

***Growing Pains:
Challenges in Saskatchewan's New EAL Programs***

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When I graduated ten years ago from a Saskatoon high school and began studying at the University of Saskatchewan, I was amazed by the difference between my mainly homogenous, middle class high school, and the diverse array of students attending the university. My first months at university opened my eyes to hallways in which you could hear conversations in multiple languages, see students in headscarves, listen to music from across the world, and debate global issues with young people who had first-hand experience. Now, as a secondary English as an Additional Language (EAL) teacher, I can see that many of Saskatchewan's high schools are no longer limited to Canadian cultures and languages; today, our students do not have to wait until university to experience languages and cultural perspectives from around the world.

While enriching our schools and classrooms, this growing EAL population also challenges teachers, administrators, and school divisions to support students with EAL needs appropriately and foster their growth. In this paper, I will examine a few of the issues that I, as a Saskatoon EAL teacher, feel need to be addressed in meeting the needs of EAL programs and students, seeing these students through to academic and social success, and transitioning them out of high school into productive, fulfilling lives in Saskatchewan. Because of my connection to one school division, I am able to suggest supportive strategies that may be helpful in other jurisdictions, while at the same time calling for further strategies to be developed across the province. I also hope to expand opportunities for educators to share worthy supports that are original in their home contexts.

Firstly, beginning new EAL programs in schools means hiring new EAL teachers. While our school systems have some highly qualified and experienced EAL teachers, our province does not have as many as we currently need. Therefore, teachers, like myself, are moving into EAL with little or no official qualifications. Fortunately, school divisions are becoming increasingly

explicit in their expectations of further professional development, but many EAL teachers are at the beginning of this professional development process. I am one of these teachers.

Consequently, there is a need for mentorship and collaboration between the experienced EAL teachers and those of us who are beginning our EAL careers. Unfortunately, this mentorship is not readily available for many beginning EAL teachers because we are often the only EAL teacher in our school. Many teachers, particularly in the elementary systems, move from school to school, and therefore, do not have the support of a consistent staff, let alone a mentor in their EAL department. This creates a sense of isolation for EAL teachers, which adds stress and frustration to an already challenging teaching area. Further, as our province increases contact hours with students, EAL teachers are left with less time to collaborate between schools; finding common time to co-plan, discuss challenges, and share strategies is nearly impossible. Research has shown that teacher mentorship and collaboration has a positive impact on student learning (Sparks, 2013), and while we are doing our best to work together, we need more time dedicated to the mentorship of new EAL teachers in new EAL programs.

Furthermore, EAL teachers like myself not only have few opportunities to collaborate with each other, but we also have very little time to collaborate with classroom teachers in our buildings, due to EAL teachers' "hectic schedules" (Markham, 1999, p. 272). Aside from meeting students' academic and social needs, EAL teachers have significant responsibilities in assisting our colleagues with professional development to help them adapt to and take responsibility for the EAL students in their classes. Without sufficient time to collaborate, co-plan and co-teach, adapt and create materials, and find resources for mainstream teachers, EAL teachers cannot support their colleagues properly and the implementation of inclusive education becomes increasingly problematic (English, 2009; English, 2012). This leads to frustrated mainstream teachers, who are unable to support EAL students in their classrooms, and over-extended EAL teachers, who must take responsibility for EAL student learning in mainstream classes as well as EAL class, because there has been no time to train the mainstream teachers (English, 2009; English, 2012; Lewis-Moreno, 2007). In my experience, this is a common teacher frustration in buildings where time to communicate and collaborate between mainstream and EAL teachers is minimal. In Saskatchewan schools where EAL is relatively new, such as mine, having time to work with mainstream teachers on supporting EAL students is particularly important, because the majority of our teachers have not had experience teaching EAL students.

Consequently, all teachers, particularly in schools with new EAL programs, must be given more time to collaborate, so that EAL students are not solely the responsibility of EAL teachers and departments, but become a shared responsibility in our schools.

Additionally, EAL students' needs reach far beyond simply learning English in the EAL classroom. EAL programs and teachers support students with settlement issues, living arrangements and housing, transportation, involvement in extracurricular activities, student scheduling and post-secondary planning, and finding volunteer and work opportunities. Although there are organizations in Saskatchewan's urban areas that relieve some pressure on EAL programs, such as the Settlement Support Worker In Schools (SSWIS) program at the Saskatoon Open Door Society, these people are not in schools full time, and therefore, are not able to provide full assistance in non-academic issues. Saskatchewan's rural areas and smaller urban centers may not have any community support at all; thus, school EAL teachers become the main point of contact for EAL students and their families. Furthermore, EAL teachers, particularly in new EAL programs, are the main point of contact for colleagues and administrators who need direction on how to deal with the daily academic and non-academic issues that arise with EAL students. To successfully meet the various needs of students, colleagues, and administration, Saskatchewan EAL teachers need increased support from and collaboration with community programs that assist newcomers, as well as time during the school day to oversee the administration of EAL programs.

