic conversations. Twenty-five activities are outlined that provide structured reading and writing opportunities for all content areas.

## LISA SMITH, PD Director South and Conference Director



Any information you'd like to share about your work: As the PD director and conference director, I am always on the lookout for guest speakers and great sessions that provide effective strategies, helpful resources and inspiration to all who work with ELLs. Please reach out with any ideas or suggestions.

One ESL resource that you cannot do without: A great resource for ELLs is the *Big Idea* series published by Scholastic. These books allow ELLs to access curricular outcomes by enriching simplified texts with meaningful visuals. They do a great job of lowering the language barrier so students with varying English language proficiency can participate in classroom activities.

## JESSICA MALOUGHNEY, PD Director Central



Any information you'd like to share about your work: Our first ESLC PD (held on October 26, 2019) was a great success in Red Deer, despite the cold, snowy weather! A big thank you to Gaylene Mackay for planning this wonderful day of learning.

Stay tuned for more PD opportunities!

One ESL resource that you cannot do without: Writing in a dialogue journal is an awesome activity that is suitable for all age levels. Each week, the students write an entry, aimed to be a conversation with their teacher. New ELL students can simply draw a picture to represent something that is important to them. Most important, the

teacher writes back to the students each week without correction or judgment. This strategy can help the teacher to develop a greater connection with students and encourages the students to try out new vocabulary words and phrases. I have used these in both elementary and middle school, and the response has been fantastic!

**YOUSRA BADR, MAL Edmonton and Area**

Any information you'd like to share about your work: It is such a pleasure working with the amazing, intelligent, resilient students in our community. I am grateful on a daily basis to work with these students and to work for such an amazing division that never ceases to put students first.

One ESL resource that you cannot do without: I cannot do without *7 Steps to a Language-Rich Interactive Classroom*, by John Seidlitz and Bill Perryman. This book offers excellent strategies for not only supporting your ELL students but also your entire class. The tried-and-true strategies are simple to implement and have significant research-based results. I recommend this quick and easy-to-read book to all teachers!

**AMANDA CAPORICCI-UROVITCH, MAL Calgary**

Any information you'd like to share about your work: I am a learning coach at a high school in High River and a divisional ELL learning coach for the Foothills School Division.

One ESL resource that you cannot do without: *Getting Started with English Language Learners: How Educators Can Meet the Challenge*, by Judie Haynes, is a great resource for beginning teachers or to gather quick ideas and strategies for the diverse classroom. It provides information on how students acquire a second language, differentiating instruction and creating effective learning environments for English language learners. This book contains many exemplars and real-life scenarios from actual classrooms.

**PAULINA NOWAK, MAL Calgary**

Any information you'd like to share about your work: As an ELL consultant for the Calgary Catholic School District, I have the opportunity to work with K–12 schools to provide strategies and supports to teachers working with ELL students.

One ESL resource that you cannot do without: Britannica Online ([www.Britannica.com](http://www.Britannica.com)) provides resources at different reading levels (differentiating outputs) as well as the ability to translate the resources into many languages.

**PURNIMA LINDSAY, MAL Red Deer**

Any information you'd like to share about your work: I am the district ELL coordinator for Red Deer Public as well as the curriculum coordinator with a focus on literacy.

One ESL resource that you cannot do without: Many teachers I work with really like the *Talk About* series by Scholastic Education.

**ANNIE FUNG, Publications Director**

Any information you'd like to share about your work: I am an ESL consultant on the inclusive learning team in Edmonton Public Schools where I work with different stakeholders to support ESL learning and teaching. Recently, I've been assigned a second catchment area—my old stomping grounds from my school years. It will be exciting to visit these schools and maybe some former teachers (I'm not that old!) at some point!

One ESL resource that you cannot do without: I was going to mention EmpoweringELLs.com, but Nancy Musica beat me to it! So, here's a tried and true Online Reference Centre (ORC) from LearnAlberta: [www.onlinereferencecentre.ca/](http://www.onlinereferencecentre.ca/). I love how families can access reading resources such as Bookflix, Trueflix and Scienceflix online for free (as long as they use the password/login from Alberta Education/their school division). Sneaking another one in—don't forget to check out [www.unitedforliteracy.com](http://www.unitedforliteracy.com) (ad-free, simple dual-language books for your ELLs and their families!).

# ACE Conference 2019

by Rebecca Bulsma and the Hutterite Educators Conference Team



Hutterite culture is woven deeply into the fabric that contributes to a richly diverse Alberta. As the number of colony schools in the province continues to grow, so does the awareness that the educational needs of these colonies require unique approaches and considerations. Hutterite education is a combined effort in Alberta. Colonies provide school buildings, and school divisions provide public school board teachers to teach the provincial curriculum to students. Additionally, a local Hutterite teacher teaches German and religion lessons to students.

In October, over 400 Hutterite colony educators from across the province filled the seats of the Magrath High School theatre to engage in professional development and commemorate 100 years of Hutterites in Alberta.

The Alberta Colony Educators (ACE) Conference has been held every two years since 1997 as a provincewide professional development opportunity for school division colony teachers and educational assistants. Recently, the responsibility for organizing the event has shifted from individual school divisions to the ACE special interest group of the English Second Language Council (ESLC) of the ATA. In previous years, the conference dates conflicted with Hutterite religious holidays and

early gardening season, making it difficult for colony members to participate. This year, the conference was held in October to make it more convenient for Hutterite German teachers to attend and promote increased collaboration and stronger relationships.

“The response to this change was incredible,” says Karl Peterson, ACE chairperson and principal of Colony Schools for Westwind School Division. “In previous years, we would only have a handful of Hutterite brethren at our conference. This year we saw a dramatic increase in our numbers, with over 200 members of various Alberta Hutterite colonies attending the conference in Magrath, including German teachers, colony ministers, and numerous other colony members and their wives.” The conference had representation from 164 of 194 colonies, which is unprecedented.

“We could feel the general excitement in the air among the Hutterite teachers and everyone who was involved in the conference,” says Peterson. He credits ACE conference chair Bill Alston with the success of the conference. Bill has been a colony teacher for 38 years with Westwind School Division and has organized three past ACE conferences.

