

Making It Count:
A Narrative Inquiry into One Teacher's Experiences
Supporting Middle School EAL Students

by

Jacquelyn Elizabeth Neudorf

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Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning
University of Manitoba
Winnipeg

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ABSTRACT

This autobiographical narrative inquiry explores the teaching, learning and leadership experiences of a middle school teacher in Manitoba. My early experiences as a classroom teacher reflect my uncertainty and unpreparedness of a teacher who struggled to meet the needs of the English as an Additional Language (EAL) students who entered my classroom. As the EAL student population increased within my middle school, I began the journey of a Masters program to seek knowledge in order to support my EAL students and to help guide my colleagues towards an inclusive environment. As I explored how my experiences as a graduate student had influenced my classroom practices, and then how my experiences as an EAL specialist and school leader had influenced the school community, five main themes emerged: The use of the iPad in a mainstream classroom, the use of effective instructional strategies, the role of culture in the classroom, co-teaching practices and collaboration in a Middle School setting. Through narrative inquiry I investigated these themes and discovered new pathways to support EAL students and guide my colleagues while moving toward a more inclusive classroom and school environment.

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DEDICATION

In memory of my father

Edward Jack Pratt

In honour of my children

Nicole Marie Neudorf

Bradley Christopher Neudorf

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Narrative Beginnings

“Thank you so much”
with the click of the phone
a sense of relief
exhilaration
fill me

After three years of subbing
short-term positions;
finally
a full year position
a local middle school.

I wanted to jump
to dance
to release the pounding energy
I wanted to shout
But I didn't.

I walked quietly
down
 the
 hall
a small bedroom
the new crib
my one-month old baby
sound asleep

I exited the room,
closed the door
silent tears
ran
 down
 my
 face.

An opportunity
a choice
at what cost?

MAKING IT COUNT: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

I exchange time
for an opportunity
mom time
for teacher time
her time
their time

Make it count
Make it worth it
Make it meaningful

For the first time
my own classroom
standing at the front
looking
 around
 the
 smallest
room

My own classroom
for 10 months
tucked away
far corner
of the school
I loved it
My own classroom!

Excited to start
meet my colleagues
greet my students,
begin my journey
a middle school teacher

A small child
sparkling brown eyes
wide open arms
greet me
each day after school

Make it count
Make it worth it
Make it meaningful

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As I wrote this, my baby girl was curled up on the couch across from me, sleeping soundly from a long day at school. My baby girl is now 17 years old, and her long day consists of physics, biology and high school electives that will open doors for her as she navigates her way through high school towards university. I never questioned my decision to accept a job to start the day my baby turned 3 ½ months old. Full time jobs were rare with a declining school population in my area and I felt a full time position with full time daycare was a better alternative than trying to accept subbing jobs on a day-to-day basis without a full time daycare plan in place (which I couldn't afford without a full time job). While I never questioned my decision to start work that August, I did feel the guilt everyday as I helped my husband secure our child in the car so he could drop her off at a home where she would spend the next five years growing and learning, day after day, without her mother.

Seventeen years later, I continue to begin each year by standing at the front of my room and soaking in the reality that this is my classroom. I worked towards this classroom for so long and gave up so much to accept the opportunity to teach in this room. A promise made is what motivates me to make the most of my time in a classroom: to make my time away from her count for something beyond a material means, to make the most of the opportunity granted to me so it was worth the sacrifice of missing the time I could have spent with her, and to make my teaching meaningful for the other children with whom I spend my days.

I have taught in the same middle school for the entirety of my fulltime teaching career. Being in the same school for a long period brings with it added responsibility. Along with my Classroom Teacher title, I am also LA/SS Department Head, Grade 8 Team Leader, School Leader, Teacher Mentor and recently the title of Co-Teacher was added to the list of responsibilities. I thoroughly enjoy working within the middle school environment and when

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colleagues ask me of future plans my response is always, “I’ll be here until I don’t enjoy it any more, then I’ll move on.” Some days are better than others, but every day is an adventure, a challenge, and a chance to make a difference.

I discovered in the first few years of my teaching career that in order to make a difference for my students and to make their time in my classroom meaningful, I needed more professional training than what I engaged in for my education degree. After many years of part-time classes, in 2002, I earned my special education certificate. This additional training gave me more confidence in attending to the specific needs of the special education students in my classroom. However, I soon realized that my special education training did not help me find answers toward meeting the needs of the EAL students when they began to enter my classroom.

The middle school I teach in is located in a suburban area of Winnipeg. Within the last 10 years our number of EAL students have progressed from 1 - 2 students per school year to a current 21 students throughout Grades 6 - 8. The population of identified EAL students now comprises 10% of the 210-student population. The most significant increase has been in the last five years and with this increase surfaced the questions: What am I to do? Who can help me? Do we have any resources?

Using My Experiences to Move Forward

My stories of my experiences over the last 14 years with EAL students are varied: they are as a classroom teacher, a graduate student and a school leader. As a classroom teacher, the stories of my first experiences with EAL students reflect the many struggles I encountered as I tried to support the EAL students in my classroom. These stories of my early experiences led

MAKING IT COUNT: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

to the understanding that once again I needed more professional training. The stories were the catalyst that led me to enroll at the university to develop an understanding of second language acquisition in order to begin to understand the needs of my EAL students. As a graduate student, I have gained an immense amount of knowledge to support my understanding of my EAL students. I have also developed a new empathy for learners struggling to overcome a barrier with language. As a school leader, I have discovered how sharing stories of successes and struggles encourages an open dialogue that others will join as they too strive to meet the needs of their students. As I reflect on my early stories, my later stories, and my current stories of experience from these different perspectives, I use the insights to move me toward my goal of providing a supportive learning environment for the EAL students who enter my class.

As a Classroom Teacher

Story 1: First experiences with an EAL student. Sayid (pseudonym) arrived at our school during the winter of the 2000-2001 school year. At that time I was teaching an A.C.E. (Academic Curricular Enrichment) Grade 8 class. Within our middle school we streamed the students into A.C.E and regular streams based on their academic grades. I was truly apprehensive about his addition to my class and argued at length with the guidance counselor about his placement in an advanced class with limited English skills. From Iran, Sayid had some English instruction but it was only on a conversational level. As I had no previous experiences with EAL students and no knowledge base to draw from, I did not understand how I was supposed to proceed with incorporating him into the class. The answers to my many questions as to how went unanswered. The answer to my question as to ‘Why my class?’ was the reason I stopped questioning and began accepting.

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That year my Grade 8 class consisted of 22 students who were motivated to learn and who got along well with each other. They were involved in many of the leadership activities of the school and most of the students participated on at least one of the school's sports teams. This environment of friendly motivated students, who were involved in the many activities of the school, was the answer to my question as to why. When I was challenged to select a better environment in the school, I couldn't. It was during that moment that I understood his placement was not about me it was about him.

After understanding why my classroom environment would be the best placement for this new student, I met with Sayid and welcomed him into my classroom. During the first few weeks I struggled with ways to keep him "occupied" while I taught the rest of the class the elements of a novel and essay writing. I selected pictures from calendars and created worksheets so he could pick out objects he saw in the pictures – look up their translations in his bilingual dictionary and learn the English translation. From there he was to try to write a few sentences to describe the picture chosen. I felt overwhelmed many times, as I was trying to help Sayid but I had no idea if what I was doing was "the right thing". After weeks of developing separate work for him I started to incorporate him into the class while jumping over the hurdles that came up on a daily basis.

His experiences of school were vastly different from my own and I soon found that I had to learn about his school experiences before I could attempt to explain why I did things a particular way in my classroom. He never asked questions, volunteered answers or spoke unless spoken to. The school he attended in Iran did not allow for questioning of teachers, requesting assistance or group discussion. Upon learning his reasons for his demeanor in class, I made sure that I frequently asked him specific questions about his work and I started even the

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most trivial of conversations to get him talking and using English in the classroom. This, however, took a lot of my time and I began to feel I was neglecting my other students. To solve this dilemma I enlisted the help of my class. Together Sayid and I explained the culture of his former school and we asked for class members' participation in helping him learn more about the Canadian classroom setting. In the beginning however, they had more questions than answers. They began asking him questions about his life in Iran, his family, and his favourite activities. Once all their questions were answered, they began involving Sayid in the conversations within the classroom, asking for his input and his opinions. Sayid in turn started to ask the students questions about their favourite activities, their families and the work in the classroom. Soon enough he became immersed in the environment of a Canadian middle school culture.

As a teacher, I was unprepared for a new student who was learning English as an additional language to be placed in my classroom. In the beginning, my reluctance and apprehension stemmed from my fear of the unknown. However, within a few weeks of Sayid being in my class, I learned that while his level of reading and writing in English were in fact below his current grade placement, he was quite capable of communicating with his teachers and his peers and contributing his own opinions and insights. He was also motivated to learn and become involved in the classroom activities as well as activities within the school. My classroom environment was the best place for Sayid. He was one of the 23 friendly, motivated and engaged students in my classroom that year.

First home visit. That spring the guidance counselor and I were called to the office to meet Sayid's mother. In carefully articulated English she expressed her wish to have us for

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lunch to express her thanks for welcoming Sayid into our school. We accepted and later that week, walked to his apartment, which was close to the school. I had never been to a student's home before and I was appreciative of having the company of the guidance counselor to guide me through this new passage. Sayid's mother was warm and welcoming as she greeted us and welcomed us into her home. His dad was back in Iran on business, finalizing plans so he could join his family in Canada. Over an elaborate spread of Iranian dishes, she expressed again her appreciation that her son was participating in classes and acknowledged that it would take time for him to understand the culture as well as the language. I felt a sense of relief that she knew we were trying and that her expectations of his English progress were realistic. After lunch, she showed us photographs of their home in Iran. The word "Mansion" came to mind when I saw the three-story home with marble throughout, filled with courtyards, swimming pools and servants. It was a vastly different home from her current two-bedroom 700 square foot apartment. I couldn't understand why anyone with such wealth in their own country would choose to move away from their family and friends. Sayid moved on to High School in June of 2001 and I lost track of him.