To address EAL teachers' sometimes overwhelming responsibilities within schools, some school divisions, such as the Saskatoon Public School Division, are developing systems to support students and teachers. One example of this is the newly opened and extremely busy Newcomer Student Center (NSC) in Saskatoon, which welcomes families, provides registration information on local schools, and completes preliminary language assessments of students. This information is then sent to the EAL teacher and guidance office, so that appropriate schedules can be made before the student arrives at school. This system centralizes the responsibility for intake assessments, which provides benchmarking consistency across the division, and relieves school EAL teachers of overseeing students' initial assessment and registration. The NSC has been effective in allowing EAL teachers to better run school EAL programs, decrease classroom disruptions, and schedule students appropriately; this system, in turn, lowers EAL teachers' stressors and responsibilities, and is a good example of how school divisions are addressing EAL

student and teacher needs.

Another significant, and often overlooked, area of student need that requires time and attention is facilitating the positive social integration of EAL students with each other and with the mainstream student body. This integration is key to ensuring that our students have positive experiences at school, achieve highly academically, do not feel isolated, build resilience, and have the support they need to deal with the trauma of culture shock. Students who do not find belonging, meet friends, and feel safe and comfortable in their new surroundings are more likely to isolate themselves in negative ways, including dropping out of school, criminal activities, and the use of drugs and alcohol (Kanu, 2009). Further, students in schools with insufficient social integration programs tend to self-segregate into racial groupings, and perpetuate power imbalances between the groups (Daoud, 2003). To avoid these negative outcomes, EAL teachers must spend significant amounts of time organizing social activities, leading clubs that facilitate interaction and friendships between EAL students and their Canadian counterparts, and planning evenings for parents and families to come to the school, meet the teachers, and socialize. For schools and school divisions who want to successfully integrate EAL students into their communities, these are not optional activities, and the responsibility generally falls to the EAL teachers to make such events happen. Consequently, demand on EAL teachers' time is further increased. With such significant academic, administrative, and extra-curricular responsibilities, teachers in EAL programs, including Saskatchewan's new and smaller programs, must be provided more time during the day to meet the needs of their various stakeholders.

A final area that must be addressed in Saskatchewan's burgeoning EAL programs is a pathway for mature EAL students who have significantly gapped, or little formal education, and may have been exposed to trauma in their first country. Many of these students and their families waited years in refugee camps before they arrived in Canada, and therefore, have had little access to education. This situation is particularly difficult when these students arrive at local high schools that do not have the resources necessary to serve their unique needs. In order to provide the literacy skills, language instruction, social development, driver's education, support for trauma, and a plan for the future, these students need a program that is structured differently and has different goals than Saskatchewan's regular high schools. They may also need support beyond the 22-year-old cut off of public high school, and the goals of their program may not be graduation, but instead, geared more toward finding work, building community, feeling

successful in their new country, and being able to support their families; these needs are impossible to meet within the regular 5-period school day, and within the Canadian teenage culture in Saskatchewan high schools.

One program that works to meet the needs of EAL learners ages 18 to 22 with haphazard educational backgrounds is the Saskatoon Public School Division's Adult EAL LIFE program (Learners with Interrupted Formal Education) at Royal West Campus. Begun in 2010, this program transitions EAL students into fulfilling, productive lives through literacy building, language acquisition, settlement support, and occasionally core academic subjects. The class sizes are small, and students learn from one main EAL teacher throughout the day, so that their programs can be individualized to meet each student's needs and future goals (A. Fedorchuk, personal communication, December 8, 2013). Royal West's Adult EAL LIFE program is an example of how school divisions can support EAL students and teachers through responsive programming.

Between increasing the mentorship and collaboration of EAL teachers and mainstream teachers, supporting students academically and socially, ensuring that EAL teachers have the time and programming needed to serve their students, and providing pathways for students with unique needs, Saskatchewan's school divisions have a number of areas that must be addressed to properly support their new EAL students. These students are challenging teachers, administrators, and school divisions to become better at what we do, and truly *practice what we preach* by providing responsive, inclusive instruction. Through recognition of students' needs, and creative programming, Saskatchewan schools can experience the benefits and richness of our new EAL students, while simultaneously fostering their academic success and positive integration into our communities.

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