Thomas Hofer, second minister at East Cardston Colony, felt that the conference was important in building relationships between the English and German teachers who work on colonies. “The environment was just comfortable,” he said. “We felt like we belonged there and the shared experience really helped to connect everyone.” Peter Hofer, the German teacher at East Cardston Colony, agreed. “It was nice to meet educators from other colonies and share good ideas and broaden our horizons a little bit. We got to see proof of programs that are working in other places and speak to other teachers.”

During the opening address of the conference, Cardston Siksika MLA Joseph Schow, town of Magrath mayor Russ Barnett and Westwind School Division superintendent Darren Mazutinec unveiled a

commemorative plaque recognizing and acknowledging 100 years of Hutterites in Alberta. The plaque will be mounted on a large rock donated by East Raymond Colony and displayed in Monument Park in Magrath. “Our goal was to honour the history of Hutterites in Alberta forever,” says Peterson.

Conference attendees enjoyed a keynote address by Julie and Lowell Taylor, a Lethbridge couple who competed on the *Amazing Race Canada*, season four. Their message of hope, positive attitudes and overcoming trials was well received by attendees. Throughout the two-day conference, educators and

speakers from around the province offered workshops on topics ranging from literacy to mental health to German grammar. The closing keynote speaker was Jerome Chabot, a Métis man who discussed the importance of embracing and promoting unique culture.

Peterson is proud of the collaborative efforts and partnership that made the ACE conference a success, including contributions by local Hutterite colonies of baked goods and door prizes.

The Alberta Colony Educators Conference is held every two years, and the next event will be in Airdrie in October 2021.

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## What to Expect When Working with Interpreters

by Lisa Smith



**M**y first experience working with an interpreter was a bit of a befuddled mess. I had the best intentions of opening communication with a child’s parents to learn more about his needs.

However, I didn’t know

what to expect. I talked too long and used unnecessary technical terms. I looked at the wrong person when speaking. I didn’t realize how long the meeting needed to be and found myself watching the clock, worried that I would be running late.

Fortunately, the interpreter was more than capable and guided me through the process.

Now in my current role I am responsible for recruiting, training and maintaining the interpreter portfolio for my school district (funny how that worked out). I look back at my first experience working with interpreters and feel compelled to help others to avoid my errors. I want teaching staff to feel confident in accessing this essential resource in supporting our students and their families.

The interpreters in my school district are professionals, guided by standards of practice to ensure that the service provided to families and schools is both consistent and high quality. At times, it may seem simpler to ask someone from the school community who speaks the language to interpret on your behalf. However, in doing so you cannot be certain that they can fulfill the role completely. There is more to it than just speaking the language. The guidelines that trained interpreters adhere to are recognized across Canada by the *National Standard Guide for Community Interpreting Services* and include

- conveying all messages with accuracy and fidelity to the best of their abilities;
- maintaining confidentiality;
- ensuring impartiality to all parties involved;
- demonstrating respect for all persons;
- performing all duties within their role and maintaining role boundaries;
- displaying accountability for the quality of the interpretation provided;
- being guided by professionalism and ethics at all times; and

- committing themselves to lifelong learning and continued competency.

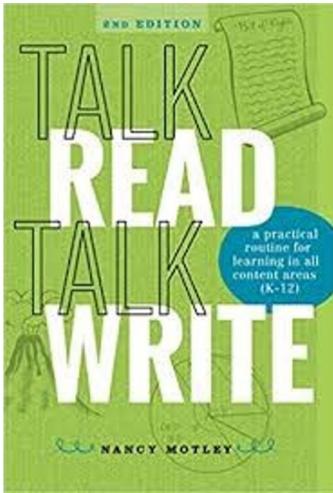
Working closely with interpreters, I realize that they bring additional assets to their role that reach beyond standards of practice. Many of the people I have trained have expressed their desire to give back and support newcomers in the ways they were supported upon their arrival to Canada. Interpreters often have the same goal in mind as the school. They not only intend on transmitting a message effectively but also hope that their service will assist families in accessing the resources, knowledge and supports they need to be successful citizens for themselves and their children.

With this goal in mind, it is important to consider how to work most effectively with interpreters in schools. At times, schools place unreasonable demands on interpreters, unaware that their requests reach beyond the interpreters' role or by not preparing adequately for a meeting. You can best prepare for interpreters by

- allowing for extra time;
- clarifying the purpose of the meeting;
- speaking directly to the parents, not the interpreters;
- speaking in clear, short sentences;
- providing the interpreters a separate place (away from the family) to wait until the meeting begins, to allow interpreters to maintain impartiality and role boundaries;
- allowing interpreters plenty of time to introduce themselves and explain their role in the meeting;
- not asking interpreters for their opinion or cultural explanations.

We educators recognize the family as the primary educator of children. We rely on their guidance and input to develop programming that is appropriate for their children. Working with interpreters is essential in effectively communicating with our non-English speaking families, to best support every child in our classroom.

# Book Review: *Talk Read Talk Write*



by Nancy Motley, San Antonio, Tex: Canter, 2016

Reviewed by Nancy Musica, PD Director North

Nancy Motley's method *Talk Read Talk Write* (TRTW), is highly recommended as it offers a universal structure that supports all kinds of students—and can be used with any grade, elementary to high school. What's great is it is designed to be used in a mainstream classroom and can be adapted to support ELLs. Motley herself discusses the how and the why in her 30-minute video, *Be Brave*, which is worth

a watch: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=44dC4DYPtM4&index=4&list=PLb5RXypPqP5sJaR-aGEVW9vgH-YTvl9P&t=0s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44dC4DYPtM4&index=4&list=PLb5RXypPqP5sJaR-aGEVW9vgH-YTvl9P&t=0s).

In a nutshell, she's developed a lesson structure to support students to navigate content learning in a meaningful way that requires students to do the heavy lifting—also known as independent reading and writing practice. In TRTW, students begin by engaging in a talking activity to get prepared for the reading piece. They then read independently with another chance to talk—which also paves the way to writing. This predictable instructional routine recognizes the importance of oral language and group work for learning, while also emphasizing independent reading and writing skills. The book lays out the method clearly and includes an array of engaging activities to make each step memorable and effective. Even better, Motley covers all the bases by answering every possible question a teacher might ask. This includes how to include ELLs and students with special needs, as well as the common and possible pitfalls that sometimes occur when encouraging students to talk in the classroom.

