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Editorial

Margaret L Iveson

This issue presents varied perspectives on thinking about English language arts. We hope you will enjoy our colleagues' submissions and be able to apply them in your own orientation to teaching English language arts.

Our president, Shelley Grey-Sortland, in "From the President's Desk," reflects on professional growth and development through her own experience with ELAC, offering potential direction for our futures as teachers.

In "Developing a Multimodal Observation Tool: Teachers and Researchers Working Together," Shelley Stagg Peterson, Nicola Friedrich and Christine Portier present research from collaborative development of an assessment tool jointly created by early childhood teachers and university researchers. Their article offers direction for assessment work in the early grades and beyond. As well, you will find insights into collaborative research and teaching.

Lynne Wiltse has been working with an issues-based teacher-researcher group in Edmonton. She highlights part of their work together in "Following the Headlines Through Reading and Responding to

Children's Refugee Literature," focusing on the use of headlines and children's literature to generate middle school teachers' spaces for student reflection on complex situations in the news. The teacher group generates both concrete and abstract ideas for classroom work, again with older students as well. There is a book list of children's literature relevant to refugee topics.

Retired teacher D B Jorgensen engages with and connects two interactions about learning and teaching in his piece of creative writing about identity and contexts. Other teacher-writers might follow his lead and create—and submit—reflective writing outside the more generally anticipated critical/analytical work.

These days, we are often looking for books about Indigenous students and teaching. Laura Schmaltz reviews *Learning and Teaching Together: Weaving Indigenous Ways of Knowing into Education*.

Whether you read an issue straight through, skim and then indwell, or share pieces with your colleagues, there is a wealth of ideas here for a snowy night.

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From the President's Desk

Shelley Grey-Sortland

It is an interesting exercise to stop occasionally and reflect on how one got to this particular time and this particular place. We don't often have, or take, the time for this reflection—especially during the school year, when we are inundated by the many tasks that are part of our profession. I am writing this in August, during the proverbial calm before the storm: another year of teaching, and also my year as president of the English Language Arts Council. How ever did I get here?

Early in my teaching career, veteran teachers made sure I knew about ELAC and encouraged me to join it as my specialist council. Over the years, I attended a conference or regional event here and there, and looked forward to my copy of *Alberta Voices*. I recognized the value of ELAC, and a desire to be involved in some form hovered around the edges of my mind, but there always seemed a reason to hold off: a difficult teaching load, dealing with ill parents, having babies, switching boards, taking courses. In other words, life happened.

In 2016, I decided that I was ready to commit to working with ELAC. Many of my colleagues were involved, and I could see how valuable and enjoyable the work was. Unfortunately, when the AGM and election came around, the only position that was available for me was president-elect. It seemed preposterous to even consider putting my name forward for this position because I didn't have any previous experience on the executive council. I was put in touch with a past president who had come into her role similarly—jumping into the thick of things without having been on the executive previously. After speaking to her, learning more about what the role would entail and being reassured that other council members would not be appalled at my presumption, I put my name forward and was elected.

The other council members were very welcoming and helpful; no one shouted “Imposter!” or “Usurper!” as I had secretly feared. Instead, I would say I have found my people: fellow book nerds who are passionate about becoming better teachers in order to engage all of our students, as well as having a desire to help others grow in our profession. I leave our council meetings with lists of

books to read for pleasure, texts to explore for teaching and a jubilation that is energizing.

ELAC has provided me with so many opportunities to develop professionally: attending the National Council for Teachers of English annual convention; being involved in curriculum redesign with Alberta Education; and learning how to include and empower LGBTQ and FNMI voices in the English classroom through miniconferences hosted by the council. ELAC has also allowed me to connect with other ELA teachers from across the province, rural and urban, across the spectrum of grades, and from a variety of teaching experiences: the traditional classroom, outreach, distance learning. And finally, ELAC has been, and continues to be, revitalizing. I believe we all reach a point in our careers when we are comfortable and cruising along, and we need an impetus to challenge us to move beyond our comfort zone and question what we have always done.

During the school year, when we are swamped, it is almost a knee-jerk reaction to say “No” when asked to add something to our already full plates. We couldn't possibly take on anything else! And while we are undoubtedly busy, there are many ways to be involved in helping the newest members of our profession and to continually improve our own teaching practice. Whether you can give just a little time occasionally or are able to provide a larger commitment, the right opportunity is out there: host a session at the Beginning Teachers Conference or your local teachers' convention; contribute to *Alberta Voices*; attend a regional ELAC event; become a member at large of ELAC or even consider being on the executive. The rewards of being involved are worth the time!

My parting advice? Don't wait until everything is perfect and things have “settled down” before being involved in your ELA teaching community, in whatever way works for you. I know from experience that getting one's ducks in a row isn't easy—those ducks tend to be quite uncooperative! As a profession, we tend to be perfectionists and expect a lot of ourselves; however, the focus should be on a willingness to serve rather than a need to do the job perfectly. Together, we will get it done right.

Developing a Multimodal Observation Tool: Teachers and Researchers Working Together

Shelley Stagg Peterson, Nicola Friedrich and Christine Portier

A former elementary teacher in rural Alberta, Shelley Stagg Peterson is a professor in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at the University of Toronto. She is the principal investigator of a research partnership with kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers in northern rural Alberta and Ontario school divisions and First Nations communities, conducting action research on children's oral language and writing in play contexts.

Nicola Friedrich is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at the University of Toronto. She is currently participating in the NOW Play project to assess and support young children's oral language and writing development through play in classrooms and early childhood programs in northern communities. She previously worked as a classroom teacher, reading clinic teacher and special subject tutor.

Christine Portier is a postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning at the University of Toronto. She is currently participating in the NOW Play project to assess and support young children's oral language and writing development through play in classrooms and early childhood programs in northern communities. She previously worked in inner-city schools in Ontario, teaching kindergarten through to Grade 6.

The Northern Oral Language and Writing Through Play (NOW Play) project is a partnership between teachers, early childhood educators, school district early childhood consultants and university researchers that aims to support the literacy achievement of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in northern rural Canadian communities through collaborative action research. In this paper, we describe an

initiative we undertook to codesign a tool for documenting and describing young children's written and graphic representations during the third year of the project. In the process, we make a case for the value of school–university collaborations to create assessment approaches and tools that address classroom teachers' needs, and offer a framework that other teachers might find useful for their classrooms.

Perspectives and Relevant Research

Underpinning our project is the assumption that whenever children make marks, write letters or letter-like forms, or draw pictures to communicate with others, they are engaged in early writing activity (Anning 2003; Lancaster 2007; Yang and Noel 2006). From a very early age, children “wrestle with the characteristic visual arrays and meaning potentials of a variety of sign systems. Throughout the early years, children's texts and writing performances are decidedly multimodal” (Rowe 2009, 219). The form of graphic representation a child produces may reflect the child's purpose for writing as much as/rather than their developmental level. Kenner's (2000) cataloguing of three- to four-year-old children's texts composed over a year showed that the children amassed a symbolic repertoire that began with their own name and those of their family members or classmates, and developed an awareness of the visual appearance of texts in different social settings that guided decisions regarding length, layout and use of pictorial or written representation. It is important to recognize that the trajectories of individual children's writing

development and their learning about different features of writing trajectories are idiosyncratic and uneven (Rowe and Wilson 2015).

Context

Our research was conducted in rural northern communities in Alberta and Ontario: four resource-based towns with populations of 400 to 7,000 people, two fly-in First Nations communities with populations of 200 to 500 people and an Aboriginal Head Start program in a large northern city. The rural and Indigenous communities are 200 to 600 kilometres from a major urban area. All participating kindergarten and Grade 1 teachers and their students speak English or an Aboriginal English dialect as their mother tongue. Eight teachers in the First Nations communities and Aboriginal Head Start program are Indigenous and the other 17 teachers and school district early childhood consultants are non-Indigenous. Table 1 shows the number of children at each age group (from four to six years of age), their gender and whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous.