Before the visit with Sayid and his mother, I never really thought about what new immigrants had left behind in order to make Canada their new home. I had assumed their new home would be an improvement from their former home. Learning about Sayid's family and visiting his home was very important to me as a teacher as it allowed me a small glimpse into his life which led to a greater understanding of his background he was bringing into the classroom. As an increasing number of immigrant and refugee students enter our school, I need to learn about their pasts, their families and their cultural values in order to successfully plan for their educational needs as well as their social and emotional needs.

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Story 2: Second chances. Alena (pseudonym) entered my Grade 8 language arts and social studies classrooms in September of 2004. She was a quiet girl who had emigrated from the Middle East two years earlier. She was a student who was eager to please and who always asked for extra work, even though she had difficulty with the current work assigned to her. Her speaking skills were slowly improving but her writing was that of an early years student. I had to ask her repeatedly to place her finger in-between her words so I could distinguish them. Even though she was writing basic sentences and her reading comprehension was at a Grade 2-3 level, instead of creating separate work for her like Sayid, I tried from the beginning to incorporate her into the themes of the classroom during language arts and social studies at a level I thought she could manage without frustration.

I had learned from my first experiences with Sayid that separate work within a classroom did not allow for conversation and communication between the EAL students and their peers. Providing access to both the curriculum and her peers allowed Alena to foster her peer relationships while developing an awareness and understanding of academic terms.

The meeting. Within the first few months of school an opportunity came up to meet Alena's parents. In the days that led up to the meeting, Alena became more outgoing in class and her smile never seemed to leave her face. She talked to me between classes of her parents and her siblings, anxious that we were able to meet and talk.

During the meeting, I learned that Alena's family had fled their home country when the Taliban took control. They left their homeland for the sake of their children: so the children could grow up in a safer environment and all the children, girls included, could receive an education. I also learned that while her parents had secondary schooling in their home county,

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her father was currently working at a minimum wage job, and her mother was currently unemployed. They were living in Manitoba Housing until they could save enough money for a new home. It was evident throughout the meeting the pride the family held for their home country and the devastation they felt when they understood they had no other choice but to leave. After meeting Alena's parents, my appreciation of the struggles and sacrifices of immigrant families grew but the most important lesson was to come.

Lessons learned. Upon Alena moving onto high school I truly believed that she had some learning difficulties and that she should be placed in an at-risk program. She was just beginning to write in complete sentences and her reading level was still significantly below grade level. She came back to visit several times over her high school years and I always encouraged her to continue to do her best. To my surprise, she graduated on time with the rest of her class. I was shocked to say the least. The year with me at the beginning of her journey was not a true indication of her potential as a student. Alena had needed time to adjust to her new surroundings and to learn the language. Alena's graduation led me to the realization that I had so much to learn about EAL learners in my classroom and as their numbers were starting to increase – I had better start learning. At the time of this writing, Alena's family has moved into an affluent area of the city with both parents working and three of the four siblings currently enrolled in post secondary institutions; the fourth will join them within the year.

Story 3: Trying to fit in. Starting my 2010-2011 school year I looked over my class lists to find a number of EAL students in my classroom. One was an EAL student from the Philippines in my Grade 7 LA and SS classes. Monica (pseudonym) had been in Canada for

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two years. Monica was a bright student who scored well on tests and assignments so neither additional resources nor adaptations were used except for a once a day pullout. This year the school had allocated time for a teacher to instruct an EAL class one period every morning to a small group of EAL students to help further their language skills. September turned to January soon enough and when an afterschool EAL session was offered by the new divisional EAL Curriculum Support Teacher I jumped at the chance to learn more about my EAL students. I left the sessions with some basic understandings of EAL learners and more questions than answers. At my request, our EAL Curriculum Support Teacher started coming to see me once every few weeks and she helped me with the assessment of my students. Monica, who I thought was fine, actually comprehended text 3 years below grade level. Her scores surprised me. After I learned the scores, I took Monica aside and explained what I had found. She acknowledged that she had difficulties but that she hid them. She got through by asking other students to read and explain directions or taking her work home and asking her older siblings. She agreed that she would not conceal her lack of understanding or questions anymore and I agreed I would never formally assess her unless she fully understood what I was asking of her.

After that conversation, the questions started: vocabulary questions, meanings of directions, reaffirming assignments and test questions all came to my attention. I was surprised at the vocabulary questions she brought to me. Nouns such as 'log' and 'sheep' were unfamiliar to her and I needed to show her pictures from my desktop computer to try to explain what the text she was reading was referring to. She began underlining unfamiliar words and phrases in her readings and together we would look up examples on the computer and discuss the meanings. Concrete nouns were much easier to find visuals for; abstract nouns such as loyalty and pride became an exercise in charades and synonyms as I tried to explain to her the

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meanings of the unfamiliar words. There were times when the visuals and my explanations did not support her understanding and I had to ask her to take her questions home to her older siblings in hopes that they would be able to explain to her what I could not. I began to understand the importance of the support she sought out from her family as many times words and concepts were sent home for the scaffolding that I could not provide to her in class.

Throughout the year, she continued to ask questions and bring to my attention words, phrases, or concepts that she had difficulty with as I had explained that her questions were helping me understand the difficulties she was encountering and the level of support she needed in my class. Monica also transferred her new voice into other classrooms as teachers spoke to me about how many questions she was now asking.

The year ended with increased communication with all the EAL students in all my classes. I made the effort to check with them when I was teaching a new concept to make sure the concepts were clear and I always welcomed their questions throughout the class as another opportunity to provide clarity. The year also ended with an acceptance letter into the University of Manitoba for studies in a Masters program in Second Language Education.

As a Graduate Student

The same year my daughter entered high school and my son entered middle school, I entered my Masters program at the University of Manitoba. Although my children were accustomed to me working on schoolwork in the evenings, the university workload brought a whole new meaning to Mom's Work Time. The dining room table became my workspace and the sideboard was home to binders, articles, books and works in progress. The more cluttered with papers the table became, the closer I was to finishing my latest assignment. It was at this

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table that I discovered a new language: Academia. Many of the articles and books used in class seemed to hold a secret and foreign language and the reading strategies that I teach my students at school did not seem to apply. 1) Activate prior knowledge – my knowledge was limited to my classroom experiences and some basic information from in-services attended. I had a very difficult time relating to the different theories of second language acquisition. 2) Make connections – This was difficult as well as I did not understand half the time what the authors were saying. 3) Visualize – create a picture in your head – no picture could form without the background knowledge of the theories. The only strategy I could use was to read, and reread, then read out loud, ask questions, look up vocabulary words, and reread again. Words and concepts that I had no background knowledge of were incorporated throughout the readings: proliferation, rationalism, postmodernist, constructivists, sociolinguistic and countless more. Many times at the beginning of my courses I had to reread the same chapter or article 5 - 6 times in order to make sense of what I was reading. I finally found that I had to make summary notes on paper, reread my notes and fill in the blanks with what I missed in order for the articles to make sense. At times however, even this process did not work and I had to rely on my classmates and professors to explain to me the meaning of the readings.

After a year of classes the readings became a little easier, as I was developing more of an academic vocabulary. I was able to read through articles and understand most of the terms and the language used. As a graduate student, I finally had a small glimpse into the lives of my EAL students who come into my classroom without the academic terms and prior knowledge. I too wanted to hide my lack of understanding of the concepts discussed in class. I didn't want the others in class to know how difficult the work was for me. The difference was I chose this path; my students did not. I continued to struggle, to persevere, and to overcome. I was

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motivated to learn and to transfer my new knowledge and understanding into the classroom to benefit my students and the teachers I worked with.

As a School Leader

As a school leader, the answer “I don’t know” became another reason for the search of answers to my departments’ questions. As the number of EAL students increased in our building, the number of questions and concerns from teachers also increased. As a department head with a special education certificate, I was able to help the teachers with answers to their questions regarding the students with Individualized Education Plans or adapted plans in their classes. I was at a loss however when I was asked to help with their EAL students. As I began courses at the University, every week I would filter new understandings, knowledge and concepts to my colleagues. Conversations before school, in the halls, and during meetings became a way to transfer what I had learned to our school environment and elicit feedback from teachers. As the Language Arts department head I began discussing some of the EAL concepts I had learned at our department meetings and provided a time for my colleagues to share their stories and their questions.

The Labyrinth of Middle School

Middle school is a challenging environment and it is in this environment that I have wholeheartedly chosen to teach in, to learn in, and to lead in for over seventeen years. I see middle school as a labyrinth of complex mazes of educational issues, relationships, and identity that both teachers and students strive to negotiate their way through. Each teacher and student brings with them their past experiences; their own compasses, to help guide them on their

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journeys through the mazes. It is in this labyrinth of middle school that I have experienced the joys, the rewards, and the struggles of leading students through the many mazes towards the goal of growing into positive, contributing members of a community.

With each year of teaching, experience and confidence grows. New paths through the mazes of middle school are explored and are either abandoned or marked with signs suggesting a favourable route. At times, a path for one group of students through a particular maze does not work for another and new routes; new paths must be taken in order for the students to reach their final destination. Some students hit a wall in a maze that they cannot get around to follow the others, so as a teacher I intervene: set up new routes, give more directions, and at times help them over the wall they are blocked by so they may join their classmates once again as they navigate together their way through towards high school.