As a teacher, Motley struggled with that familiar problem—wondering how to get her students to read and write independently and realizing that she may have been helping them too much. This is something I always struggled with as an ESL teacher. Our students need so much support, but also need to stand on their own feet—as we won't always be there for them. The TRTW routine is prescriptive, and the teacher must be very intentional in the planning. The steps need to be clearly laid out for the students and include a high level of accountability. The TRTW method can be used to support learning in a variety of subject areas and is recommended to be used twice a week. The lesson requires preplanning, so that all four steps connect cohesively. The TRTW lesson can be carried out with the students in an hour. Planning the first lesson may take some time, but it is definitely doable! As a bonus, developed lessons ranging from kindergarten to senior high are included in the final chapter, revealing how this method can be used in a range of ways and for a variety of subject areas.

We know it takes practice to improve, and this method supports practice! Active reading strategies like the Pay Attention to List, Notetaking and Highlighting Plus help support learning and activities such as Envelope Please, and I like it for all students, but especially see value in using it with English language learners. Specific benefits to ELLs using this method are detailed in the book and summarized below:

- Provides practice with academic English.
- Allows for linguistic accommodations.
- Involves listening, talking, reading and writing.
- Involves listening and speaking with proficient speakers.
- Allows for nonlinguistic representation.
- Allows for sentence stems and sentence frames.
- Allows for adapted text.
- Offers built-in opportunities for teacher to work with individuals or small groups.
- Provides safety and comfort in partner or small group work.

The book is available for borrowing from the ATA library, Barnett House.

More on TRTW: Tan Huynh's article *Empowering ELLs* is also worth a look as he provides further ways to adapt the method for ELLs, with the possibility of including more opportunities for ELLs to talk in order to break the work of reading into more manageable chunks. Go to [www.empoweringells.com/29-trtw/](http://www.empoweringells.com/29-trtw/).

# A Tale of Two Approaches: How Implicit Bias Affects Learning

by Stephanie Dodyk

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.  
—Charles Dickens



As an adult learner, I decided to embark on acquiring a new language: French. With my newly acquired proficiency, I envisioned myself exploring the Rhône Valley in search of the perfect Syrah. I would discuss the subtle fruit and floral notes or

earthy chocolate undertones with the various vintners of the region, basing my decisions on which wineries to visit, and hotels to stay at, on what locals shared either online or in passing. I would feel like I was part of French culture.

But alas, my first introductory French course for adult learners did not get me there. Once a week for 10 weeks, I listened and watched the teacher regurgitate the material from the textbook and saw my dream move farther and farther away. We wrote down how to pronounce vowels and consonants, the conjugation of verbs and other grammatical aspects of the language. We completed homework assignments, which consisted of filling in the blank with the correct article, preposition or verb for sentences about cars, dogs and houses. At the end of each lesson, the instructor asked what our plans for the weekend were *en français*. I had a laundry list of items composed in my head, but no way of expressing them in the target language. All I could muster was *Je ne sais pas*—I do not know. I was frustrated. French was looking like a language that would never be mine.

Finally, at week 8, I was able to piece together *Je voudrais un verre du vin, s'il vous plaît*—I would like a glass of wine, please—but still had no idea

how I could describe its fruity tones with any of the ever-shrinking number of classmates, whose names I did not know. In addition to the heavy emphasis on grammar, our weekly lessons started with reading a dialogue at the beginning of the sequentially administered chapter of the week. Two students at a time would be selected to read the lines of script aloud until everyone had read at least one part. We were discouraged from reading the translation offered below in the textbook and told to “just try to figure it out.” This proved difficult when there were only a few cognates, words similar to English, to pull out of the text. What was the purpose of reading these dialogues? They were not steering me to my overarching goal of finding the perfect wine. But I persevered. I paid money for this course, and I was going to finish it.

During this weekly endeavour that I felt was taking me nowhere, I decided to try a two-day workshop designed to develop oral language proficiency, where I would practise my listening and speaking skills. The instructor spoke nothing but French for those two days and set the expectation that we would do so as well. Yikes! Full immersion. I gave myself no choice of backing out even though my heart was racing and my cheeks were flushed. Our English learners have no choice either when they set foot in our classrooms, I thought. But how was I supposed to speak with my six chapters of French grammar and sentences about cars, dogs and houses? Surprisingly, I did, and learned so much more on top of that.

By the end of the two-day workshop, I was justifying book and film recommendations, introducing participants to the other members of the group, asking questions for clarification, talking about my work and family, and, most important, sharing how I enjoy spending time with family and friends—my *passer du temps*—eating and drinking,

all *en français*. How did this happen? Why was this experience so much more meaningful than my weekly introductory French class? Why did I feel exhausted, but exhilarated, at the end of each day? The Rhône Valley was coming closer.

For starters, the instructor got to know us. She asked, *en français*, how much exposure to French we had had. She used gestures and spoke slowly to get her message across and provided sentence stems to help us phrase our answers. Some didn't need to use the stems because of their backgrounds, but some, like me, were extremely thankful to have that scaffold there to support us in putting together an intelligible answer. From that quick 10-minute exercise, the instructor was able to learn participants' names and find out the range of proficiencies she was going to be working with for the next two days. And it was quite a range: with me at one end of the spectrum and another with university French at the other.

The other important feature about these two days was the level of interaction among group members. I believe all of us talked about as much as, if not more than, the instructor through a variety of structured activities. By using one another's strengths, we were able to support one another in taking risks of using the language. We were never put on the spot of giving an answer to the whole group until we had a chance to practise it with others in a low risk setting. I did not always know what the task was right away, but breaking up into groups or with a partner, I was allowed more processing time to get my brain in line with the expectation. By implementing activities in a low-risk environment, I also remember more of the language I used, and it was not all cars, dogs and houses. So why was this workshop more effective in getting me closer to my goal than the weekly French class?