We wish to acknowledge that this research has been carried out on Indigenous land in the Nishnawbe Aski Nation Territory. We are grateful to participating Indigenous community members for welcoming us to work and learn within their ancestral lands.

For the past three years, we university researchers have been visiting each participating teacher five times each school year (usually in October, November, January, March, and April or early May). During these visits, we have meetings with individual teachers about their action research projects and hold after-school action research meetings with all participants from the

school/school division/school board. In this paper we describe one branch of our study: the collaborative development of a writing assessment tool.

Working Collaboratively to Develop a Writing Assessment Tool

Between the beginning of October and mid-November, participating teachers, early childhood educators, school district consultants and we coinvestigators gathered writing samples from 100 children. Various circumstances contributed to the variation in who did the administration of the tasks (eg, flights being delayed/cancelled due to weather).

The initial writing protocol involved inviting children to complete three tasks similar to those that children would do as part of everyday classroom activity and that have been used in previous research (Clay 1975; Coates and Coates 2006; Levin et al 2005; Rowe and Wilson 2015). These tasks were: (1) writing their name; (2) drawing a picture showing what they like to do with their family (family being defined as broadly as children’s experiences of family might be) and talking about the picture; and (3) responding to the question, written by the educator administering the task, “What do you like to do after school?” While writing, the educator spoke and stretched out the sounds to demonstrate a practice the children might employ in their writing, and then gave the pencil to the child, inviting the child to write a response. We then asked the child to tell us what had been written. This task took more of a dynamic assessment approach (Martin 2015), because task administrators provided scaffolding, in the form of demonstrating how the child might stretch out sounds, to support students’ completion of the writing task.

Table 1: *Participating Students*

Gender		Age			Cultural Background	
Girls	Boys	4 years	5 years	6 years	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
55	73	36	72	20	62	66

As part of our assessment, we made notes to capture the child's talk before and during the drawing event (eg, "This is me walking to the playground," "My mom's neck is taller than my dad's") and highlighted behaviours such as choosing not to write or draw and revising what they had drawn or written.

Educators and Researchers Make Sense of the Data and Revise Assessment Practices

Following the administration of the tasks, participating educators talked with us about the children's observed writing behaviours and what we saw in children's written products. We used the content of

these meetings and our analysis of each participating child's scribbles/drawings/writing to guide us in developing the first draft of the observation checklist (see Figure 1).

Participating teachers told us that the format of the checklist was not useful for their classroom assessment purposes. They suggested adding space for recording the date of the observation. Additionally, we and participating teachers agreed that the requests to draw a picture of what children liked to do with their family and of what they liked to do after school often elicited the same types of responses. Finally, we realized that adding in a dynamic assessment component increased

Figure 1: Observation Checklist for Name-Writing Task

Name Writing	Early	Later
Physical process of writing name	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holds writing tool in fist • Changes hands while writing • Transitional grip (fingers wrapped around writing tools) • Uses many strokes and/or wavy lines to make letters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses tripod grip to hold writing tool • Uses smooth, continuous strokes to make letters
Product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses marks/lines/shapes • Name is written as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vertical and horizontal marks - Diagonal/wavy lines - Circular shapes that cannot be constructed as letter-like - Letter-like shapes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses Letters • Letter formation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Writes one or more of the letters in given name - Writes name using one or more letter reversals or reverses name completely - Writes name with all recognizable letters in given name - Writes name with well-formed letters • Case/size/spacing of letters <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All upper/lowercase letters - Mix of upper and lower case vs Appropriates used of upper and lower case - Uneven spacing between letters vs Uniform size of letters - Inconsistent sizes of letters vs Uniform size of letters • Size/position of name on the page <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Appropriate size of name for space vs Name is written too small/too large for space (runs out of room for all letters) - Middle/bottom/side of page vs Top - Letters ascend/descend vs Horizontal line left to right

the complexity of the tasks and was not a practice that teachers were likely to carry out during assessments. We decided to revise the tasks by combining the final two tasks. Thus, task administrators would only ask, “What do you like to do with your family?” and then verbally prompt children to draw their response, talk about their drawing, write a word, phrase, or sentence to tell us about their picture, and then read back to us what they had written. Furthermore, we restructured the observation form as a checklist that would allow teachers to record observations of the child’s multimodal responses over time (see the appendix for the version we now use, following two more revisions).

Using Current Version of the Tool

In the following example, we show how teachers are using the tool. We focus on the drawing task to avoid compromising the anonymity of participating students by showing their response to the name-writing task. The analyzed sample is found in Figure 2, followed by a

narrative description of the teacher’s observations and her completion of the assessment tool in Figure 3.

Six-year old Troy (all names are pseudonyms), an Indigenous boy carrying out the tasks in October, has drawn clearly identifiable images that provide a context and show relationships (eg, his family members eating at the table together). There are plates on the table, the tablecloth is drawn, and the people have utensils for eating in their hands. Troy’s written and verbal explanations confirm the context—that the people in the drawing are family members and that they are eating. His writing has a combination of invented spelling and sight words. He uses spaces between words and partially uses conventional directionality (ie, the words are written left to right), but he finishes the sentence by moving up on the page, rather than in the space below the first line of writing. The drawing seems to have got in the way for him to write using conventional directionality. Troy is able to read his writing.

Figure 2: Troy’s drawing of what he likes to do with his family

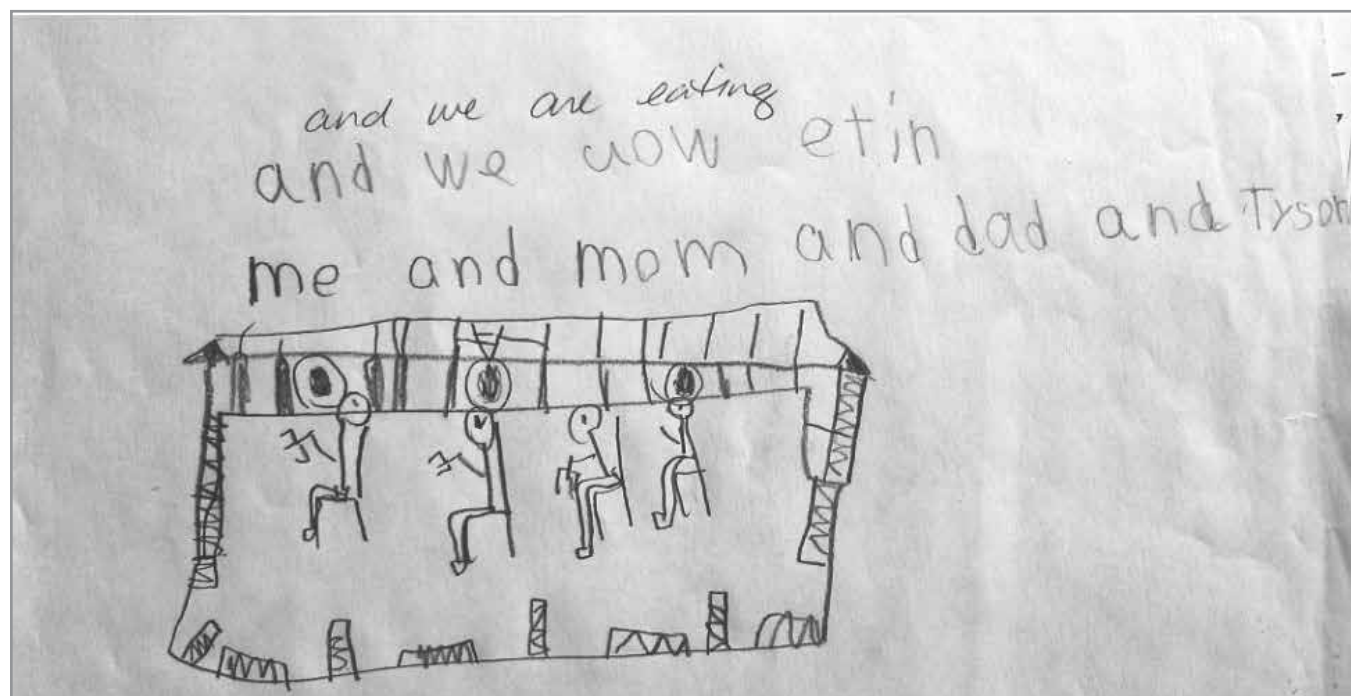


Figure 3: Assessing Young Children's Multimodal Texts (Example)