Each year I live with my students in their labyrinth and together we negotiate our way through the complexities of the mazes. With each set of students, new paths are explored, new blocks are encountered and new ways to negotiate through are discovered. Each year I live with my colleagues in their labyrinth and together we negotiate our way through the complexities of the mazes. New initiatives are explored to find distinct and innovative pathways to help our students. Co-teaching is one such school initiative. For a second year, one quarter of my time was dedicated to co-teaching with the teachers in the English Language Arts department. As I entered my colleagues' classrooms I brought my teaching experience, resource experience, and newly acquired knowledge of second language acquisition. As I left my colleagues' classrooms I took with me new ideas, new perspectives, and an enriched understanding of the complexities of mainstream classrooms. This year, the divisional initiative of placing iPads into the hands of every middle school student was truly innovative

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and groundbreaking. Each middle school student was loaned an iPad mini for the duration of the school year. Students had access to their iPads not only at school but at home in the evenings and on weekends as well. While these initiatives were explored, new mazes were added to our labyrinths and new pathways as well as new barriers were discovered.

The Research Puzzle

My goal in reflecting back over the 2013-2014 school year and looking ahead to the future is to find new understandings to the following research puzzle:

- 1) How have my experiences as a graduate student influenced my classroom practices to benefit EAL learners?
- 2) How have my experiences as a co-teacher and school leader influenced the school community into working towards a more inclusive environment?

Theoretical Framework

My past experiences guide my journey as I navigate the mazes within the labyrinth of middle school. As well, my reflections and analysis of my experiences explain why I have chosen specific pathways to travel and indicate where they may lead me next. John Dewey's (1938) view of experience with its two principles of continuity and interaction helps me understand that past experiences shape present experiences and these present experiences in turn would shape future experiences. My experiences in the middle school landscape follow many different pathways within the labyrinth. Each of the pathways I enter has a beginning, and I enter that pathway carrying my backpack of experiences from previous pathways as I begin my new journey. As I continue to travel the new pathway, I consider where it may lead

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me next and I reflect back on the experiences that brought me to my current location (Continuity). Along with continuity, Dewey's principle of interaction considers the relationship between the person and their social context. According to Dewey (1938):

As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations that follow. (p. 72)

As I continue to travel the new pathway I interact with colleagues, students, curriculum, and initiatives. From these encounters my personal feelings, thoughts and understandings change or strengthen and these too are carried with me as I navigate my way through (Interaction).

Based on Dewey's theory of experience, Clandinin and Connelly conceptualized and developed narrative inquiry both as a way to understand people's experiences and as a research methodology. For narrative inquirers,

We can see that not only is a pragmatic ontology of experience a well-suited theoretical framework for narrative inquires, narrative inquiry is an approach to research that enacts many if not all of the principles of a Deweyan theory of inquiry. (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 42)

My experiences as a middle school teacher working with EAL students have continued to evolve and change as each new pathway is traveled. Narrative inquiry provides a theoretical and practical framework for (re) interpreting my lived experiences (Shields, 2005). The process of reflection within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space will inform my research as I examine my current experiences, reflect on my past experiences, and imagine my future experiences in order to search for insight into my research puzzle.

MAKING IT COUNT: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

Narrative inquiries are always composed around a particular wonder, a research puzzle. Narrative inquirers frame a research puzzle that carries with it “a sense of a search, a ‘re-search, a searching again,’...“a sense of continual reformulation” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 124).

Through the process of searching for and creating new understandings for my research puzzles, I uncover new pathways for my students, my colleagues, my school community and myself. These new pathways through the middle school labyrinth will contribute to new insight and opportunities to support one another while we journey together supporting our EAL students in mainstream classrooms. My inquiry will also contribute to the research literature by analyzing my perspectives as a co-teacher who is an EAL specialist, a classroom teacher and a department head, as well as documenting the impact of including iPads in a mainstream classroom in Manitoba.

Using a metaphor of the labyrinth, I re-present my research journey through exploring a series of complex mazes and winding pathways situated within the middle school setting where I have been working to search for insight and understanding into my research puzzle. The pathway I have navigated through is neither straight nor linear. In the following chapters, I will lead you through these mazes: Chapter 2 is my search for relevant literature. Chapter 3 explains how I come to use narrative inquiry as my research methodology. Chapter 4 is a narrative account of my research journey over the 2013-2014 school year and Chapter 5 discussing what I have learned from this research journey and how I am going to move forward into the future.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

In order to support my EAL students I looked to the past and current literature on EAL students in the mainstream classroom. Some of the questions I wanted insight into included: How can EAL programming be delivered in a mainstream classroom? What are effective teaching practices for middle school EAL students that I can use in my classroom? What has been discovered about iPad technology in the EAL classroom? After reading the literature, and inquiring into my own practices with the literature in mind, I began to transform my teaching practices to determine what worked for my EAL learners and me in my classroom.

Program Delivery

Within Manitoba, classroom programming is the most common model used for EAL learners. English is generally the sole language of instruction, and the classroom teacher provides programming within the framework of a regular classroom. In some cases, a resource or EAL specialist or educational assistant working in collaboration with the classroom teacher may provide additional EAL support (Manitoba Education, 2011). Within Manitoba, regular classrooms consist of all learners integrated together with their grade level peers. These classrooms are mainstreamed and they incorporate a diverse range of student learning needs. With this in mind, I looked to literature that focused on different types of programming used within a mainstream setting.

A program overview by Pardini (2006) and long-term qualitative studies by York-Barr, Ghre & Sommerness (2007) and Theoharis & O'Toole (2011) describes the move of the English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher into a mainstream classroom and the coteaching and collaboration that followed. Pardini (2006), York-Barr et al. (2007) and Theoharis &

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O'Toole (2011) describe the results of successful collaboration where all staff were responsible for planning for their students. Districts or school principals led the reform effort and provided professional development to all teachers, along with additional ESL teacher support and additional time for meetings.

Co-teaching has just recently been introduced into our school as a method to support our goals to improve the literacy levels of all our students. My responsibility as a co-teacher is to support teachers in my Language Arts department to meet the varied needs within their mainstream classrooms. There are many ESL practitioners who felt inhibited from doing their best to assist ESL students with language and content development within the mainstream environment and had low perception of themselves as legitimate, important professionals at their school sites (McClure & Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010). I entered the co-teaching environment as a department head, classroom teacher and co-teacher. Co-teaching to support EAL students can be successful but there seems to be so many structures that need to be in place:

involvement of all staff, divisions or principals leading the reform effort, ongoing professional development, additional EAL teacher support and additional meeting time. As well there are teachers' challenges, which include identification of roles and responsibilities, agreement on instruction, student behavior, communication, evaluation and time (Dove & Honigsled, 2010).

Recently, Bell and Baecher (2012) addressed the debate as to which ESL program type is most effective: pullout, push-in (working within the classroom setting with an individual ESL student or a small group of ESL students) or coteaching. Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from 72 survey respondents from a range of states as well as Canada, Japan and Mexico. The pullout model was most used, followed by push-in then coteaching. The pullout model was also the preferred model (64%). Bell and Baecher concluded that regardless of

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program model, teachers need time to collaborate and administration support for collaboration must be provided. However, collaboration has many different levels and that partnership between ESL and classroom teachers is neither easy nor unproblematic (Davison, 2006).

The research on the successful move of the EAL specialist into the mainstream classroom pointed me down a path that includes: school reform efforts, professional development opportunities for all teachers, additional EAL teacher support and time for collaboration (Pardini, 2006; Theoharis & O'Toole, 2011; York-Barr et al, 2007). This path does not exist within my current school landscape. Although the school administration has provided some co-teaching time within my schedule, the co-teaching time is designated toward supporting literacy goals for all students, not just EAL students, and time for collaboration beyond the designated co-teaching time has not been scheduled. EAL professional development opportunities are provided several times throughout the school year but only one or two teachers usually attend from each school. Within my division, we have only one EAL support teacher to serve all our K-12 schools. We do not have a department or team of EAL specialists to call upon to help. Within my school, I am the sole EAL specialist. Even though the path uncovered by the research towards successful support for EAL students in the mainstream classroom does not exist in my current landscape, it does not suggest it is the only path. I cannot change structures that are not within my control to change; I can however, search for a new pathway through the labyrinth that supports my school's current individual landscape.

Effective Teaching Strategies

Throughout my literature search on effective teaching strategies for middle school students, I found three main themes woven throughout the articles. These themes include

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classroom teachers' need to understand 1) length of time of language acquisition 2) the role of culture in the classroom and 3) effective instructional strategies for EAL learners.

Length of time for language acquisition. Whereas it usually takes EAL students 1-2 years to become fluent in conversational English (BICS- basic interpersonal communicative skills) (Cummins, 1981), it can take 5-7 years or longer for students to approach grade norms in cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Collier & Thomas, 1989; Cummins, 1981). Students in our division enter Middle School within the age range of 11-14 years from grades 6 through 8. The EAL students are placed in age appropriate classrooms in our school and then not only face the challenge of developing their BICS but of trying to develop their CALP in order to catch up to their same age peers. Older L2 learners whose L1 CALP is better developed, acquire L2 CALP more rapidly than younger learners. There is a common underlying proficiency that flows between L1 and L2, and thus the better the L1 is developed, the more likely L2 will develop to the level required for academic success (Cummins, 1981). However, younger-arriving EAL students also come from our division's elementary schools into our middle school. Younger-arriving students do not have the proficiency in their L1 to develop cognitive understanding in L2. Although they may sound good, they will have more difficulty and should be carefully monitored for growth and achievement in the junior high grades (Roessingh & Kover, 2002). Success in one grade does not necessarily mean successful integration in the next grade (Early, 1989), and it is a mistake to take students out of English language learner support in elementary only to reclassify them in middle school as needing resource or special education (Roessingh & Elgie, 2009).

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Within Manitoba, EAL support is granted for only the first four years of the student's arrival (Manitoba Education, 2006b). The questioning of many Canadian EAL funding guidelines falling short of the 5-7 years required to approach grade norms (Early, 1989) still remains a matter of concern.