## **Power Distance and Implicit Bias**

Geert Hofstede is a cultural psychologist who describes national cultures along six dimensions, one of them being power distance (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2010). Power distance is defined as "the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organisations within a country expect

and accept that power is distributed unequally" (Hofstede 2019). Based on Hofstede's (2019) findings, Canadian culture values egalitarianism and interdependence, whereas France accepts a high degree of inequality leading to students being dependent on teachers.

Looking back to how both of my experiences to learning French were implemented, it is easy to see how unconscious attitudes shape our responses to groups and individuals (Hammond 2015). It was natural for my weekly instructor to carry the cognitive load because of a more centralized-held value of power (Hofstede 2019). Since my brain has learned and hardwired implicit Canadian cultural values, and my weekly French instructor has imprinted values based on European French culture, it was natural for conflict to occur. But the learning environment was less stressful and more effective when facilitated by someone who acknowledged my needs as a learner.

Implicit bias is directly linked to how our brains are wired and refers to the unconscious attitudes that affect our understanding and decisions (Kirwan Institute 2015). These biases do not occur voluntarily and are initiated without the individual being aware, or in control, of them. I have implicit bias as much as my instructors do, but when these biases go unchecked, it can greatly affect the learning environment and move both teacher and student further away from their intended outcomes. For example, Flanders (1970) reported that teachers of high-achieving students spent about 55 per cent of the class time talking, compared with 80 per cent for teachers of low-achieving students.

Bakhtin (1981, 293–94) reminds us that "[t]he world in language is half someone else's. It becomes 'one's own' only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention." From this, it is important for teachers to be aware of their own implicit biases. If power distance is unbalanced, there are fewer opportunities for students to engage in dialogue because they do not feel safe. Our amygdala, the almond-shaped structure deep inside the brain's limbic layer, is involved in emotional processing and is designed to react in a split second

by releasing the stress hormone cortisol when it receives information that it is not socially, emotionally or intellectually safe (Hammond 2015). If positive social relationships are fostered, where signals are sent to the brain that the physical, psychological and social environments are safe, oxytocin, the bonding hormone, is released, making it possible for language to be shared and learned.

## Conclusion

From a young age, we have used language as a medium to acquire information (Vygotsky 1978). Bandura (2001) notes that learning is a sociocultural act ruled by language. Language incorporates our background knowledge and values, and is how we think and establish purpose.

Just as infants do not produce complete sentences right away, it is important to have scaffolds in place to allow for language learners to take risks in a safe environment. Using the strengths of the group, incorporating learners' background knowledge, providing sentence stems, giving options of what to say instead of *Je ne sais pas* and making the learning relevant to your audience are vital for effective language instruction no matter the content area. Providing explicit content and language objectives that tie into what learners want to achieve is paramount for a safe, engaged and effective learning community, where success is based on the well-being of the group through respect, cooperation and purpose.

I am feeling closer and closer to my dream of exploring the Rhône Valley and being part of French culture as I continue on my language learning journey. Now I just need my wallet to cooperate.

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# Opinion: And Everybody's OK with This? Shortcutting Shakespeare for Postsecondary Admission

by M Gregory Tweedie

*This opinion article asks whether an existing loophole in university admissions policy undercuts the Alberta English Language Arts Program of Studies and creates the perception of an uneven playing field among Alberta high school students.*

*In his capacity as an associate professor in language and literacy at the Werklund School of Education, University of Calgary, M Gregory (Greg) Tweedie works with schools, school districts and education ministries, locally and internationally, to support effective teaching and assessment of English language learners.*

At a pivotal moment in Disney's animated classic, *The Lion King* (1994), Timon, an egocentric and wisecracking meerkat, delivers a memorable gibe. When Timon is warmly introduced to the very lioness who's been hunting him, the exasperated meerkat exclaims to the Lion King: "Let me get this straight. You know her. She knows you. But she wants to eat him [Pumba, their dim-witted but lovable warthog pal]. And everybody's OK with this?"

The Alberta Education (2003) *English Language Arts 10-20-30 Program of Studies* begins by asserting,

There are two basic aims of senior high school English language arts. One aim is to encourage, in students, an understanding and appreciation of the significance and artistry of literature. A second aim is to enable each student to understand and appreciate language and to use it confidently and competently for a variety of purposes, with a variety of audiences and in a variety of situations for communication, personal satisfaction and learning.

The rationale for these admirable aims?

An appreciation of literature and an ability to use language effectively enhance students' opportunities to become responsible, contributing citizens and lifelong learners while experiencing success and fulfillment in life. (Alberta Education 2003)

So, what if there was a way for Alberta students to complete their high school diploma and gain direct admission to Alberta universities, without demonstrating an "appreciation of the significance and artistry of literature" (2003), nor without demonstrating the ability to use language "confidently and competently for a variety of purposes . . . audiences . . . and situations" (2003)? If there was such a way, to paraphrase Timon: Would everybody be OK with this?

Because there is a way. It will set Alberta students back about \$325, and take up one day of their time, but from a university's point of view, it can substitute for demonstrating understanding of *Hamlet*, or showing that you can analyze and respond to poetry, or even proving that you can use language for a variety of audiences and situations.

A number of one-off standardized tests provide some Alberta high school students a shortcut into university admission, which goes easy on Shakespeare and iambic pentameter. As English is the medium of instruction at most Alberta universities, it follows that all students must demonstrate proof of their proficiency, which can be done in a number of ways.<sup>1</sup> A frequently presented one of these, the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) academic test, assesses "aspects of academic language" and "whether you're ready to begin training or studying (British Council nd)." In certain circumstances, standardized tests like the IELTS can be used to demonstrate English

proficiency in a way that undercuts the learning outcomes such as those prescribed for English language arts (ELA) 30-1. It works as follows.

International (fee-paying) high school students are actively recruited by Alberta school boards.<sup>2</sup> We welcome such students from around the world for the rich diversity and international perspectives they bring to our schools.<sup>3</sup> Understandably, some components of ELA 30-1, particularly literature, draw upon culture-specific background knowledge that may pose a challenge to international students whose entrance to our school system begins in upper secondary. No matter: for Alberta high school students here less than three years, proof of proficiency in English for university admission can be shown by scoring an 80 per cent grade in ELA 30-1 (at the University of Calgary; 75 per cent at the University of Alberta), or by presenting a standardized language proficiency score, from tests like IELTS.<sup>4</sup>

And everybody's OK with this?