Student: Troy		Class/Grade: 1		
Date 1: October 18		Date 2:		Date 3:
Name Writing	Date #1	Date #2	Date #3	Comments
No marks at all				
Marks/lines/shapes				
Some but not all letters in child's name				
First name in full	√			
Communicating Through Drawing	Date #1	Date #2	Date #3	Comments
Unidentifiable scribbles				
Identifiable images without context				
Clearly identifiable images show relationships between people/ objects/animals	√			Lots of detail in table cloth, family members have eating utensils
Child's Explanation of Drawing	Date #1	Date #2	Date #3	Comments
No explanation				
Labels for objects, people, animals and/or actions				
Information about context and relationships among objects/people/ animals	√			
Elaborated theme (narrative)				
Communicating Through Print	Date #1	Date #2	Date #3	Comments
Marks and shapes on paper				
Letter-like forms				
Random string of letters				
One word or phrase				
Spaces between 'words'	√			
Sentence or sentences				

... continued

Directional Knowledge				
No evidence of directionality				
Partial evidence of directionality	√			Drawing may have got in the way so Troy wrote second line above first
Conventional direction pattern				
Letter–Sound Relationships				
Invented spelling—dominant sounds				
Invented spelling and sight words	√			Family words are conventionally spelled; provides most sounds in eating (except silent a and g as part of ending)
Conventional spelling				
Reading Back the Writing/ Scribbles	Date #1	Date #2	Date #3	Comments
No attempt to read writing/scribbles				
Assigns meaning to writing/scribbles				
Reads the words that are written	√			

In the individual sections, the features of each of these literacy practices are increasingly sophisticated, so it would be expected that at a later date, Troy's responses to the tasks would reflect a greater number of features at the bottom of each section.

What Teachers and University Researchers Are Learning from the Collaborative Experience

We believe that the collaborative development of a writing assessment tool has been one of the most effective initiatives of the project by supporting teachers' professional learning and gathering contextualized data to inform theory development and our own learning. We are all gaining a deeper appreciation of the wealth of information about children's thinking, literacy and conceptual learning demonstrated in children's drawings/scribbles and in their talk about these multi-modal texts, in addition to children's use of print (Coates and Coates 2006; Lancaster 2007).

As in previous collaborative action research, there has been a sharing of discoveries and new understandings, as teachers and researchers take up specific practices from the collaborative initiative in our everyday lives with students (Goodnough 2010; Webster-Wright 2009). For example, although we discontinued the dynamic assessment process of stretching out the sounds to write a question inviting children's written responses in the assessment procedures, one kindergarten teacher has changed her teaching to include this practice. While working one on one with children in her literacy centre, rather than teaching children individual letters, she now models for the child the writing of words in context, teaching letters and sounds as she sounds out the words while writing them and then inviting children to write back to her. As another example, teachers in an Ontario school district are using the tool as a source of information to write the learning stories they are required to generate in lieu of formal report cards.

We have narrated the story of our collaborative initiative to share our learning with other educators. We

believe that the tool, Assessing Young Children's Multimodal Texts, may be useful to other teachers for contexts beyond those of the NOW Play project. We are certain that its form will change as we and participating teachers continue to gather writing samples (next year we will use writing from everyday classroom tasks), but at this point, the tool is useful to raise our awareness of the kinds of things that young children do when asked to draw and write to communicate about something or someone important to them. We also hope that our paper provides inspiration for other teachers and university researchers to consider initiating similar types of collaborative initiatives. The time and energy that everyone invests lead to immeasurable benefits in professional learning and enduring relationships bringing teachers and researchers together for purposes that are meaningful to all involved.

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Appendix: Assessing Young Children's Multimodal Texts

Student:		Class/Grade:		
Date 1: October 18		Date 2:		Date 3:
Name Writing	Date #1	Date #2	Date #3	Comments
No marks at all				
Marks/lines/shapes				
Some but not all letters in child's name				
First name in full				
Communicating Through Drawing	Date #1	Date #2	Date #3	Comments
Unidentifiable scribbles				
Identifiable images without context				
Clearly identifiable images show relationships between people/objects/animals				
Child's Explanation of Drawing	Date #1	Date #2	Date #3	Comments
No explanation				
Labels for objects, people, animals and/or actions				
Information about context and relationships among objects/people/animals				
Elaborated theme (narrative)				
Communicating Through Print	Date #1	Date #2	Date #3	Comments
Marks and shapes on paper				
Letter-like forms				
Random string of letters				
One word or phrase				
Spaces between 'words'				
Sentence or sentences				

Directional Knowledge	Date #1	Date #2	Date #3	Comments
No evidence of directionality				
Partial evidence of directionality				
Conventional direction pattern				
Letter–Sound Relationships	Date #1	Date #2	Date #3	Comments
Invented spelling—dominant sounds				
Invented spelling and sight words				
Conventional spelling				
Reading Back the Writing/Scribbles	Date #1	Date #2	Date #3	Comments
No attempt to read writing/scribbles				
Assigns meaning to writing/scribbles				
Reads the words that are written				

Following the Headlines Through Reading and Responding to Children's Refugee Literature

Lynne Wiltse

*Lynne Wiltse is an associate professor in the Department of Elementary Education at the University of Alberta, where she teaches courses in the areas of language and literacy and children's literature. Prior to become a teacher educator, Lynne taught in Aboriginal communities in British Columbia. She is currently working with a group of Edmonton-area teachers on a research study, *Developing a Pedagogy of Social Justice Through Postcolonial Literature*.*

The first research meeting for the second year of our teacher inquiry group was on October 5, 2015, just two weeks before the federal election. I brought the article “Harper’s World,” from the *Globe and Mail* (MacKinnon 2015, F1), to the meeting for discussion. In his piece, MacKinnon notes that “the Prime Minister has carved a muscular new identity for Canada: military assistance over peacekeeping, unilateralism over teamwork, free trade over foreign aid.” The topic of Syrian refugees surfaced in our discussion of “Harper’s World.” Our last meeting had been in June; over the summer months and early fall, the civil war in Syria had worsened, and was being referred to in the media as “the biggest humanitarian crisis of our time.”

Our minds were full of images of Syrians fleeing a war-torn country and their dangerous journeys to crowded refugee camps. We were all speculating as to the results of the election—whether Syrians in crisis would be welcomed to Canada as refugees was one of the many questions at stake. Our discussion mirrored the headlines on the topic.

In Refugee Camps, Hope and Fear

Canadians Can Rise to the Refugee Challenge

Open the Door to Syrians in Dire Need of Safe Haven

By the time of our next meeting, in November, Trudeau had won the election and promised to bring in 25,000 Syrian refugees by the end of the year. While the resettlement took longer, the “crisis” was getting closer to home. The headlines had changed to the specifics of how we, as Canadians, could respond to the refugees who would arrive in our provinces and cities:

First Wave of Syrian Refugees Is Arriving, But Are We Ready?

Processing of Refugees Underway

Alberta Set to Accept 850 Syrians

Area School Boards Preparing for Syrian Students

During the first year of the study, we focused on children's literature related to residential schooling as a follow-up to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The refugee situation presented itself as a topic for uptake by our inquiry group for the new school year. Accordingly, this paper will present select findings from one site of a national research project designed to engage English language arts teachers and their students in reading and responding to postcolonial children's literature with the potential to address issues of social justice. This paper will highlight findings from the second year of the study with a focus on the use of children's literature in responding to the refugee situation.