Reflecting back on my early experiences, the research opened my eyes to the language experiences of Alena, Monica and Sayid. When Alena entered my classroom in Grade 8, she was only in her third year of Canadian schooling with English. According to Cummins (1981) she would require at least another 4 years to approach grade norms in L2 CALP. Alena's progress throughout high school supported the research, as she was able to catch up to her grade level peers and graduate from Grade 12 with them. Had I known then, what I know now, I would have never had thought that she should be included in an at risk resource program. Psychological testing only two years after her arrival would have underestimated her potential academic abilities (Cummins, 1981) and she may have been placed on a different path instead of the one she was able to successfully navigate.

While Monica also entered my classroom in Grade 7 she was also in her second year of Canadian schooling, however, she had prior English education. English was taught as a second language at her school and several subjects like Math and Science were taught in English. Her oral skills continued to develop very quickly within her new setting, which may be why I assumed she was able to cope in the classroom without additional supports. Similar to Monica, Sayid had prior English exposure in his previous school. However, he arrived in my classroom with basic conversational skills at the age of 14, an age Cummins (1981) found which rapidly acquired English vocabulary. Without an understanding of the research behind the length of time for language acquisition, I placed Sayid, my first EAL student, as the measuring stick for

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future EAL students like Alena and Monica. In fact, Sayid was close to being a best-case scenario in terms of age of arrival, and prior education.

With this new knowledge from the research and from my courses at the university I began to look more closely into the backgrounds of my EAL students to find out their date of arrival so I could begin to determine what stage of language development they may be in and to put supports in place to further their learning. I also ensured during high school transition meetings that all my EAL students were identified with their current level of achievement as well as their date of arrival, first language and home country in order to inform the high schools so they in turn could track and respond to the EAL students changing instructional needs.

The role of culture in the classroom. As I began to investigate the role of culture in the classroom, I realized I needed to select a working definition for a term that is complex with multiple meanings and a variety of definitions in order to guide me through the process. I found Gebhard's (2006) definition was a very good starting point for me: "While there are many ways to define culture, here it refers to the common values and beliefs of a people and the behaviors that reflects them" (Gebhard, 2006, p.119). I also began to understand that I needed to be aware of the culture that I brought with me to the classroom. "In order to understand issues of race and culture for ourselves and for our students, we need to understand ourselves as raced participants, not as removed from issues of race and culture" (McMahon, 2003, p. 268). Reflecting on how my race and culture influenced my classroom environment made me more aware of the difficulties my EAL students experienced in my classes as I did not take into account how their experiences were based on their own background and culture, not mine.

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Teachers can create a more inclusive environment by reducing the cognitive load by allowing students to draw on their prior knowledge and life experiences and teach and include aspects of each child's culture on a regular basis, and showing the EAL students that they value the students' first language (Miller & Endo, 2004). Teacher's knowledge about individual students, including their past and present lives and existing skills is essential. Only with such knowledge can EAL students' strengths be identified and capitalized on in classroom practices. It is through participation in valued cultural activities that students encounter and appropriate the meaning making practices of the culture and the language in which these meanings are made (Haneda, 2008).

Reviewing the research, it is evident that classroom teachers hold the key to mainstream EAL learners' success. However, it also became evident that professional development for all mainstream teachers with EAL students is needed in order for teachers to provide the appropriate environments for their EAL students. It is imperative that I reflect on my own background and culture (McMahon, 2003) and I find out who our students are and where they come from before I can begin to appreciate the resources they bring and to understand their needs (Slavit, Moore & Maloney, 2002).

Reflecting back I begin to understand the importance of knowing Sayid's, Alena's and Monica's backgrounds and how this knowledge would have helped me plan for their individual needs. Monica, whose first language was Tagalog, came from the Philippines whose two official languages are English and Tagalog: a Latin based language. Sayid's and Alena's first languages were Farsi and Dari respectively, both based on the Persian language, which is read and written from right to left. EAL students may enter our classrooms with not only a different language, but with a different alphabet. The transition to the Latin alphabet for many students

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is an additional source of confusion that teachers need to understand (Ernst-Slavit et al, 2002).

Visions of Alena placing her fingers in between her words come to mind. I never took into account how difficult it was to change from Dari to English.

Teachers also need to show their EAL students that they value the students' first language. Through classroom activities EAL students can share their language and become the teachers of their languages to peers in the class. Teachers also need to be cautioned that some students may want to give up their first language in order to fit in with their peers (Miller & Endo, 2004). I never knew how important maintaining and honouring my students' first language was (Haneda, 2008). I never really thought about it. I was so busy concentrating on developing their English, it never occurred to have the students use and share their first language to further their own learning. At times my students would share the writing of their first name in their first language and would show the other students a small glimpse into their background, but I never went beyond that. Along with different languages, my EAL students entered my classroom with different cultural and background experiences. While I experienced this with Sayid, I used more of a reactive approach than a proactive approach. Incorporating a more multicultural approach to the classroom was needed in order to be proactive in promoting the education and achievement of my EAL students.

In providing students with a multicultural approach to learning within a classroom, an understanding of the different approaches used is important for teachers to evaluate their practices. Cumming-McCann (2003) outlines four different approaches to Multicultural Education:

The Contributions Approach: Most frequently used and commonly referred to as the heroes and holidays approach. Ethnic content may be limited to special days,

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weeks, months or events and the curriculum remains unchanged in terms of its basic structure, goals and main ideas.

The Additive Approach: The second level of content integration. Similar to the holidays and heroes approach, content is put into the curriculum without restructuring it and looking into the cultural significance of the content. Individuals or groups of people from marginalized groups are included, yet racial and cultural inequities or oppression are not addressed and issues are presented from a dominant perspective.

The Transformative Approach: Enables students to see concepts from several cultural and ethnic perspectives. It requires the infusion of perspectives and ideas that will expand students' understanding of an idea. The challenge of this approach is that it requires a complete transformation of the curriculum.

The Decision Making and Social Action Approach: Includes all the elements of the transformative approach but adds components that require students to make decisions and to take action related to the concept, issue, or problem they have studied.

Within my classroom I am beginning to use the contributions and additive approaches. Although I understand the importance of moving to the transformative and social action approach, I have just begun the move away from a dominant perspective curriculum. I know however the direction I need to move in order to transform my classroom into a more inclusive environment.

Effective instructional strategies for EAL students. Good teachers have a repertoire of strategies that will serve them well in working with EAL students. Nevertheless, these strategies can become powerful tools in the hands of a teacher when connected to an understanding of second language acquisition (Teemant, Bernhardt, Rodriguez-Munoz & Aiello, 2000). As I read through the literature on instructional strategies for EAL students I found several strategies throughout the articles that continually were being advocated as effective for EAL students. These studies suggest effective instruction for EAL students involves classroom-based instruction that scaffolds the EAL learners as they actively participate in the mainstream setting. Outlined below are four instructional strategies most often cited in the literature as being effective for EAL students in the mainstream classroom.

- **Use of First Language:** Use materials in first language (Lewis-Moreno, 2007) or use first language to scaffold learning (Rubinstein-Avila, 2003). Encourage students to substitute words from their native language for unknown English words (Williams, 2001). Enabling students to use their L1 to clarify content (Cummins, Mirza, & Stille, 2012).
- **Cooperative Learning:** Open Word Sorts, Think Pair Squares (Lewis-Moreno, 2007), Think Pair Share, and Jigsaws provide a perfect opportunity for ESL learners to interact and collaborate with friends (Allison & Rehn, 2007). EAL learners should be encouraged to work with fluent English-speaking peers (Rubinstein-Avila, 2003). Teachers can assign roles in cooperative learning tasks (Teemant et al., 2000).
- **Academic Language:** Teachers need to use academic terms and model their use (Lewis-Moreno, 2007). Avoid oversimplified language; model academic language (Miller & Endo, 2004). ESL kids do not need things simplified, they need more than

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one way to understand a concept (Teemant et al., 2000). Extend students understanding of academic language across the curriculum (Cummins, 2014).

- **Use of Visuals:** Consider visuals (Miller & Endo, 2004) and use of manipulatives, videos, gestures, drama (Carrier, 2005). EALs prefer visual support in each lesson (Curtin, 2006). Middle school teachers can incorporate visuals into lessons: drawings, posters, storyboards (Allison & Rehn, 2007), semantic mapping (Rubinstein-Avila, 2003), pictures, objects demonstrations (Williams, 2001), concept maps (Teemant et al., 2000) and graphic organizers (Cummins et al., 2012).

For my classroom and my school this knowledge is a good foundation to build from as we begin to scaffold for our EAL students in our classrooms. They are not new strategies nor unfamiliar strategies to me but they are now outlined in a new context that I can knowingly and strategically apply to teaching EAL students as suggested by Teemant et al (2000).

When Sayid first entered my classroom I had him look at pictures and access his first language through his translator to write in English. However, Alena did not have access to a translator nor a Persian-English dictionary and at the time I did not seek either out for her, as I did not understand its importance. She was included from the beginning with the activities of the classroom and the cooperative learning that took place in the classroom and I did provide her scaffolding ahead of time to the academic language in order to support her learning within the groups. Monica, on the other hand, understood that working with her peers would further her learning and it had, but it also hid her difficulties from her teachers. Once I was aware of the difficulties she was facing, I was able to more closely monitor her learning. As her peers continued to support her during cooperative learning activities, it was my job to assess her

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individual progress and add in the additional supports her peers did not address. Understanding how important these scaffolding strategies are for my EAL students, I began to reflect on my current practices and make changes to the scaffolding provided to my EAL students.

Along with the instructional scaffolding strategies, Cummins (2014) included the role of students' cultures, specifically, connecting curriculum to students' lives and instruction that affirms students' intellectual, academic and personal identities when he created a framework for classroom instruction. Concentrating on a multilingual approach to instruction, researchers found success in connecting to students' lives and affirming their identity in mainstream classrooms with large populations of EAL students when students were encouraged to create multilingual stories enquiring into and reflecting on their own experiences (Giampapa, 2010; Ntelioglou, Fannin, Montanera, & Cummins, 2014; Taylor, Bernard, Garg, & Cummins, 2008).