Two objections have been raised that indicate everybody may not be OK with this substitutionary policy. First, comparing the outcomes of the *ELA Program of Studies* (2003) (for example, "appreciation for the artistry of literature") to a test designed to assess reading of "academic topics of general interest"<sup>5</sup> is like comparing apples to oranges. Scores on the ELA 30-1 diploma and the IELTS band scores are measurements of two entirely different things. This of course calls into question the presumption of equivalency among measures of language assessment for university admission, a point I have taken up elsewhere (Tweedie and Chu 2019).

Second, doesn't this substitutionary policy lend itself to the perception of an uneven playing field? Imagine two classmates in an Alberta high school, both seeking places in a highly competitive university program. One student demonstrates English proficiency through 125 hours spent in such activities as evaluating textual "verisimilitude, appropriateness and significance" (Alberta Education 2003, 2.3.2 [e]), or explaining "the contribution of motif and symbol to controlling idea and theme" (Alberta Education 2003, 2.2.2[e]). Another student

in the same class demonstrates English proficiency by spending \$325 and a Saturday afternoon. The obvious differences between these measures will inevitably raise questions about fairness.

Do we really want to undercut the high school ELA curriculum aims in this way? The IELTS is an established, well-researched and internationally recognized test of English language proficiency. But it does not purport to assess the learning aims of the Alberta Education program of study—that's our job. Scores from the two are incommensurable but are currently being treated as equivalent for university admission.

And everybody's OK with this?

## Notes

1. A number of ways to demonstrate English language proficiency are available. See [www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/a-11.html](http://www.ucalgary.ca/pubs/calendar/current/a-11.html) and [www.ualberta.ca/admissions/undergraduate/admission/admission-requirements/language-requirements](http://www.ualberta.ca/admissions/undergraduate/admission/admission-requirements/language-requirements) (accessed May 6, 2020).

2. See, for example, the multilingual recruitment efforts of the Calgary Board of Education: [www.cbeinternational.ca/default.htm](http://www.cbeinternational.ca/default.htm) or Edmonton Public Schools <http://internationalprograms.epsb.ca/> (accessed May 6, 2020).

3. And, it must be admitted, in a time of reduced education funding, school jurisdictions also welcome the added revenue from international students' tuition fees (\$12,500 annually per student at the Calgary Board of Education): [www.cbeinternational.ca/apply\\_fees.htm](http://www.cbeinternational.ca/apply_fees.htm) (accessed May 6, 2020).

4. A grade of 80 per cent in ELA 30-1 can be used as proof of English proficiency at the University of Calgary; 75 per cent at the University of Alberta. The reason for this difference is unclear to the author.

5. For a description of the components of an IELTS test, see [https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/ielts\\_information\\_for\\_candidates\\_uk\\_version.pdf](https://takeielts.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/ielts_information_for_candidates_uk_version.pdf) (accessed May 6, 2020).

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# Vocab@Leuven

by Joan Miles

*Full disclosure: I have never attended an international conference before. Heck, the farthest I've gone to a gathering of my professional peers is probably Edmonton! It was with great delight, therefore, that I drew on my ATA professional development allocation to attend a conference focused entirely on new research in the area of second language vocabulary learning. I am pleased to be able to bring some of that research back to share with you.*

Vocab@ is held every three years in a different city somewhere in the world. In July 2019, that location was Leuven, Belgium. The conference, which ran for three very full days, attracted some of the best and the brightest in the area of vocabulary research, including the developer of Compleat Lexical Tutor, Tom Cobb (accompanied by his wife and partner in academia, Marlise Horst, who was scheduled to present at the ESLC conference in April); Stuart Webb, from Western University; and retiring vocabulary guru Norbert Schmitt. Scholars from our very own province, such as Geoffrey Pinchbeck, Fanny Mace and Brock Wojtalewicz, from the University of Calgary, also presented their research. With the exception of the keynote addresses, sessions were only 20 minutes in length, followed by brief Q&As, so over three days, I took in 28 presentations, all of which hovered around different aspects of the same theme. What I hope to do in this short article is synthesize the information from several sessions under a few general headings and present some key take-aways that might support, validate or challenge your existing understanding about second language vocabulary learning.

## Core Word Lists

The purpose of core word lists is to help ELLs prioritize vocabulary for learning, and teachers are encouraged to use them. There are many word lists from which to choose, so the problem is in deciding which list offers the best return for learning. One example is the Oxford 3000, originally created in 2005. It has recently been revised based on two key criteria: frequency (based on a corpus of 2 billion words of American and British English representing the ultimate target language of the learners) and relevance (based on a corpus of 7 million words used in teaching texts). The most recent version of the Oxford 3000 includes modern words such as blog, app and download (Lea 2019).

The evaluation of the usefulness of existing high-frequency word lists has, in the past, never incorporated feedback from teachers and students; however, in a recent study undertaken by Dang, Webb and Coxhead (2019), two well-known word lists were compared (the 2,000 British National Corpus and Corpus of Contemporary American English word families [BNC/COCA2000] and the New GSL), and the perceptions of teachers and learners were taken into consideration. Based on teacher rating and learner knowledge of 973 words, findings suggest that the BNC/COCA2000 is a more useful word list than the New GSL.

## Reading

A study by Chang (2019) looked at the effect of narrow reading on vocabulary acquisition. Narrow reading requires that learners read a series of books by the same author or on the same theme. The

advantage of narrow reading for developing literacy is that related texts use fewer word types (different words) and families. As well, specialized words are more likely to be repeated, so students get more exposure to target vocabulary, which may improve reading fluency and vocabulary acquisition. Some narrow reading requires students to read versions of the same book at different levels of difficulty; however, this can lead to boredom for a novice reader.