Theoretical Framework

The research study is underpinned by postcolonial theories of reading practices (Bhabha 1994; Bradford 2007); a postcolonial lens expects the reader to examine the effects that the expansion of power into other nations has on people. In designing the study, we also drew on theories of social justice education with teachers (Cochran-Smith and Lytle 2009; Ladson-Billings 2001) as well as studies that emphasize the role of literature in advocacy research in literacy education (Bender-Slack 2010; Cherland and Harper 2007; Wolk 2009). In conceptualizing our inquiry group approach, we utilized theories of communities of practice (Wenger 2007; Cochran-Smith 2004), in which individuals in communities engage in inquiry into their own practice to improve curriculum, pedagogy and student outcomes.

Research Design

Consistent with the researchers at each of the six universities involved in this national study, we are developing four-year case studies within a collaborative action research framework (Carr and Kemmis 1986). As McNiff (1993) argues, educational knowledge is created by individual teachers as they attempt to express their own values in their professional lives. We see action research as “a series of principles for conducting social enquiry” through practice (McTaggart 1996, 248). Our inquiry group of 10 teachers who work with students in Grades 4–7 is one of two groups at the University of Alberta (elementary teachers and secondary teachers). In monthly meetings, researchers and teachers read and reflect upon their pedagogical understandings of social justice framed by collaborative academic readings. Teachers then select postcolonial texts for their teaching and develop appropriate pedagogical strategies for their classrooms. Data are being collected through audio-recorded teacher discussions and interviews, classroom observations, student focus-group discussions, and analysis of teaching and student-generated materials related to the texts.

Taking up the Topic in Our Inquiry Group

Our inquiry group began by reading and discussing news articles and academic literature on the topic of refugees, in conjunction with a range of children’s

picture books (for example, Garland 2013; Hoffman and Littlewood 2002; Lofthouse 2007; Munsch and Askar 1995; Robinson and Young 2008; Williams 2005) and novels (for example, Applegate 2007; Cornwell 2006; Ellis 2002, 2003, 2012; Lai 2011). Hope (2008) explains that while there is no shortage of research about children’s literature that deals with war, “there has been little research about the portrayal of the refugee experience in children’s books, which is now itself developing into a significant genre” (p 296). In accordance with Hope’s comment, we found no shortage of children’s literature on the topic field; however, it was too soon for any books about Syrian refugees. We also found that recent research had been published in the field. For example, Monobe and Son (2014) categorize books about the experiences of refugee children into three types: books that portray political conflicts and wars, books about refugees’ relocation and books depicting settlement in different countries. Dolan (2014) uses critical multicultural analysis of picture books about refugees to examine societal power structures and the ways in which the interconnected systems of race, class and gender work together. And Hwang and Hindman (2014) explore art and drama strategies for adopting children’s refugee literature in classrooms.

This academic literature framed the way we approached the reading and discussion of children’s literature in our inquiry group. Due to time constraints, we focused on picture books in our meetings; teachers took recommended novels to read at home. In this regard, Hope’s (2007) guidelines as to the sensitive use of picture books about refugees were particularly helpful. She explains that “books need to be well written, realistically illustrated, and properly researched. It is of paramount importance that refugees are depicted positively, that there is empathy but not pity, and that, where possible, the situations described are located geographically and politically to make [the] most impact in mirroring real life scenarios” (p 7). A case in point can be seen with one of the picture books Hope (2007) examines, *The Whispering Cloth* (Shea 1995), which tells the story of the Hmong people of Laos, persecuted for fighting alongside the Americans. Tens of thousands of Hmong fled to Thailand, where they spent years in refugee camps until removal to the US. One of the teacher participants, Warren,¹ made a connection to his teaching:

¹ All names are pseudonyms.

I've been using *The Whispering Cloth* in Grade 4 and my students love it; it follows the story of the main girl in a refugee camp who makes a story cloth ... they're fascinated by her work. We stop and talk about what the vocabulary term *refugee* means. In this article we read by Hope, she mentions what makes a well-written story about refugees—it's one where the protagonist has resilience and there's some humour and richness to the whole story. It's a story worth listening to and reading and students get that. And they like the pictures of the cloth.

Warren had used this book in the past with his students; the academic readings were giving him more insight into how to approach the story with his students. Referring to the selection of picture books featured in her article, Hope (2007) notes that

These books serve a dual function, to educate all children about the experience of persecution, flight and resettlement, as well as reassuring refugee readers that there is new life and hope for the future in an adopted country. (p 7)

Hope's comment can be likened to the windows and mirrors metaphor; Patsy Aldana (2009) commented that "[c]hildren need books that are mirrors in which they can see and learn about themselves, and books that are windows open to the rest of the world" (p 1). For Warren's students, who live in a small town with a white settler population just outside of Edmonton, *The Whispering Cloth* served as a window to learn about refugees. For other children, books about refugee children have the potential to function as a mirror.

Taking up the Topic in Participants' Schools and Classrooms

An example as to how books can work as mirrors occurred with *Playing War* (Beckwith 2005), the first of the books examined in the inquiry group to be taken up with students. This picture book features a group of children playing their favourite game—war, with guns made of sticks and bombs made of pinecones. When a new boy who doesn't want to play explains that he comes from a country that was in a real war, the other children begin to reconsider their game. One study participant, Terry, was the vice-principal at a school that had welcomed a number of students from Syrian

refugee families; at each meeting, she would give us an update as to how they were doing. During one meeting, Terry explained that she had read the book to a Grade 3 class:

As there are two children in that class who are Syrian refugees, it was interesting to watch them engage with the book. After we read and discussed the story, we made a list of recess games that would allow all students to feel safe on our playground, as an alternative to "playing war" or violent games. We then shared the list with the leadership team in charge of organizing recess games. Thank you for introducing me to this book, as it has made a real impact at our school.

Another participant, Collette, who taught Grade 7, used *Playing War*, along with a number of books about refugees, to help her students, none of whom were Syrian refugees, try to make sense of the mixed messages they were hearing in the news. She explained that

reading some of these books for this age group has given my students more of a look at where these refugees are coming from. This morning we talked about *Playing War*, where the boy is talking about how his family was killed when a bomb blew up his house. My students are not in the war, so we talked about being empathetic, and not seeing the situation the way that the some of the world seems to be looking at it.

Collette's comment was made in reference to the terrorist attack on Paris, which occurred in the midst of our inquiry group conversations. The headlines had shifted yet again:

**Trudeau Says Refugee Plan Had to
Change After Paris Attack**

**Should Canada Stop Bringing in Syrian Refugees
Because of the Paris Attacks?**

**Paris Attacks Fuel Calls for Canada to Delay Plan
to Take in 25,000 Syrians**

In the following comment, Collette furthers this topic:

When we talked about the Syrian refugees this morning, I explained to my students that one of the reasons we read these books is because I want us to be knowledgeable and empathetic to other people ... We talked about why some people don't want the

refugees to come to Canada. Well, because people think they're terrorists. But what about all these families that are coming?

Collette went on to explain that her students, many of whom were from immigrant and refugee families (though not recent Syrian refugees), were supportive of Canada's plan to bring in refugees:

In our school, I mean the empathy often comes from personal connection and they can connect to this topic. We have a high immigrant population, so most of them understand and support immigration and refugees. So, when we read the novels, I said to them, "We've studied about immigration but let's put a human story and a human face to the topic and think about it again." They get it.

As Collette points out, being able to make connections to what is being read is important, especially when the settings and situations are far away and foreign.