Currently within my classroom my EAL student population is relatively small with 2-3 EAL students in a class of 25. Although I have within the past year encouraged students to create dual language stories, it was during a time when the students were pulled out of the classroom. They used the time to collaborate with one another in order to create the stories. I have also had students who have ask to write their poetry in two different languages, alternating their L1 and English throughout the different stanzas. I have not used a multilingual approach in whole class instruction; however, I see the possibilities for the future as our EAL population continues to increase.

The Role of iPad Technology

Investigating the potential role of iPad technology in the classroom, I looked to research on technology and language education. Several advantages for the inclusion of

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technology include increased engagement, collaborative learning enhancement and lowering learning anxiety levels. Barriers included lack of access, teachers' attitude and lack of effective training (Kalyanpur, & Kirmani, 2005; Riasati, Allahyar, & Tan, 2012). The iPad, commonly known as a tablet, and defined as a small portable computer activated by touching the screen (Collins, 2012) is one of the devices included in the overall category of Mobile Assisted Language Learning (M.A.L.L.). Research on M.A.L.L., before the introduction of the iPad in 2010, is limited and focused on the use of mobile technology such as PDAs, cellular phones, or iPods (Ally, Schafer, Cheung, McGreal, & Tin, 2007). "Recent research or review on mobile assisted language learning tends to focus on more detailed applications of newly emerging mobile technology, rather than given a broader point focusing on types of mobile device itself" (Yang, 2013). These applications included short message service (SMS), Microblogging (i.e. Twitter) and the use of Global Positioning System (GPS). Implications from these studies suggest that M.A.L.L. could reduce learners' anxiety and promote their motivation and confidence (Yang, 2013). With the introduction of the iPad in 2010, researchers began investigating this new technology with respect to its usefulness in various educational settings. Advantages of the iPad include cooperative learning opportunities where flexible groupings are possible, as opposed to fixed computer stations, as well as group dynamics being more interactive and supportive (Meurant, 2010; Brown, Castelloano, Hughes, & Worth, 2012). Another advantage was the multifunctional capability of the iPad. Students had the capability of creating presentations using a variety of media resources all on the same device (Brown et al, 2012) and the visual and audio information available on portable devices like the iPad will bridge the gap between native and non-native oral English (Kumar, 2013). Barriers included unfamiliarity with software, Wi-Fi connectivity and hardware issues (Brown et al., 2012).

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Using The Research to Move Forward

As I reflect on the research, I see my experiences as a teacher, graduate student, and a leader through a clearer set of lenses. At times, my experiences in my different roles are separate and distinct. During other times, they overlap and all three roles are intertwined. My experiences as a teacher and a leader led me to my experience as a graduate student. My experience as a graduate student introduced me to the research on second language acquisition for my classroom and my school. As my knowledge increases with each article read, my understanding of the length of time for second language acquisition, the role of culture, effective instructional strategies, and the role of technology in language education grows. Using a narrative inquiry approach, my goal is to reflect on my past teaching experiences, and to analyze my current experiences as a graduate student, a classroom teacher, and a school leader in order to inform my future school experiences.

CHAPTER THREE: NARRATIVE INQUIRY AS A RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

a graduate student
seeking knowledge
searching for answers
for my students
my school

changing roles
to complete a puzzle
missing pieces
using stories
my stories
my experiences

searching
through different lenses
teacher, leader, learner
reflections
 journals
 stories

a three-dimensional space
a framework
to examine
reflect upon
and interpret

looking for
common threads
tensions
shifts in thought
to create new meaning

finding answers
for my students
my school
finding pieces
of the puzzle
my goal
my hope

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Each student walks into my classroom with a different story to tell. Each of their stories is filled with struggle, achievement, sadness and joy. Giving the students opportunities to share their stories is an important part of making meaningful connections with my students. Through shared stories we learn about each other's families, activities, disappointments, hopes and wonders. Stories are told in my classroom to entertain, to teach, to affirm one's identity, and to make sense of the world.

Each teacher walks into a school with a different story to tell. Each of their stories is filled with struggle, achievement, sadness and joy. As teachers we tell our stories around the staffroom table, the photocopier and during hall duty. We typically do not put time aside to share our stories in our busy day as the constraints of the classroom pull us away from one another. Opportunities to share stories to entertain, to teach, to affirm one's identity, and to make sense of the world are many times lost to the demands of timetabling, preparing for lessons and teaching our students.

Each day I walk into my school with a different story to tell. My story is composed of the struggles, achievements, sadness and joy of a wife, mother, daughter, sister, friend, teacher, graduate student and leader. The story I live by today has been shaped by my past experiences. Each day new experiences continue to influence my understanding of who I am in each of the roles I own. The chapter of being a teacher, student and leader is the part of my story that I am reflecting on. Through inquiring into my experiences as a middle school classroom teacher, graduate student, and school leader, I am able to gain a deeper understanding of who I am today. The story of who I am today will influence the story of who I will be tomorrow.

Searching for Answers

I enrolled at the university to learn from others about Second Language Education and with all the expertise at the university, the course-based route made more sense to me as I had many questions that needed answers. At the end of my first year as I was completing my analytic literature review on ESL student motivation, I was disheartened to find the answers were not found in the literature that pertained to my middle school students:

I could say that in terms of Motivation and SLA research there needs to be more longitudinal and experimental studies in Canada. I could say more studies involving school age students at the elementary and middle school level are needed. I could also say that more studies on additional relevant theories of motivation and development should be researched: instrumental theories, equity theories and social cognition theories. I could say all this, but the results of all these “future” studies will not put me any further ahead in discovering what motivates the students in my classroom and how I can use the findings to increase their English language learning.

I will say, as a classroom teacher with EAL students from Nigeria, Russia, The Philippines, India, Albania and Korea, all this research has taught me is that individual students have individual motives and individual learning preferences. What I need to do is to spend some more quality time with my EAL students: finding out their likes and dislikes, their wants, needs, and desires, and to use this knowledge when supporting them in their learning of English. If I want motivational research to transfer to my students in the classroom, the place to start should be with my students.

(Analytic Literature Review, April 2012)

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While the literature did not give me the answers, it did however give me a place to start with my students by highlighting that the classroom learning environment (Rossiter, 2003; Hashimoto, 2002; Noels, Pelletier & Vallerand, 2000; Nikolov, 1999) and classroom teachers' motivational practices (Cheng & Dornyei, 2007; Guilloteux & Dornyei, 2008) are key factors of EAL student motivation. This discovery led me to take a closer look into my own classroom environment and practices to better meet the needs of my students. It also brought to light that many of the answers I was seeking were not going to be found by simply attaining knowledge from others. I had to learn from others' experiences, transfer the learning into my classroom-teaching situation and evaluate how the practices affect my own students, individually and as a whole.

The experience of not finding the answers to my specific questions in the motivational research literature led me to be more critical of the readings and assignments undertaken. Literature reviews became narrowly focused and directly related to EAL students in a middle school setting. Narrowly focusing research in a relatively new field of research, I soon realized, was an impossible task. I found myself having to go beyond the middle school classroom in order to find research articles that related to the topics of program implementation and instructional strategies.

As I reflected on the literature reviews I had written I came to realize that in order to transfer the knowledge to my classroom and my school, I may have to change how I approach my next steps in my Master's program. This experience led me to question that maybe the course-based route was not the best route for me. I needed to learn how to address the needs of EAL students in my own school by inquiring into my experiences within the specific environments of my classroom and school. This awakening led me to Narrative Inquiry, a

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research methodology that encouraged this process. This new awakening to narrative possibilities led me to change how I perceived my location of learning in my master's program. Instead of being a graduate student engaged in research at the university, my route changed to a graduate student engaged in research at her own school.

What is Narrative Inquiry?

In order to search for the answers to my research puzzle and inquire into my past, present and future experiences as a classroom teacher, graduate student, and school leader within my classroom and my school, I used narrative inquiry as my research methodology. According to Connelly and Clandinin (2006),

People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are and they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in the current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experiences of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular view of experience as phenomenon under study. (p. 477)

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative methodology of research that allows individuals to investigate their research puzzles through inquiring into their own lived stories. Through a process of reflection within a three-dimensional narrative inquiry space (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) narrative inquirers use the stories to teach and inform others.

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The three-dimensional narrative inquiry space. While investigating their research puzzles narrative inquirers are placed within a three-dimensional space of temporality, sociality and place. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest,

This set of terms creates a metaphorical three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, with temporality along one dimension, the personal and social along a second dimension, and place along a third. Using this set of terms, any particular inquiry is defined by this three-dimensional space: studies have temporal dimensions and address temporal matters; they focus on the personal and the social in a balance appropriate to the inquiry; and they occur in specific places or sequences of places. (p. 50)

It is within this framework that inquirers set themselves along with their lived and told stories in order to examine, reflect upon, and interpret their experiences in hopes of creating new meaning.

The first dimension in which researchers place themselves in is **temporality**. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) place temporality as a central dimension in the inquiry process: “When we see an event, we think of it not as a thing happening at that moment but as an expression of something happening over time. Any event, or thing, has a past, a present as it appears to us, and an implied future” (p. 29). My experiences as a middle school teacher spans over 17 years. My experiences as a middle school leader spans over 13 years and my experiences as a graduate student began in September 2011. These past experiences through three different lenses at different points in time shaped my current lived stories in the 2013-2014 school year and in turn create new possibilities for the future.

The second dimension of the inquiry space, **sociality**, combines the personal and social experiences of the inquirer. Through this dimension, experiences became more defined as I

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focused on the stories through the lens of a teacher, graduate student and a leader within my school landscape. Paying attention to the surrounding social factors and people while acknowledging personal feelings, hopes and desires deepened my understanding of my stories lived and told. My thoughts, experiences, and hopes for the future were important to this research. My voice as a graduate student, classroom teacher and school leader could be heard through the narrative process and was not lost in a statistical number written down on a page of the number of teachers who are seeking to improve their classroom practices.