## Vocabulary Learning

There are two popular methods of learning vocabulary in a second language: word writing and retrieval practice. Word writing is decontextualized. It involves writing a word repeatedly by hand, thereby creating motor memory and inducing increased focus on word form (that is, the spelling of the word and all its inflections, for example, beauty, beautiful, beautify and so on). Retrieval practice focuses on both word form and word meaning at the same time. It requires the learner to complete a specific retrieval task, such as filling gaps in a sentence. Tasks must be at an appropriate level of difficulty so that the learner experiences success. This type of activity requires effort on the part of the student, which is considered critical for learning. Findings suggest that word-writing yields better short-term form recall than retrieval practice; however, retrieval practice yields both the highest form-recall scores and meaning-recall scores over time (Candry and Eyckmans 2019).

Another study by Duong and Peters (2019) explored whether students learned vocabulary better with input-based tasks (for example, students listen and perform such tasks as following directions but do not produce language) or output-based tasks (for example, watching a video and then writing a summary). The experimenter controlled for whether or not the vocabulary was used correctly. Findings showed that input-based tasks were better if the aim was to learn word meaning; however, output-based tasks were preferable if the goal was to master word form.

Learners need 6 to 20 exposures to a word in order to link form with meaning. The variation in the number of exposures depends on several factors: (a)

L2 proficiency, (b) mode of input (words encountered with visual support require fewer encounters for learning), (c) characteristics of the word (concrete or abstract), (d) spacing between exposures (the wider the range of encounters, the weaker the learning) and (e) how the learning of new vocabulary is assessed. To get the required number of exposures incidentally, as a by-product of other learning, an L2 learner would need to read more than 8 million words in hundreds of texts. A meta-analysis of 25 studies between 1990 and 2018 revealed that intentional learning (explicit vocabulary instruction) generally leads to better learning outcomes than incidental learning (Uchihara, Webb and Yanagisawa 2019)

Uchihara, Webb and Yanagisawa (2019) looked at the effect of different glosses (explanations of words in a text through L1 translations, L2 definitions or pictures) on vocabulary learning. Their findings suggest that students learn about 19 per cent more words in glossed reading, and that this has a significant impact on overall learning gains (about 45 per cent). Glosses may appear as notations in the margins of a text, as hyperlinked words, as definitions within the text itself, in a separate part of a book or in multiple-choice format, where the reader must select the correct meaning from more than one option. In keeping with the “mental effort” hypothesis, multiple-choice glosses appear to lead to deeper learning and the greatest gains, while glosses in text are least effective because students tended to skip over them, simply ignoring the unknown words.

## Multi-Word Expressions

Is knowledge of frequent and familiar word sequences (for example, How do I get ... or I think I will ...) associated with increased fluency? Do teachers need effective strategies for teaching such expressions to students?

To practise the use of multi-word expressions, researchers in one study employed several fluency workshop strategies, such as (a) listening to model dialogues and answering gist questions, (b) shadowing (listening to audio and then imitating pronunciation), (c) dicto-gloss (listening to a conversation and then working in a group for five minutes to recreate it in writing), (d) mingle jigsaws

(each student has one of ten different expressions and must talk to other students to collect all ten), (e) role play, (f) decreasing time role play, (g) related situation role play and (g) free role play. Measures of pre- and postintervention recordings suggest that while interventions increase students' knowledge of multi-word expressions, and their ability to use these expressions in conversation, there is no significant improvement to overall fluency (Thomson 2019).

## Idiomatic Expressions

According to Hubers, Cucchiari and Strik (2019), idiomatic expressions are challenging for ELLs because the global meaning of an idiom cannot necessarily be derived from its constituent parts (for example, "kick the bucket" meaning to die). Students' ability to learn idioms is impacted by (a) frequency of use, (b) transparency or opacity of the expression (for example, it is easier to make sense of "killing two birds with one stone" than to "kick the bucket"), (c) ability to visualize (for example, the idiom "when pigs fly" might be easier to visualize than "driving someone nuts") and (d) cross-language overlap (that is, is there an identical expression in the other language, a similar expression (for example, in English we grab the bull by the horns, but in Dutch, they grab the cow), or no equivalent (for example, in Dutch, "to come good out of the paint" means to have done something very well. A similar expression does not exist in English).

Idiomatic expressions often carry cultural information, so native speakers of a language can often determine the meaning of an expression even if they do not fully understand the phrase. L2 learners with an L1 that is closer to the target language can more reliably figure out the meaning of idiomatic expressions than those whose language is more distant (Hubers, Cucchiari and Strik 2019).

Intensive practice with idiomatic expressions can help L2 learners achieve native-like proficiency. Studies that compared explicit, or deliberate, learning (for example, flashcards) with implicit, or incidental, learning (reading an idiomatic expression in the context of a sentence) revealed that both methods were effective (Obermeier and Elgort 2019).

## Miscellaneous Short Snappers

1. When students are permitted to draw on their full linguistic repertoire (that is, English, as well as resources in L1 and other additional languages), they feel empowered and vocabulary learning improves (Sundquist et al 2019).
2. Regular recycling of vocabulary is needed for long-term retention (Sundquist et al 2019).
3. Experiments have confirmed that learners who have multi-modal input have better outcomes for vocabulary learning, especially when connecting meaning and form (for example, reading while listening is more beneficial than reading alone) (Chen and Huntley 2019).
4. Large vocabulary gains result from spoken input in meaning-focused activities, and interactive tasks are more effective than noninteractive tasks (Hu 2019).
5. There are over 750 million illiterate people worldwide, plus another 2.5 billion people who are functionally illiterate. Deygers and Vanbuel (2019) suggest that over one-third of migrants to Europe have low literacy. The requirements for citizenship in European countries increasingly demand literacy rates that are very difficult for migrants to achieve, and fewer countries are allowing exemptions to this policy, with dire implications.
6. In Canada, according to Katagiri, Rodgers and Fox (2019), engineering students comprise a large part of undergraduate programs. The two requirements for success are engineering knowledge and linguistic skills (academic writing and public speaking). Engineers spend only 4 per cent of their work time writing, although this increases over the course of the individual's career. SAFE (Self-Assessment for Engineers) is a diagnostic tool that helps students understand themselves better as writers. Writing profiles for students who are academically at risk and those who are not at risk show that the more successful learners incorporated more formulaic language, technical vocabulary and academic vocabulary into their writing. Generally,

vocabulary knowledge correlates with a higher writing score.