Another participant, Evelyn, a teacher at the same school as Collette, explored various books about refugee children with her Grade 5 students over the course of the project: a selection of picture books, a read-aloud novel and literature circles (the literature circles were taught along with two colleagues and their students). Perhaps because they were younger, personal connections did not come as easily for Evelyn's students, at least initially. As an introduction to the novel *A Long Walk to Water* (Park 2010), that she had selected as a read aloud, Evelyn read the picture book *Brothers in Hope: The Story of the Lost Boys of Sudan* (Williams 2005) to her students. These books tell the stories of Garang and Salva respectively, two of the thousands of boys who fled their homes in southern Sudan (now South Sudan) when war came to their villages. As refugees, they walked hundreds of miles seeking refuge and endured unimaginable hardships. In one of our inquiry group meetings, Evelyn explained that she was trying to engage her students with the big issues in the books (for example, war, displacement, poverty); not surprisingly, her young students were struggling somewhat with being able to relate to challenges so distant and different from their own lives. During one of inquiry group meetings, Evie explained how she prepared her students for the read-aloud selection:

We started with reading *Brothers in Hope* to kind of prepare them for the read aloud, *A Long Walk to Water*. *Brothers in Hope* is a picture book about the

lost boys in Sudan and so it gives kind of an overview of who they are. I explained that these are more serious books than some of the fun books we've been reading and how people will die in these books, so they need to be prepared for that ...

In the midst of this, in early May, the news of the Fort McMurray fire hit. The media images of homes burning and families fleeing their city were close to home. Edmonton was full of evacuees; many students from Fort McMurray were attending local schools. Evelyn found the situation in Fort McMurray helped her students to "get" the term *issue*, which in turn helped them to better understand the books about Sudanese refugees (as well as other books about refugee children they were reading as part of the project).

Fort McMurray Residents Flee in the Largest Fire Evacuation in Alberta's History

Fort McMurray Fire Prompts Evacuation Order for Entire City

Thousands Flee Fort McMurray as Wildfire Threatens Entire City and Burns Some Homes

In the following excerpt from the inquiry group meeting in early May, Evelyn explains how she and her colleagues drew on what was behind these headlines to facilitate their students' understanding of issues:

For some kids, finding the "issues" in these books might be kind of challenging, especially the kids in the lower groups. So, we used Fort Mac as an example of an issue, kind of as a jump-off point with the loss of homes and the loss of jobs, and then we had the students brainstorm issues ... We were surprised with what they came up with—poverty, emotional issues like depression, education, economic issues, moving, immigration issues, changes in families, divorce, war, human rights, disabilities, disease, death, trauma, health care. When we stopped there were still 10 kids with their hands up. And we thought that they weren't going to know what issues are!

I was intrigued by what Evelyn had to say about her students. I had the opportunity to explore this further when I visited Evelyn's class and conducted a focus group interview with one of the literature circle groups near the end of the school term. These students had read *Mud City* (Ellis 2003), the third novel in Deborah

Ellis's *Breadwinner* series, as their literature circle selection. *Mud City* tells the story of how a young girl, Shauzia, escapes a difficult life in war-torn Afghanistan to end up in a refugee camp in Pakistan. During the focus group, we had been discussing the characters and situations in this novel, as well as those in *A Long Walk to Water* and *Brothers of Hope*. I wondered if the students were making connections between these books, Syrian refugees and Fort McMurray evacuees. I asked students if the Fort McMurray fire and having many of the evacuees in Edmonton helped them to imagine what life might be like for the refugees they had been reading about as well as seeing in the news. Sahat's response was

Kind of, because it's not only that you hear about it, you also get lots of visuals. If you turn on the news, you're seeing the Fort Mac fire, so you're really comparing things, and you're seeing what happened to where they live and there's lots of rubble. Some of the Syrian refugees, their houses got bombed, so it's kind of like what happened there, it's a bunch of rubble.

Other students' comments suggest that they were noting both similarities and differences in the situations. For example, one student noted that

the Syrian refugees were coming 'cause of war and in the *Brothers of Hope* and *A Long Walk to Water*, they had to flee 'cause of a civil war between southern Sudan versus northern Sudan. Fort McMurray where the fire happened wasn't really connected to both of them.

However, another student, Adam, saw a way to connect what happened in Fort McMurray to events in war-torn countries:

The Fort McMurray fire was unexpected and some wars might be unexpected, so the people gotta quickly get out. And, then I find the people in Canada, they'll be nice enough to lend a spare bedroom or something to someone so that they have a place to stay until they can get their own place or whatever. I find that nice that they'd do that for people.

In both *A Long Walk to Water* and *Brothers of Hope*, the main characters had to leave their villages quickly. The exodus of residents from Fort McMurray was sudden, and many Syrians left their homes abruptly due

to the war, although the process to come to Canada as refugees took varying lengths of time. This comment prompted Neda to say

When the Syrian refugees came, some of them got their own homes, some of them stayed with people, and I heard some of them went into hotels. That also connects to the Fort McMurray people because they were trying to find a place to stay. Campgrounds were being taken over and two or three families that are from Fort McMurray are staying at the hotel my auntie works at.

A third student contributed to the discussion:

When the Fort McMurray fire happened, people were also welcoming people into their houses. I think it was somewhere around my area where I live, people rang the doorbell of a person and said, "Can we stay at your home?" and the person said yes, 'cause their homes were destroyed in the fire.

While I cannot confirm this, the comment that followed this was of interest:

Like Kalinda said, we were really, really welcoming because it's kinda like they are one of us, they're not like from overseas. If people from their country where there was war knocked on your door, and said, "Can I live with you?" you wouldn't necessarily say yes, like with Fort McMurray people, because you feel they're really similar to us.

In the following remark, Sahat further speculates as to how differently fellow Albertans and Syrian refugees may be welcomed: "When refugees came, people were kind of worried because they thought maybe someone could say they are a refugee but actually be an extremist so they're like really thinking about it." Indeed. Sahat voices a concern expressed by many, not only in Edmonton, Alberta and Canada, but also in countries around the Western world. And, of course, concerns about terrorists are in no way limited to Syrian (or other) refugees, as evidenced by the number of "home-grown terrorists."

We are living in difficult and complex times. There are more refugees than ever before. Leatherdale (2017) reports that

sixty-five million of the world's seven billion people ... have been forced to leave their homes because of war, persecution, or natural disasters. Nineteen

million of these displaced people have no hope of ever returning home safely and are seeking asylum in another country. More than half of these refugees are children and teenagers; many are orphans or “unaccompanied minors” traveling alone. (p iv)

These numbers are staggering. At the same time, we are seeing an increase in deaths from terrorism. Knowing how to make sense of these complexities and how to best respond is not easy. I struggle with this as an adult; for children, the challenge is greater. Monobe and Son (2014) make the point that children may “set boundaries between us (America) and them (other countries). We believe that these dichotomies, which reinforce distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them,’ can interfere with preparing students for global citizenship in a culturally diverse and interdependent world” (p 69). Although the authors are referring to the American context, a parallel can be made to Canadian students, as demonstrated by the discussion with Evelyn’s students. *It should be noted that children are not alone in setting boundaries of this nature.* Monobe and Son suggest that, to avoid having students generate “us” versus “them” attitudes, teachers use global literature in their classrooms. In this way as well, Evelyn’s students provide an example as to how international stories can help “prepare young people for a productive, peaceful future” (Tomlinson 1999). In these troubled times, with global conflicts on the rise, what could be more important? On this note, one of the students’ comments struck a chord:

I just wanted to say, like when the refugees walked in *A Long Walk to Water* or in *Brothers in Hope*, they would meet strangers and they would rely on the strangers for food, if they had food, or if the strangers could do something for them.

This observation made me think of the saying “the kindness of strangers.” How many Syrian refugees to Canada had their lives changed by the kindness of strangers? How many evacuees from the Fort McMurray fire were affected by caring acts of people they did not know? Once again, these groups were in the headlines, this time with connections drawn between the two:

**Fort McMurray Fire: Syrian Refugees
Pitch In to Help Evacuees**

**Syrian Refugees in Edmonton Step Up to
Help Fort McMurray Fire Evacuees**

These headlines call to mind another saying: “What goes around comes around.” While I could find headlines of a negative nature that speak to this saying, in this case, the kindness that Syrian refugees received “came around” in support of Fort McMurray fire evacuees.