The third dimension, **place**, described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) “attends to the specific concrete physical and topological boundaries of inquiry landscapes” (p. 51). When I considered place within the three dimensional framework, images of my classroom and school appeared to me as the location of my inquiry space. However this change of place from the university to the classroom space created new tensions for me. This change led me to a pathway within a maze that I had not yet encountered. Navigating through this maze I found new pathways to explore as well as unexpected barriers. Using an autobiographical narrative inquiry I was able to learn, change, and grow as a teacher, leader, and graduate student in the space of my classroom and my school community. Clandinin (2013) explains,

The three commonplaces specify dimensions of an inquiry and are central to the conceptual framework for narrative inquiry. Commonplaces are places that need to be explored in undertaking a narrative inquiry. Attending to experience through attending to all three common places simultaneously, is, in part, what distinguishes narrative inquiry from other methodologies. (p. 38)

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Living in the Midst. “As we work within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space, we learn to see ourselves as always in the midst – located somewhere along the dimensions of time, place, the personal, and the social; we see ourselves as in the middle of a nested set of stories – ours and theirs” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 63).

I call my classroom my second home: a place to grow, a place to learn and a place to relax. This home has been shared with my students and colleagues for over 17 years. My hope for my students and colleagues who share this space is that they too find my classroom a welcoming place, where they can grow and learn along with me, day after day, year after year. In my second home I have welcomed over 800 students and 90 colleagues to share my classroom space, and share stories of past experiences, family and school life, current issues, hopes and dreams for the future.

The Narrative Inquiry Process

Entering the inquiry field. Each start to a new school year brings with it new expectations, new tensions and new stories. As I entered the new school year I paid attention to how my classroom environment changed and evolved as I reflected on my past university courses and inquired into new methods, used new strategies and reflected with a new appreciation for the EAL students in my class. As a school leader I focused on the examples that I set, the attitudes conveyed and the responses to my colleagues’ questions and concerns, as I journeyed through the 2013-2014 school year with them. “When researchers enter the field, they experiences shifts and changes, constantly negotiating, constantly reevaluating, and maintaining flexibility and openness to an ever changing landscape” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 71). I awakened to the shifts and changes within my classroom and school

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environment while I negotiated through the different mazes at my school, encountered new challenges, considered different alternatives and discovered innovative routes through.

Creating field texts. Upon entering the Master's program at the university in September of 2011 I took my advisor's advice and started writing journals of my thoughts and experiences related to my EAL students, my classroom and my course work. These journals were completed every few months to record my goals, feelings and questions. For some of my university classes, journals were required to be completed weekly, for which I am grateful, as I began to fall into a rhythm of writing and this has allowed me the opportunity to reflect back on my experiences and make adjustments for the future.

Since December of 2012, my journals became more frequent as I purchased an iPad and took it to school with me everyday. This iPad was linked to my computer as well as my iPhone so the journal entries could be accessed and added to from different media sources and were linked together through one application.

Beginning the 2013-2014 school year my iPad was my constant companion; it was where I shared my experiences, my thoughts and feelings, and my concerns. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explore how field texts assist memory to fill in the richness, nuance, and intricacy of the lived stories and the landscape. Throughout the school day I used my iPad to make quick notes of experiences in my classroom, my coteaching classrooms and my school environment as I lived in the midst of my research. As new experiences needed to be documented I would write a brief explanation of the event as a reminder to write about the experience. When time was found at lunch or after school I would write about the experience emphasizing the time, place and the social factors around the event. Once the event was

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written down I would reread the event and underneath the notes I would explain my feelings about the event, my thoughts, my questions, and possible ways to proceed forward. Over the course of the 2013-2014 school year along with my observations about different experiences, I photographed my classroom space throughout the year, which also provided insight into physical changes I made within the classroom. Along with the recording of classroom observations, I used department meeting agenda notes, leadership meeting notes, and notes on informal collaboration with colleagues to help me understand the experiences and influence of a department head and school leader. These were the field notes that I wrote, read, re-read and inquired into during my search for meaning. Inquiring into the field notes allowed me to develop a deeper understanding of the events and the impact they had on my current story.

Composing research texts. Towards the end of the 2013-2014 school year I began the process of composing my research texts. First, I had to print out all my field notes contained on my iPad. Once printed, I had to read all the notes and then I began to arrange the field notes in thematic piles on my dining room table. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) advise,

We need to make sure that we read and reread all of the field texts and in some way sort them, so we know what field texts we have. This involves careful coding of journal entries, field notes, documents and the rest, with notation of dates, contexts for the composition of the field texts, characters involved, perhaps topics dealt with, and so forth. (p. 131)

As I read through the first few field notes, I thought about the dimensions of sociality, what I was doing at the time, and the personal and social conditions the note was written about and placed them on the table with a sticky note. As I read through each note I continued to reflect

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on the dimensions of sociality and tried to connect it with a theme that was already on the table, if it didn't fit, I created a new pile (Creswell, 2012). When I finished somewhat organizing my field texts I had 20 different piles. Some piles had many papers; some only had one. I then reread the ones that only had one or two pages and tried to see if they actually did fit into one of the other piles on the table. Over the next few weeks my field text piles changed from 20 piles to 16 to 7 and then to 5 piles. The main themes woven throughout the 2013-2014 school year were:

- iPad – the pros and the cons (12 field notes)
- Role of culture in the classroom (25 field notes)
- Instructional strategies (13 field notes)
- Co-teaching: teaching strategies and observations (18 field notes)
- Collaboration in the Middle School environment (16 field notes)

Once the 5 main themes were identified, I then sorted the stacks of papers within the dimensions of space. Three distinct spaces were identified: my classroom space, coteaching space and the school environment space. Once the field texts were sorted, I selected each set of notes and began organizing the notes into the third dimension of temporality. Paying attention to the temporality of the field text: the past, present and future implications of the event.

I wrote the following research journal regarding the collection of field texts on the iPad.

As I look over my field texts in the pile marked iPads, I began to sort the papers in time order starting from September to June. I reread the notes again looking for any significant threads that were woven through the articles. Many of the notes reflected how the iPad allowed for the infusion of specific teaching strategies. The iPad notes focused on classroom lessons and how the iPad made the incorporation of specific

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strategies much easier than in the past. Strategies like the use of visuals, cooperative learning, access to academic language and the use of first language. These were the strategies that I focused my September presentation on to the teachers when discussing ways to use the iPad in the classroom. The iPad notes also focused on some of the difficulties the EAL students faced when using this tool as their only writing tool. When I began writing my research notes I actually started with my last note from June 11, 2014. It was fresh in my mind as I read over the notes and I could still visualize the students' faces as they handed in their beloved iPads. So I began at the end of the year and then reflected back to September to my first note of September, which was my presentation notes to the teachers at the first staff meeting of the year. However, the presentation by itself did not make sense as I felt it needed background information as to why I wrote it. So I went further back into my journal notes from the end of August in order to further explain my presentation. I selected to write about a specific cooperative learning experience as it really stood out to me that this was an experience that could only happen with an iPad. The iPad allowed for all four of the learning strategies in one moment in time. Many of my next field notes also outlined the issue with the writing app on the iPad, Pages. I felt this was a significant piece to write about because once the issue with the app became known to me, my EAL students' writing increased significantly. They took more ownership of their writing using my desktop computer and a Word document, as they were able to see their mistakes and correct them before they handed in their work. The change in their writing skills using Word vs. Pages was a very important discovery in the advancement of the learners' skills. I concluded this section by stating that the iPad was a valuable tool to the

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students and while the writing app proved to be a disadvantage to the students, it could be overcome. (Research Journal, June 12, 2014)

Once my research notes on each of the themes were completed, my next task was to organize my notes in order to write my research texts. I chose to use the same categories as in the narrative beginnings: classroom teacher, school leader and graduate student. I then organized my research notes using a framework based on temporality: completing one theme before moving on to the next. This allowed for the reader to engage with the temporality of each theme within the research texts from start to finish. After this process I decided that I would use the category “graduate student” as the introduction to my findings as my themes all fell into the categories of “classroom teacher” or “school leader”. I continued to look for patterns, narrative threads, tensions, and themes either within or across my experiences and in a social setting (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I began to write my research notes with the themes that fell under the classroom teacher category first, then continued on with the themes under school leader. These themes in the categories of teacher and leader were organized using the framework of place. I included coteaching within the school environment space so I was left with my classroom (teacher) and the school environment (leader).

As I began again to review my research notes, I reflected on the themes, asked questions, and looked for meaning. As I read through the notes, the meaning of the experiences changed as I was able to understand to a deeper level how and why the new experiences developed from past experiences and how the impact of the newer experiences impacted my current experiences as a classroom teacher and school leader. I repeatedly went back and forth between the field notes and the research notes on each theme and began writing

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my interim text (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). As I continued the process of restorying: gathering stories, analyzing them for key elements and placing them in chronological order (Creswell, 2012), it was the inquiry, rewriting and the continued reflection of the experiences that led to the creation of new understanding and my final research texts. In this back and forth process of narrative analysis, I constructed the narrative accounts that I present in the next chapter (Kissling, 2014). Through the narrative inquiry process I was able to use my own professional landscape to reveal insight to my research puzzle through a retelling of my lived stories.

Ethical Considerations in Narrative Inquiry

As I looked back on my early stories of experience with EAL students, the personal journals created during my first two years of my Master's program, and throughout my field notes of the 2013-2014 school year, I encountered many names embedded in the notes as a reflection of the social dimension within the stories. Also embedded within the journals and field notes were my personal reactions, thoughts and feelings I have documented while reflecting on the stories I have experienced. However, my research texts only highlight the issues that emerged and my own reactions to the moments of tension and the moments of awakening. Whereas my early stories reflect my struggles and uncertainty as a classroom teacher with EAL students, my later stories reflect the many changes I have been through as a classroom teacher and school leader taking her Masters in Second Language Education. The current stories of the 2013-2014 school year reflect my experiences, thoughts and feelings as a classroom teacher and school leader who is focused on improving EAL programming within her classroom and her school.