7. Studies suggest that more hours of L2 instruction do not necessarily equate with increased proficiency. Language gains depend on the composition of the class, teacher expectations and rich input, or exposure to reading material. In fact, the impact of the teacher is substantial when measuring how well students develop proficiency in a second language.
8. When it comes to writing, “What you know is not what you show.” In one study, three accomplished researchers showed a vast variation in vocabulary use on a writing test despite the fact that all three subjects were very knowledgeable academics. The choice to use a simpler, clearer style of writing, therefore, does not necessarily indicate a lesser knowledge of vocabulary (Laufer 2019).
9. Studies show that even students who are quite proficient in a second language require up to 20 per cent more time to read a text in L2. Marks tend to be lower on tests if the questions involve free recall (as opposed to simple yes or no type answers), possibly because it is harder for learners to mentally organize information in two (or more) languages (Brysaert 2019).

It is reassuring to know that so many researchers around the world are focusing their investigations on the nuances of second language vocabulary acquisition; however, at the end of the conference, I was left with two thoughts. The first was that listening to all that data was a lot like being immersed in a second language myself! It was mentally exhausting to focus so intently on one theme, and there was information that passed right over my head because, ironically, I lacked the vocabulary that I needed to fully process all of the quantitative data that was presented. My second thought was that any teacher who has spent time in a classroom with English language learners would likely have arrived at the same conclusions as most of the researchers. There were, ultimately, no earth-shattering revelations and no big aha moments for me as a classroom-based educator. As one presenter explained, the role of research is to ask questions,

gather evidence and share findings. It is up to teachers to take that information and do the work at which they are so skilled—designing tasks based on sound evidence so that students can optimize their learning opportunities and make the necessary language gains to succeed in school.

I am glad that I had an opportunity to immerse myself in the field of vocabulary research for a few days last summer, and I am grateful to the Alberta Teachers’ Association and ESLC for their support.

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# Learning About Residential Schools in an ELL School Context

by Bhaidani Amynah



**A**lmadina Language Charter Academy (ALCA) operates as an ELL (English language learners) public charter school with a unique emphasis on English language acquisition. The uniqueness in this school comes through the programs being offered to ensure there is a focus on English language learning acquisition. ALCA caters not only to newcomers to Canada but also to Canadian-born children who need proficiency in English language. The student composition is 100 per cent ELL whose second or third language is English and who come from 27 or more different countries, representing geographical diversity. Teachers ensure that they consciously address students' needs by using a number of the following ELL teaching strategies:

- Using key visuals
- Building background knowledge
- Providing explicit language instruction

- Linking common ideas
- Differentiating for different levels of ELP (English language proficiency)
- Integrating across disciplines
- Incorporating cooperative learning
- Checking for comprehension
- Providing opportunity for oral language practice
- Identifying or referring to key vocabulary
- Modelling and teaching reading strategies
- Modelling and teaching writing strategies
- Modelling and teaching appropriate language structures
- Modelling and teaching appropriate language functions

Link to Almadina ESL Strategies: <https://goo.gl/vdYZYu>

Last summer, I had the opportunity to attend a Walking Together: Education for Reconciliation professional development session on the history and

legacy of the residential school system in Canada. This program is part of the Alberta Teachers' Association response to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's *Calls to Action* (2015) and a grant project funded by Alberta Education. It is an important professional learning project for our school to build capacity in Indigenous education about the history and legacy of the residential school system as it directly coincides with the changes to the new Teaching Quality Standard specific to FNMI (Indigenous education). I found great value in this session, as it related to many of my own personal experiences as an immigrant to Canada. It was intriguing to notice that the experiences lived by families in the residential schools were similar to the experiences lived by some of my country-people back home. That is when I realized that the students from Almadina would also find value and a commonality with the Indigenous community just as I did, while they build on their background knowledge.

Being a teacher at Almadina is always rewarding and brings forward many new challenges for me to appropriately address the needs of all ELL students. After attending the Walking Together: Education for Reconciliation professional development session, I decided to take the lead and work with a team of teachers to bring forth the ideas from the session into our schoolwide virtue program. My school has a mandate to create aspiring, independent citizens through CARES, a virtue program (Michelle Borba) that represents the five virtues (conscience, acceptance, respect, empathy and self-control) that all staff and students refer back to in any learning moment. These virtues are taught schoolwide through literature, art, drama and music as part of the citizenship curriculum. Each virtue is spread throughout the academic year (six weeks for each virtue) to focus on and then culminated with an assembly. In my opinion this virtue program seemed to be the ideal tool to educate and reach out to all students and other stakeholders about the history and legacy of the residential school system in Canada.

I am the Grade 2 team lead representative for the respect virtue, and with one teacher per grade from K to 4, we decided to work on the theme of Respecting the Indigenous Cultures. As our literature

focus we (respect team and principal) selected the book, *Stolen Words*, by Melanie Florence. This book expressed some of the challenges faced by Indigenous children who attended residential schools. One such challenge was losing their language. This concept is not foreign to our ELL students, as they are also learning a language that is not their own. To ensure that students do not feel a loss of their language in our school, there is a curriculum for teaching Urdu and Arabic (unique to ALCA). Our ELL students now feel a sense of their culture being preserved as a part of their self-identity through language. Consequently, our students would gain a notion of respect for all cultures and languages present in the school and a sense of empathy for Indigenous students who attended residential schools and lost a part of their self-identity by losing their language. Also, students begin to understand how this continues to impact Indigenous students, families and communities today. This in itself is a powerful lesson for students to learn and understand.

To create an equitable schoolwide literature focus, first teachers read the story of *Stolen Words*. All teachers started with the academic vocabulary for scaffolding. In *Stolen Words*, the dream catcher is symbolic as the granddaughter asks her grandpa to take support from the dream catcher to remember his stolen words. There was a connection between the dream catcher and its importance to the Indigenous community. Thus, a schoolwide art activity to create dream catchers (which is a very special form of art among most Indigenous cultures) and understand their importance was experienced by all students. This was a great visual support for the learning of the ELL students to show their respect to Indigenous peoples and their art. Our school bulletin boards were full of different dream catchers! Students learned the skills of weaving, threading the beads, cutting, pasting and colouring the dream catchers. In addition to this visual, we also had a schoolwide bulletin board depicting the setting of the prairies where the Indigenous (Cree) people from the story actually lived.