Closing Thoughts

In the third year of our research study, we have been examining tensions between Aboriginal and newcomer populations, one of the ways in which the topics we focused on in years one and two of our study intersected. We have continued to pay attention to the ways in which the refugee situation makes the headlines. As with the previous year, our first inquiry group of the school term started off with talk of another election, this time the American election. While we did not anticipate the outcome, at our meeting after the election we shared our fears as to what Trump’s win may mean for Syrian refugees (and many other minority groups). It was not long afterwards that this topic was in the headlines:

Trump Bars Refugees and Citizens of 7 Muslim Countries

**Trump’s Executive Order Suspends the
Entry of Syrian Refugees into U.S.**

**Trump’s Sweeping Executive Order Bars
All Syrian Refugees from Entering U.S.**

And, shortly after this, Canada was in the headlines in relation to this situation:

Refugees Keen on Crossing into Manitoba

21 Asylum Seekers Crossed into Manitoba Saturday

Premier Says Manitoba Will “Absolutely” Help Refugees

While the headlines on this topic will persist, this paper must come to a close. The ways in which our inquiry group followed the headlines featured in this paper and teachers took up refugee children’s literature with their students points to the importance of this research.

As I finish this paper, the one-year anniversary of the fire Fort McMurray is being marked in the media. Unfortunately, peace in Syria remains a

distant dream. And, tragically, there have been horrific images in the news of people tragically affected by drought and the ongoing conflict in South Sudan. The need for teachers and students in our schools to consider issues of social justice, whether local or global, has never been more pressing. Literature for children and youth has the potential to raise awareness and foster conversation about tough questions of discrimination, belonging, citizenship and social justice. In the time since our teacher inquiry group began to follow the Syrian refugee situation, books for young people on this topic have been published—for example, *Stepping Stones: A Refugee Family's Journey* (Ruurs 2016). This dual-language (English and Arabic) picture book, with its astonishing stone artwork, demonstrates that “children’s literature about the refugee experience” can be “an ideal context for sharing the stories, feelings and fears that many children have had to deal with in their relatively short lives, and expose stereotypes and media myths at the same time” (Hope 2008, 302).

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A Romance in Two Parts

D B Jorgensen

D B Jorgensen used to be an English teacher and a person who rolled educational rocks up administrative hills. But now he sleeps late, plays his guitars, rides his motorcycles, and grows apples.

“Your name is Edward, according to the seating plan,” the old man spoke quietly to the student in the first desk of the middle row. “Yet you have long brown hair that seems to have spent part of the morning with a curling iron, and the heart locket on your necklace looks very old and precious—perhaps from your grandmother? It really is beautiful. So I’m not really sure your name is Edward?”

The young woman rose in her desk, her face hardening, then eased back down, deciding to take the compliment as genuine. “Thanks,” she replied softly. “It was actually my great aunt’s. Next to my oma, she was my favourite. It would have been her birthday on Saturday—I’ve been wearing it all week.”

“Well, hang on to the locket and the memory—someday it may be yours to pass down, too.” He smiled—a little sadly, maybe—and began to look again at the computer printout of names and faces.

“Yeah,” came out booming voice at the end of the row, “she’s Ed and I’m Georgina. But you can call me Georgie cuz that’s really my special girl name.”

“Hah/yeah/good one Eddy/he doesn’t know any of us,” and the chorus cackled like Defarge and her

crew as they waited for the blade to drop. “We gotta open the window/I’m gonna puke it’s so hot/Mister I gotta go to the bathroom/we’ll just call you SubMan, okay/how come we got four subs in a row and they’re not the same?”

Indeed, the old man had already taken off his sport coat, loosened his tie, and rolled up his sleeves. He walked to the side of the classroom and opened both windows. “Hey, Mister, that’s a bitchin’ tattoo,” and a blue jean jacket from close to the front craned his neck and looked at the teacher’s forearms. “I like that parachute tatt—you a Hells Angel?”

“No, stupid.” A gangly fellow had been slouching at the side beside the windows—he was over six feet, six inches tall, the substitute teacher guessed. And even if the student was

standing as a sign of defiance, it would have been uncomfortable for him to sit in those desks for any length of time, anyway. The young man looked at the tattoo, then at the old man, his eyes clear and blue. “‘Ex coelis,’ right? My dad was Princess Patricia’s. But he’s not badass like you guys were.” Now he turned to his classmates and his voice thundered to the back. “Shut up. This guy was Airborne. Parachutes. Fast reconnaissance. He could kick the shit out of any of you—especially you, Edward.” And as he looked at the noisy cabal at the back of the class, he spat out the name of the teacher’s two-bit antagonist.

The class got quieter. “Sooo, like, you know kung fu/you guys are all snipers, right/didja ever kill



anybody?” And the questions and comments came from everywhere and nowhere. Defarge had put down her knitting.

“No,” and the old man laughed quietly. “I never killed anybody. But I did break a marine’s jaw in a bar fight in Germany, once. Alabama boy, I remember now—he broke my nose first and gave me seven stitches, though, so we called it about even.”

And the class exhaled.

“That’s kind of interesting,” and he tossed the student roster on the desk, “because the story we’re supposed to look at is about a young man who’s about to become a soldier, but his younger brother refuses to let him go. And Miss Hawson says we’re supposed to look at the two brothers and their characters. And then we’re supposed to talk about what motivates them to do what they do.”

“Awww shit/the other sub skipped ahead and did this story with us on Wednesday/what do you mean by character/we don’t know nuthin about that.” The chorus was shuffling again.

And in the midst of “We can’t do this work/it’s too hard/I’m gonna watch *Finding Nemo* on my phone/ yeah, I’m gonna watch that Mad Max movie with that chick with the buzzcut” there came a voice from the middle of the room, self-assured enough to be heard, but not so demanding as to invite ridicule. “Don’t you ever forget who you are or where you came from.”

The old man looked up and the voice—a young woman with a black leather jacket and Doc Martens, he could see as she shuffled in her desk—continued. “That was Faulkner’s theme. The father told the older brother not to forget, and

the little brother became the memory.”

“Yeah, see, we already know this stuff/we know character/it’s Friday block four and I’m motivated to leave/I told you it’s hot in here.” The chorus got louder.

The substitute teacher leaned on the back of the teacher’s desk and looked at the leather-clad student. “Thanks very much for that—you’ve summarized Faulkner’s intent really well.” And then he spoke to the class as a whole. “Well, you’re right—it’s Friday afternoon and that clock says 2:25. I can see you’ve pretty much got this assignment under control. But you know that I can’t let you go and this is supposed to be an English class—so how about I tell you a story.”

“We don’t like stories/we’re too big for stories/it’s gonna be really boring/Mister, I really gotta go to the bathroom?”

And on it went for a minute, until another young woman at the back of the class quietly asked over the clamour “What’s the story about?” Then she asked again, just a little louder. “I want to know what the story is about.” And the purpose in her voice caught her classmates off guard, and they stopped their carousing and looked back at her.

“That’s a very good question—what is your name?”

“Moir.”

“That’s a very good question, Moira. It just so happens that this story is also about a Moira, a beautiful young woman who was just a little older than you. Can I tell you a part of the story, and, well, if you don’t like it you can watch a movie on your phone or talk to your friends.” The class agreed, reluctantly, as if they sensed a trick. But

the old man had seemed kind, even when they were trying to be bad. So as a group they quieted, and he began.