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As we retell stories, that is, inquire into them, we move beyond regarding stories as fixed entities and begin to retell our stories. In the inquiry process, we work within the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space to ‘unpack’ the lived and told stories. We restory ourselves and perhaps begin to shift the institutional, social, and cultural narratives in which we are embedded. (Clandinin, 2013, p.34)

It is within this framework of the three-dimensional narrative inquiry space that I set myself along with my lived and told stories in order to examine, reflect upon, and interpret my past and current experiences as a middle school teacher in Manitoba in hopes of creating new meaning. My inquiry into my experiences, struggles, and accomplishments within my classroom and my school along with my growth and changes as a teacher and leader helped to uncover new pathways toward finding answers to my research puzzle and creating a more inclusive classroom and school environment for EAL learners. In the following chapter, I share my research text in the form of narrative accounts on the 2013-2014 school year.

**CHAPTER FOUR: NARRATIVE ACCOUNTS OF MY JOURNEY WITHIN
THE LABYRINTH**

As I reflect back on the 2013-2014 school year I discover several themes that emerge as winding pathways through the different mazes of classroom teacher, department head and graduate student. These mazes however are connected: all part of one big labyrinth. The different themes: The iPad, Materials, Cultural Awareness, Coteaching and Collaboration became pathways lined with my stories. At times, the pathways within the different mazes cross over and connect with another maze. Many times understanding how to navigate through a pathway in one maze assisted me in navigating new pathways in a different maze. Throughout the year my stories guided me and they became markers on a path; the reason to look for new routes, continue forward, or double back and begin again. The following narrative accounts are stories of my lived experiences in the different mazes of the middle school labyrinth during the 2013-2014 school year.

Exploring the Maze of the Classroom Teacher

The iPad: A new pathway to explore. I must continue to investigate new pathways in order to move forward in a changing world.

As I sat at the lake on the long weekend in September I was reminded that I had to give a presentation on the use of iPads to the rest of the staff in a few days. As I began my notes I thought back to the EAL articles that I read during my coursework and I decided to combine the knowledge I had learned through the articles with the use of the iPads. I began my presentation with the four most recommended instructional strategies for EAL students from

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the articles: Use of first language, teaching of academic language, use of visuals, and cooperative learning.

After an explanation of the strategies I continued my presentation by explaining how the iPad will assist the teachers infuse the instructional strategies into their classrooms. Allowing the students to use their first language becomes easier with the Google Translate application downloaded on their iPads. In order for students to gain understanding of unknown words and new academic language, students can use the translator app to bridge the words back to their first language. Google Translate offers free text translation for 70 languages and speech-in-text in 17 languages. This app also offers users the opportunity to listen to translations spoken aloud in 40 languages. The keyboard on the iPad can be changed to wide variety of languages to allow the students to translate to and from their first language. As well, use of visuals becomes less complicated for the teachers to assist students with finding appropriate images as students have instant access to images and visuals on their iPads. Finally, encouraging students to work in cooperative groups with the iPads could promote and scaffold the learning of the EAL students through one on one peer and group discussions.

The divisional initiative. I first learned of the division's new digital initiative just after spring break 2013. Every middle school student in the division was to receive an iPad mini for the 2013-2014 school year. The initiative was in place to enhance the students learning environments by providing innovative ways to be creative and critical thinkers. The students would have access to the iPads not only at school but they were able to take them home each night. As the 2012-2013 year drew to a close and news spread of the new digital initiative to students and their parents, a mix of excitement and anxiety filled the school. At our last staff

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meeting in June it was suggested we set time aside at each staff meeting for the following year to share with one another ideas for using the iPads in the classroom and someone needed to share for the first staff meeting on September 4th, 2013. I volunteered. I was excited by the opportunities the iPad provides to the EAL students and I wanted to share my knowledge and experiences with the rest of the staff so they could in turn share it with their students. I was fortunate to have had my own iPad for the last six months so I was familiar with its capabilities and I had experience using it in a classroom with many EAL students.

Experiences with an iPad. I remember during a co-teaching period last year I was asked by my colleague to work with one of the EAL students in class to see what main topics she had been able to understand on the current unit and which topics needed more attention. I came to class with iPad in hand and sat down with a student as she read through the assignment, asked questions and struggled to understand what she was being asked to answer. At one point the student became very confused with a particular question. I used my iPad to bring up an image of the object the questions was asking about and the student used the information from the visual provided and continued on. She then asked another question that I did not understand. She seemed to struggle for the language to ask the question and soon enough we were at a stand still. She didn't have enough English to ask the question and I didn't know enough of her first language to help her. When our repeated attempts at communication failed, I finally asked if she wanted to use the iPad to help her. I went into the settings controls in my iPad and added her first language to my keyboards. Her eyes lit up and she typed in her question using her first language into a search engine. She selected one of the sites and began reading the information provided to her in her first language. She began

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writing out her answer, I assumed she was able to find the answer she wanted. We continued on with the assignment with the iPad between us. The iPad had allowed this EAL student access to using her first language, visuals and the academic language in the unit of study. It provided a bridge between her limited English, my lack of knowing her first language and the task at hand. This experience showed me how the technology of the iPad was able to help both the teacher and the student work towards new understandings. I was very excited about how the new iPad initiative in the division could help the EAL students as they progress through the stages of language acquisition.

Preparing for the iPads. On Sept 4th, I delivered my presentation to the staff. I shared stories of my experiences of using my iPad with EAL students to illustrate the support the iPads could offer to our students. I was encouraged by the response of the teachers to the presentation and I looked forward to seeing the impact of the iPads on our EAL students. Early in October one of the teachers came up to me in the staff room to tell me about finding a Farsi translation app on her iPad and how she used it to communicate with one of her students with very limited English. She was excited that her iPad had finally given her a communication device. I was thrilled that she was so excited and using her iPad with her EAL students. While the teachers had had their iPads since the end of last year, the students did not receive their iPads until mid October. For the first few days the students spent time getting to know the iPads, learning about applications, reviewing rules of use, and learning other basics. Soon enough the iPads became incorporated into their daily routine as they used the variety of applications on their iPads to write, document, record and present their classroom learning.

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Creation of a new workspace. One of the changes I noticed immediately with the iPads was the change in the students' work environment. As the students worked in cooperative groups, they would look for information on two of their iPads, and record the information on a third iPad. Some groups who had EAL students left their iPads free so they could use Google translate if needed. iPads on a table became much more interactive than the larger laptop computers. Students would place the iPad on the table for all to see, and they would pass the iPads back and forth to point out new information. Three to four students could all see the information on the iPad at the same time instead of crowding around one side of the table to see around the backs of the laptops. They were able to work in cooperative groups easily and discuss their research and questions through a shared learning space.

New obstacles to overcome. As the year progressed, the students were becoming proficient with the use of the translator apps and the variety of applications on the iPad. However, my EAL students' written work on the iPad seemed to be at a stand still. Grammatical errors and spelling errors were common throughout the written work and I was at a loss to explain how the quality of written work was not improving. In February I finally discovered the answer when one of the EAL students sent me her work from her iPad as a Word document instead of the Pages document: the writing application on the iPad. I opened the document on my computer, reviewed her writing and then called the student to my desk. I showed the student all the grammatical errors underlined in green on the computer. She seemed surprised. I asked her for her iPad and opened her Pages document. There were no alerts on her page. Errors including spacing after periods and commas, missing capitals letters at the start of a sentence, improper noun-verb agreement as well as many spelling errors did not

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flag as an issue on the iPad. As a Word document on my desktop computer she could see the underlined errors on her writing piece. She went to work correcting the errors and I had her explain why she was correcting them as they went. She understood the reason for most of the corrections and those she did not, I explained to her. The student had assumed that errors would be flagged on her Pages document but they were not. She had corrected what she could find on her own and sent the writing to me. She had also allowed autocorrect to fill in words or phrases and assumed the iPad knew best. After that day, all my EAL students were asked to send me their writing as a Word document and they were given time to edit it on my desktop computer before they handed it in. While the same offer stood for all my students, the EAL students used my computer to edit their work every time they had a writing assignment.

The change in the quality of their written work increased dramatically over the next month, more so than during the first six months of school. Even as the documents came to my computer I noted that the overall errors were less. The students were conscious of their specific errors and they tried to correct as many as they could before they sent their work to me. It almost became a game as they would ask to check their work and we would note which errors no longer appeared. They needed and wanted the feedback from the Word application that Pages did not give them. As the students themselves noticed the difference in their writing after using the Word application on my desktop, I mentioned my observations to the other teachers so they could offer the same support.

A sad farewell. When the day came in June for the students to hand in their iPads, the sad expressions on their faces told the story of how much the students would miss the iPads. They entered the classroom and madly started their final check on their Twitter and Instagram

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accounts. For some of the students the iPad had become a constant companion: completing class work during the day, tweeting and following friends on social media sites during lunch hour and afterschool as well as working on classroom assignments, watching you-tube and playing games at night.

Over the past year, for my EAL students, the iPad became a valuable tool to bridge the gaps in their understanding and to support their learning in the mainstream environment. At this time, while there may be an issue with one application for writing, the benefits of the multiple keyboards, translation apps, instant visuals, and cooperative learning space where student have face to face interactions outweighs the inconvenience of using two digital devices to complete an edit on a writing selection. As I continue to explore the pathway of iPad technology within the mainstream classroom I am encouraged by its potential for supporting the EAL students and I look forward to learning more of its capabilities.

Instructional Strategies: Tensions and discoveries on a path to understanding.