During the span of six weeks, students from each grade level had the opportunity to make schoolwide announcements thrice in a week. This addressed one of the ESL teaching strategies, where students had

the opportunity to practise oral language to enhance their speaking skills. Each week focused on the core values of respecting self, parents, children, mother nature, language and environment. Also, many books on Indigenous culture were ordered for the library so that students could read other books to understand more about residential schools and Indigenous cultures.

To support the students' learning and to address more of the ESL strategies, students were prepared for a school assembly where some students had the opportunity to practise their oral language and be a part of a play to present at the assembly. One class sang the popular song by Michael Mitchell, titled "My Paddle's Keen and Bright" accompanied with drumming and pictures to visually represent the culture. Another two classes worked on a skit prepared by teachers for the book, *Stolen Words*. The students narrated the context of the story while two of the main characters, the granddaughter and grandpa, were performed by two of our students through extempore dialogue. Finally, this assembly made the story come alive in a multilanguage and diverse school environment for all students and parents to watch with awe.

As a teacher, this project was an incredible experience for me as I chose a theme that was initiated by the Alberta Teachers' Association to work within the framework of our Charter and to plan a schoolwide activity. Not only did teachers have the opportunity to gain greater insight about Canada's history, but they were also able to integrate across various disciplines. Parents and students also gained an in-depth knowledge about Canadian history. The students' learning was very meaningful and valuable since they found a commonality among their need for preserving their language just as Indigenous peoples have a need to try to preserve their own language. Through the history of

residential schools, students learned to respect Indigenous peoples and were able to empathize with them for the experiences they had in the residency schools. Moreover, many of the ESL strategies were addressed during this time, enabling students to be successful in their tasks while addressing the schoolwide virtues and Canadian history.

I, personally, felt that this schoolwide learning ended on a positive note—books being the most powerful resource to learn. In the story *Stolen Words*, the teacher shared a book called *Introduction to Cree* from the library with her student so that she could teach her grandpa the stolen words he had lost. The granddaughter could restart teaching his lost language. This is huge! Here in Alberta, we encourage students to take ownership of and share their learning. Students are learning to be creative and find ways to relearn what is lost. It's a challenge and not easy. However, with collaboration and citizenship responsibilities, we can start and be successful to support, understand and change what we can for the Indigenous communities in our capacity. This had a huge impact on our students. Students learned that books (oral or digital texts) can be an evergreen and lasting learning resource to learn or retrieve anything that is lost or forgotten.

This project could not have been possible without the support of all my colleagues at the ALCA Elementary School. Every teacher did their part to make this effort valuable. My special thanks to Sabrina Rawji, Dita Haziri and my team members (Diana Chambers, Saira Mahmood and Melanie Yanofsky), who supported me for the entire project till it was complete.

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# Member-at-Large Reports

## Edmonton and Area

*By Tracey Allan and Youssra Badr*

### What's New for Winter?

On January 27, 2020, Kerry Harvey, Sarah Lees and Nancy Musica organized a wonderful PD day at the Center for Literacy to support teachers in helping recognize and remediate reading disabilities among students, particularly ESL students. The session was attended by 20 ATA members and was very well received.

Edmonton Public Schools is exploring cost-saving changes while continuing the overall instructional time and quality of student education.

Tracey held a great session, Intercultural Activities and Writing Workshop for Your ELL Classroom, for teachers at GETCA at Archbishop O'Leary School in February.

### Why Is This Important for Teachers and Students?

Quality professional development is key to ensuring teachers continue to be the best educators and advocates for their students. Thank you to all of those who continue to provide ESL PD opportunities to better support our growing ELL population.

This cost strategy would serve to benefit teachers and students in a number of ways, including the potential to save large sums of money and enhance professional development time for staff.

Questions or suggestions? Please contact Tracey Allan or Youssra Badr at [Tracey.Allan@epsb.ca](mailto:Tracey.Allan@epsb.ca) or [Youssra.Badr@epsb.ca](mailto:Youssra.Badr@epsb.ca). Check out our website at [www.eslcata.com](http://www.eslcata.com).

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## JOIN ESLC

Being an ESLC member has many perks.

- Connection to Alberta Education
- Networking with like-minded professionals
- PD opportunities
- Some meetings held via Skype
- Information to help you with your professional practice
- Opportunity to advocate at a provincial level for our learners
- All expenses covered

**We're super-fun!**

If you are interested in joining the ESLC, please visit the ESLC website at [www.eslcata.com](http://www.eslcata.com).



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# THE FACE OF EDUCATION

## We believe in public education

The Alberta Teachers' Association is encouraging teachers, parents and other concerned citizens to show their support for public education by participating in the Pledge for Public Education campaign.

Public education provides students from all backgrounds with learning experiences to discover and develop their potential, their passions and their gifts, allowing them to make significant contributions to their communities.

Public education prepares learners for life, and Alberta's public education system\* is widely recognized as one of the best systems in the world.

We believe in public education, and we believe in providing students with the best opportunities for success.

## How can you support the pledge?

1. Visit [www.IBelieveInPublicEd.ca](http://www.IBelieveInPublicEd.ca) and add your name.
2. Encourage your colleagues, friends and family to sign on.
3. Share your support for the pledge on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, using #IBelieveInPublicEd.

## What's next?

This fall we are collecting the names and e-mail contacts for supporters who believe in public education and support small class sizes, supports for special needs, full-day kindergarten and access to counselling services. Later, we will contact supporters with information about actions they can take to advocate for students and to voice their support for public education.

Stay tuned for more information as the campaign rolls out.

\* In Alberta, public education refers to public, separate and francophone schools.

## The pledge for public education

- I believe all students should be able to learn in small-sized classes.
- I believe all students with special learning needs should receive the supports and resources they require for success.
- I believe all students should have the opportunity to benefit from fully funded junior kindergarten and full-day kindergarten programs.
- I believe all students should have access to a teacher-certificated school counsellor in their school.

**I believe in public education**

[iBelieveInPublicEd.ca](http://iBelieveInPublicEd.ca)



The Alberta Teachers' Association