Once upon a time (for that was the way all the best stories started, he said), there was a girl named Moira who played fastball in the summer and volleyball in the winter—to win, always to win. And she fought with her sister every morning over who got to wear what clothes and what shoes—and sometimes with her mother as well, for they were all the same size (and sometimes, between the three of them, they could no longer really remember what clothes belonged to what girl, anyway). She had long, strawberry-blonde hair—the colour of her grandfather’s when he was young—and she’d let it stream out behind her when she snuck away with her mother’s convertible car-keys. She got good grades, and she only skipped enough school so as to have fun and not get caught. She liked her school, she had pretty nice friends, she loved her parents and her sister and they loved her back. Things were pretty good for Moira, and she knew it, but there was one problem that was just ripping her up.

“Well, that’s the beginning of the story,” the old man told them. “Now, I can tell you the rest of the story and we can find out a little about Moira and her character and her motivation. Or you can watch fish movies and car chase movies on your phones. What would you like to do?”

“I wanna watch YouTube” a boy grumped, and he began to pull out his phone. “Quiet, stupid,” hissed the girl behind him, and she whacked him across the back of the

head. "Teacher, tell us why that girl was in trouble."

"Yeah," said Ed, quieter than he had been at the beginning of the class. "I wanna know what kind of trouble she was in. Did she get kicked out of the house, or something?"

Heads nodded in agreement around him, and then the old man had them.

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Her father noticed it one June morning, the kind of June morning that you just know is going to turn into an early summer scorcher—the day where school kids change from their winter jeans to their summer cut-offs, the kind of day where there are fewer students in the school in the after-

noon, because somehow, a bunch of them just decide to drive to the lake for the afternoon instead of attending calculus and Shakespeare classes.

Her dad knew something was off—he noticed that instead of looking for cut-offs and sandals, Moira was sitting on the couch wrapped in her yellow baby blanket. She was wearing her Fuzzy Bunny slippers and watching SpongeBob cartoons.

"Coffee?" her dad asked. "It's that kind that mom gets mailed to her from Portland."

He was about to pour cream into a mug for her when she stopped him. "Daddy," she asked, her voice smaller than usual. "Can you please make me hot chocolate instead? And not that instant stuff from the can. Can you please make it from cocoa and sweetened condensed milk, the kind you always make after we come back in from skiing?"

It was an odd request, he thought, for a day where the temperature was quickly climbing into the high 20s. But bunny slippers and baby blankets were not to be argued with, so he dug into the lazy susan for a can of milk. "We gotta go in a half-hour," he reminded her, "you gotta be there early." He heard her mumble something in reply. "What?"

"I know," she responded, her voice sharp as she strode into the kitchen, her arms crossed. "I need my dictionary and thesaurus. Did Sammy or Mom move them?" And she shuffled through the mail at the end of the kitchen table.

"Mom left them by the front door for you. She dropped Sammy off at the pool and she's got a meeting so she left early. She said she left a note for you in the front of the dictionary."

Moira went to the shelf by the front door, picked up the dictionary,

and read the note that her mother had left inside the front cover. Then she slammed the book down on the floor. "I can't do this. I can't write this thing. I'm not ready." And she stormed up the stairs and slammed her bedroom door.

Her father waited a few minutes, then quietly walked up the stairs and knocked on her door. "Moyz? Moyz, I poached you an egg. There's brown toast and saskatoon jam and bacon too, if you want. And your cocoa is on the table."

She came down a few minutes later. Ripped jeans—not the three-hundred-dollar kind of ripped jeans, just a pair of ragged garden trousers. Ponytail underneath a ball cap, her WILSON TRUCKING FASTBALL cap. "Think they'll let me write the essay with my cap on?" she asked with her mouth half-full of toast and jam. "It's lucky. We won provincials with these caps."

"Yeah, they might. Tell the supervising teachers that the fluorescent lights in the classroom hurt your eyes. Tell them that you're going to be writing for three hours, and you need the cap on to concentrate. What are you gonna use. *Hamlet*?"

"Naw, Mrs Peake says everybody uses *Hamlet* and *Death of a Salesman*. I locked on to *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Prufrock* and *Quixote*. Maybe *Antigone* or *Bell Jar* if the question is really sad. I figured that if I use some different stuff, then it'll look like I know a lot more." And she looked at her mug. "A life measured in hot-chocolate spoons." She shifted. "This better work, I prepped the shyte out of all of them."

"Not gonna use that word in any of your essays, are you?"

"What—prepped?" She giggled.

"No, and I'm not gonna use exclamation marks or capital letters for

effect—Mrs Peake says that’s an automatic deduction.”

Then she sagged in her chair. “Daddy, why do I have to do this? Can’t I be little just a little bit longer? Can’t I just stay home and watch SpongeBob? Can’t I just go back to Grade 6 summer camp?” And she put her elbows on the table and her head in her hands.

Her father tugged on her ponytail. “Hey. You’re ready. You got this. You know the difference between hot chocolate spoons and coffee spoons. There ain’t no other kid in the school what knows that.”

She looked up, a Mona Lisa smile appearing. “*Aren’t any. There aren’t any other students in the school who know this.* Put your grammar pants on, daddy.”

He sat in the driveway for a few minutes listening to the morning news. Then Moira came racing down the front steps, jumped in the front seat and yelled “Okay, go!” He put the car in reverse, turned his head and, just as vehemently, she yelled “Wait, stop!” She banged the garage door opener and raced back into the house. Her father turned the radio back on.

A few minutes later she ambled through the garage, her Grade 2 Spice Girls backpack slung over her shoulder. She climbed in and grabbed his chin. “Look at me. I’m gonna tell you, but you can’t tell mom for a long time and you can’t ever tell Sammy because she’ll think I’m a wuss. I’ve got my stuffed Bonnie Bear with me because I’ve slept with her every night that I can remember. And I’ve got a fistful of paintbrushes and a sketchpad because that’s where I’m going. And I’m gonna murder this thing. I’m gonna murder it.”

It was a short drive. They rolled the windows down. The spring smelled good, he thought, and they drove

slowly enough to hear the chickadees singing in the trees on the boulevard. It was a good day, he decided. It was going to be a very good day.

They rolled into the school parking lot—it was already alive with yellow buses and pickup trucks and skateboards and mountain bikes. “You gonna need a ride? Afterwards?”

“Naw,” and her eyes crinkled. “I’ll find a way home. I always do.” And she air-kissed his cheek, skipped out of the car and ran into the school.

They sat still, and a few of them stared out at the traffic beginning to build in the student parking lot. “We gotta write that exam, right?” The young woman who asked was pushing the zipper on her backpack back and forth.

“Yes,” the old man replied, also looking out at the shuffling pickup trucks and the scooters. “You’ll have to write it in two years.”

“Yeah, but it’s hard—”

“It wouldn’t be so damn hard,” the young woman with the Doc Martens turned to the rabble of boys in the back. “It wouldn’t be so bloody hard if you guys would get your heads out of your kneecaps and start paying attention. Geez, some of you guys used to be smart.”

“Well, you’re right, it is a hard exam,” and the old man nodded toward the students in the back. “And it’s okay to be worried about that exam—as long as you turn that worry into doing enough to learn how to do all this stuff. But do you see how that also creates ‘character’ and ‘characterization’ in this story? Moira and her dad? What she needed to do? How he needed to help?” The class murmured that they were pretty sure they knew, for indeed, they really had known all along, anyway.

But they still didn’t want to write that exam. “And do you also think you might know a little more about ‘motivation’ now? Do you think maybe Moira had a lot on the line? Maybe this was important for her dad, too?” The class again quietly consented.

“She had paintbrushes in her pack. I think she was going to art school. Did Moira really go to art school?” asked a young man who had so far said nothing. He’d been drawing and doodling all through the story.

“Ah,” said the old man, and he fingered the lapels of his sport coat that was lying on the teacher’s desk. “Class is almost over, and that would be another story, wouldn’t it.”

“Is that story really true?” asked the tall fellow quietly from the side. “I think you’re kind of lying to us.”

“What do you think?”

“Yeah,” said another, “it’s too happy to be true.”

“Wrong. That’s wrong,” countered another, “it’s too sad to be true.”

“No,” said someone else. “It feels true. It just feels ...” And his voice trailed off.

Then the bell rang and the students rustled in their desks. “Wait,” cried another young man, perhaps the smallest in the class, his eyes bright. “Wait, I need to know. Did she ever get to be little again? Did she ever get to be small again, even for just a little bit?”

And the old man smiled. “Well, that might be a part of the story you’ll just have to tell. Just by yourself.”

And with that, the class remembered they were teenagers, and they tumbled into the hallway, kicking and caterwauling, frolicking and

falling forward. But the tallest one, the one from the side, turned back. “‘From the Clouds,’ right? ‘Ex coelis?’ I’ll always remember that.”

The old man slung his jacket over his shoulder. “Yeah. ‘From the Clouds.’” And the young man tentatively reached out to shake hands goodbye. He smiled as they did so, then turned away down the hall, quickly fading into the crush of students. And with that, the substitute teacher turned off the lights, locked the door, and turned to watch the hallways abuzz with a Friday afternoon full of wishes, lies and dreams.

For Stuart Mc

Book Review

Learning and Teaching Together: Weaving Indigenous Ways of Knowing into Education

by Michele T D Tanaka

UBC Press, 2016

Reviewed by Laura Schmaltz

Laura Schmaltz is the communications coordinator on the ELAC executive.

In June 2016, education stakeholders in Alberta, including Alberta Education and the Alberta Teachers' Association, signed a commitment to ensure that all students learn about Indigenous history, perspectives and contributions in Canada. While teachers I know are enthusiastically in favour of this, they realize that this initiative requires changes in preservice teacher education and teacher quality standards to ensure that educators are properly equipped to share this knowledge with students. As a non-Indigenous teacher, I often struggle with how best to integrate Indigenous ways of knowing into my classroom. Do I have to teach Indigenous and non-Indigenous students differently? How can I ensure that I am not being disrespectful? How can I authentically weave Indigenous ways of knowing into my teaching? When the University of British Columbia recently offered a massive online open course, or MOOC, called Reconciliation Through Indigenous Education, I jumped online, eager to learn more. While exploring elements of education such as relationships to land and place and Indigenous literacies, I realized how much there is for me to learn. It left me eager to learn more about how I can combine Indigenous ways of knowing with my philosophy of teaching and the way that I teach the curriculum to my students.

This is where *Learning and Teaching Together*, by Michele T D Tanaka, came in. This resource recounts the story of a group of non-Indigenous preservice teachers who worked with Indigenous wisdom keepers

so that they could learn about Indigenous ways of teaching and learning in an authentic manner. As I read *Learning and Teaching Together*, I was often reminded of the saying "Once you know better, you do better." This was the case for the preservice teachers. Once they were more aware of Indigenous ways of knowing, they couldn't "un-know." This became a struggle for the students when they did their practicums in traditional Western classrooms and had to learn how to reconcile both ways of knowing. One struggle in particular that I could relate to was the struggle to use group work effectively in the classroom. The preservice teachers felt that group work would benefit students, but they struggled with their own preconceived notions of what this looks like in a more traditional Western setting where group work was "competitive and emphasized the work of individuals, which took away from the focus on a goal and group cohesiveness" (p 184). This is a struggle that I have had myself, and I think a lot of teachers can relate. I believe that collaborative learning benefits learners, but I also remember being a frustrated student who was the one who "did all the work" while my peers didn't contribute. I don't want to create that frustration for my students, nor do I want my students thinking that they can get by without putting any effort. The preservice teachers in *Learning and Teaching Together* acknowledged this struggle and came to the conclusion that effective group work requires teachers to "... move away from our fixation on efficiency, and perhaps, to pay better attention to the learning spirit of the group" (p 185). This certainly struck a chord with me, and ever since, I have been reconsidering my own approach to group work. Why am I putting those particular students

together? Am I giving students enough time and space to explore? Am I telling them what they will learn, or am I allowing them to discover on their own?

What I liked most about *Learning and Teaching Together* was that I found the strategies for supporting intellectual, tactile, emotional and spiritual forms of knowledge were applicable to all students. Just as I believe that strategies that are meant to support ELL learners will actually support all learners, the holistic approach presented as support for Indigenous learners would benefit all learners. When we have an increasingly diverse student population, ways of including all of them and giving all students a voice are vitally important for all teachers, no matter what, where and whom you teach. One of the strategies discussed in *Learning and Teaching Together* was to teach students in four different ways. This strategy recognizes that all students learn differently, and therefore teachers must “teach them in four different ways. You make offer of that understanding, of that knowledge, of what you are trying to teach [through the] physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental” (p 80). If we have been through an education system that privileges Western ways of knowing, we would probably call this differentiation. By looking at my ideas about differentiation through an

Indigenous lens, I started to think about more authentic and meaningful ways to teach content to all of my students. When I teach a given concept, am I really respecting all four of these areas that are so vital to respecting the dignity of the students that I teach? While reading, I often found myself stopping and reconsidering ideas that I was already familiar with. This allowed me to reflect on the journey of these preservice teachers and how their lessons learned complement my own philosophy of teaching and learning.

If you are tired of reading about theory and are ready to dive into practical strategies to integrate Indigenous ways of teaching and learning into your practice, I would encourage you to pick up *Learning and Teaching Together*. You will walk away with real-world ways of integrating Indigenous ways of knowing into your content area, and you will find strategies that you can easily adapt to your own classroom. I feared that after reading this book I would feel overwhelmed by all of the things that I was doing wrong, or that I would feel intimidated by my lack of knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing. Instead, I felt refreshed and as though I was on the right path to, as the subtitle suggests, weaving Indigenous ways of knowing into education.

Making Meaning

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- promote the professional development of English language arts educators and
- stimulate thinking, explore new ideas and offer various viewpoints.

Submissions are requested that have a classroom rather than scholarly focus. They may include

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- descriptions of innovative classroom and school practices;
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The Alberta Teachers' Association



Diversity • Equity • Human Rights Diversity • Equity • Human Rights

Specialist councils' role in promoting diversity, equity and human rights

Alberta's rapidly changing demographics are creating an exciting cultural diversity that is reflected in the province's urban and rural classrooms. The new landscape of the school provides an ideal context in which to teach students that strength lies in diversity. The challenge that teachers face is to capitalize on the energy of today's intercultural classroom mix to lay the groundwork for all students to succeed. To support teachers in their critical roles as leaders in inclusive education, in 2000 the Alberta Teachers' Association established the Diversity, Equity and Human Rights Committee (DEHR).

DEHR Committee aims to assist educators in their legal, professional and ethical responsibilities to protect all students and to maintain safe, caring and inclusive learning environments. Topics of focus for DEHR Committee include intercultural education, inclusive learning communities, gender equity, UNESCO Associated Schools Project Network, sexual and gender minorities.

Here are some activities the DEHR Committee undertakes:

- Studying, advising and making recommendations on policies that reflect respect for diversity, equity and human rights
- Offering annual Diversity Equity and Human Rights Grants (up to \$2,000) to support activities that support inclusion
- Producing Just in Time, an electronic newsletter that can be found at www.teachers.ab.ca; Teaching in Alberta; Diversity, Equity and Human Rights.
- Providing and creating print and web-based teacher resources
- Supporting the Association instructor workshops on diversity



We are there for you!

Specialist councils are uniquely situated to learn about diversity issues directly from teachers in the field who see how diversity issues play out in subject areas. Specialist council members are encouraged to share the challenges they may be facing in terms of diversity in their own classrooms and to incorporate these discussions into specialist council activities, publications and conferences.

Diversity, equity and human rights affect the work of all members. What are you doing to make a difference?

Further information about the work of the DEHR Committee can be found on the Association's website at www.teachers.ab.ca under Teaching in Alberta, Diversity, Equity and Human Rights.

Alternatively, contact **Andrea Berg**, executive staff officer, Professional Development, at andrea.berg@ata.ab.ca for more information.



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