There are times when I continue down a path as it is the only way I know. It's not until there is a fork in the path that I hesitate, evaluate, reflect and choose.

During a resource meeting at the beginning of October one of the Educational Support teachers handed me some EAL materials and said I should look at them and think about ordering them for my students. I briefly looked at the books, slid them back across the table to her and firmly informed her I was not looking for materials at this time. She seemed taken back by my response and suggested that I needed to have appropriate materials for my EAL students. I refused the materials again and we continued on with the meeting. Sitting at home later that evening I realized I was really upset about the materials comment made in the

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meeting. The teacher was only trying to help but at the time, materials were not the help that I needed. How was I to explain the learning and knowledge I have gained over the last few years has led me to a new place where I know materials is not the only answer to my EAL students. How does a person explain how they have grown beyond a material need?

The tension begins. Just one year earlier I was in a very different place when it came to the topic of materials.

A teacher from another school came over today to look through some of my resources, as she needed help in programming for one of her EAL students with very limited English. I began pulling down all the binders from my shelves I had on beginning EAL reading and writing programs hoping to find something to help her. I finally found some booklets for Spanish students learning English. The three booklets progress through different vocabulary skills using Spanish as a bridge to English. The materials would give the student support in developing specific vocabulary. His learning now had a chance to continue while she figured out her next steps. She left the school with the books, holding onto them like they were a precious gift, promising to return them as soon as she could. This exchange reminded me of the Clair (1995) article I read earlier this month about teachers in the mainstream wanting materials and quick fixes, which she interpreted as teachers not understanding the intricacies of learning English. Today, this was certainly not the case. The teacher had a background of teaching EAL students. Also, when a student enters a mainstream classroom with very limited English skills, what are teachers supposed to do? Materials in this case do fit the need. The student is now able to learn some basic

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English skills scaffolded by his first language and the teacher is given a few days to try to create and plan appropriate programming. Is it better to have the student sit and learn little or use materials and learn more? Why would Clair conclude that material requests are an indicator of teachers' desire for easy answers and emphasizes their lack of understanding of second language acquisition? (Personal Journal, Oct. 26, 2012)

Clair's conclusions had really bothered me when I first read the article. I couldn't understand how requesting materials was an indicator of lack of understanding. Perhaps it bothered me so much because I was at that place last October of asking for materials myself. I wrote my journal as a response to Clair's article to prove to myself that she was wrong in her conclusions. However, it was only a few months later that year when I asked my Language Arts department how I could help with their EAL students and the requests came back: Resources and Materials – that I had to sit down and think about Clair's article again.

On March 2, 2013, I wrote a new response to the Clair article.

My Hypothesis: Teachers who request materials are taking the first step in trying to meet the needs of their students. They are acknowledging that they are not currently meeting the needs of their students and they understand they need something more. Materials may be perceived to be an easy fix so this is what they ask for first. Their affective filter (Krashen, 1982) is up and at this point they are not open yet to learning about using a variety of EAL strategies in their classrooms. Once teachers have enough materials to get through the day, a sense of relief takes over and their affective filter lowers and they are able to begin to ask questions and open up to adapting their lessons to meet the needs of their students. Materials, then asking questions leads to the search for insight. (Personal Journal, March 2, 2013)

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Understanding the source. A year ago I was adamant that Clair's conclusions about material requests were wrong. Six months ago, after reviewing the repeated requests within my department for materials, I had to admit that there was a possibility that Clair's conclusions may indeed be accurate. I needed to reflect on my own understanding of second language learning and begin a search for answers. A literature review on instructional strategies for EAL learners gave me new insight and understanding to my questions. This insight into effective instructional strategies was shared with the rest of the staff at the beginning of the year when I gave the first iPad presentation. It was only one month after my presentation, when I was offered the materials at the resource meeting. The offer at the meeting brought the article and the tensions back to life. The tensions came out in the form of brief curt responses and refusal of materials. This time I took offense to the offer of materials, as if the person was insinuating that I was at the beginning of my journey when in my mind I am far beyond the beginning stages. The tension and reaction was all a result of my journey, not due to the innocent offer of materials from someone trying to help. I still feel uneasy when I think about the resource meeting, about how curt I was. Within a year, the knowledge and understanding from course work, literature reviews, and my experiences in school changed my view on materials and unfortunately I didn't realize the tension was still within me until I was offered the materials. I never did explain the reason for my reaction that day to the support person. I do know the next time materials are offered, I will accept them graciously with the understanding the intention is to help, not to judge.

Throughout the 2013-2014 year I received many requests for materials and resources from my department. This to me was encouraging as the teachers were acknowledging that they needed more support for their students. It took time for me to realize with Alena that

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involving the students in the daily activities of the classroom was a better approach than separate materials. My response to the requests for materials this year was “Yes, we have materials”, but through my coteaching time I knew I needed to lead the teachers to the understanding that materials are only the first part of the question of how to meet the needs of their students. Once teachers had materials in hand I needed to wait for the next step – the questions and the individual search for insight into their teaching practices. Co-teaching was valuable in providing me the opportunity to collaborate with my colleagues and address specific questions and concerns. When I compare the amount of support my colleagues have today to what I had for Sayid then, I am amazed. I had no one to go to for help and I had to create materials on my own. Teachers today have a Manitoba Education document to guide them, a divisional EAL teacher to support them, and I am here as well, supporting teachers as a co-teacher and ESL specialist, with materials as needed.

Moving forward towards acceptance. When I reflect on the shelves of EAL resources I have collected over the last few years, I have to laugh, as I have not used one of the resources this year with my EAL students. Instead I have fully incorporated the EAL students into the classroom lessons using the instructional strategies I have learned to make them contributing learners in the classroom. I have materials, yes, as it was my first step. As I move forward do I need my materials? Yes, I need them on my shelf to lend to others, and perhaps just to see that they are there. They still comfort me; they were indeed the easy fix when I did not understand about the specific strategies I could be using to scaffold my students through the complexities of second language acquisition. However, for me they are no longer the answer to my question as to how to meet the needs of my EAL students. I could not have reached this new pathway

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without first traveling down the path lined with materials. One pathway of experience had led to the next and now I am keeping myself open to looking for new strategies, new ideas, and new technologies to help me support the EAL students in my classroom.

Culture: Venturing down a winding pathway. Sometimes the pathway I have chosen is rocky and unsteady. I choose to continue not because it is easy but because I can see the potential of the path leading to a magnificent place.

On the back wall of my room I have a large bulletin board with “Children have the right to practice their own culture, religion and language.” Over the last few years each student in my class has been asked to add their home country, religion, and first language to the backboard if it is not already listed. It is a conversation piece for my students when they first enter their homeroom class and they see all the cultures of the students who have been in the class before them. I started the board three years ago, as I wanted to show the students the diversity: the variety of cultures, languages and religions, within the classroom. After this year however, I saw the impact of continuing the discussion of the classroom’s diversity into the lessons in the classroom, and not leaving it on the wall. This is an area I still need to continue to focus on as I continue to look for the opportunities to incorporate my students’ backgrounds and cultures in the classroom environment.

Whose worldview? One of the changes I made this year was to encourage all students to reflect on their backgrounds as they make connections to the lessons in class. During a Social Studies discussion on how our worldviews influence our perceptions of the world around us, I involved my students in contributing their thoughts and insights into what has affected their

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own personal world view. In the past I would have glided over the aspect of culture in worldview and I would have referred to culture as Canadian culture. This time, I acknowledged the diversity of cultures within the classroom and encourage students to contribute on paper or aloud how their culture has influenced them, through their celebrations, religion, and traditions. With this change of encouraging the students to refer to their own specific culture, more students than in the past were willing to share their reflections and experiences with the class; others who choose not to share openly did write about their reflections or shared them with me privately after class. My students are very proud of their cultural backgrounds and in the past I do not think that I provided the open and supportive environment to encourage them to talk about their culture and to share their experiences.

Incorporating students' backgrounds and cultures. I began to look at my different lessons and activities through a new set of multicultural lenses. Personalized family crests, Egyptian sarcophaguses, and Middle Age shields all became a canvas to display symbols of the students' backgrounds and cultures. Writing prompts now reflected family traditions, favourite holidays, as well as, positive and negative changes within a student's life. Many of the EAL students wrote about their experiences coming to Canada and the changes they encountered: first Air flight, first time with snow, first new home, and new friends. Some wrote about experiencing Halloween for the first time and how strange it was, while others shared their stories of the family they had left behind and hoped to visit some day. I could see within the classroom, the more personal the connection the students were able to make with their assignments, the more engaged they became. The content of the stories became even more

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important to the students when they were able to share a glimpse into their lives with the other students through group sharing or oral presentations.

Sharing our celebrations. Added to my side bulletin board this year is a new saying “We celebrate...” and from the discussions of worldview at the beginning of the year, the students were encouraged to add the special days throughout the year their families celebrate. One day, while one of the students was looking at the different celebrations, I was asked when Eid was. I was unable to answer the question so I asked the class if someone knew and sure enough someone did. I was then asked if it would be on the announcements. I answered it would be if someone writes out an announcement and takes it to the administration to have them read it.

The school so readily acknowledges holidays or days of celebration like Halloween, Christmas, Valentines Day and St Patrick’s Day, as has been our tradition. But our school population is changing and we need to make a conscious effort to include the celebrations of all the students. I encouraged my students to write announcements for the school to share their celebrations in both their first language and then in English. For the first time in my 17 years the school acknowledged Eid, Hanukah, Kwanzaa and the Chinese New Year on the announcements. The students were thrilled to have their celebrations recognized and once again I saw the impact of acknowledging the diversity within my classroom and school, and not leaving it on the wall.

Shifting responsibilities. As I was becoming more aware of the cultures within my classroom I soon realized that it was not just my classroom I needed to be responsible for. The

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school's Remembrance Day Service is one of the responsibilities that I take on each year. A few days before the event I was reviewing the speeches and the flow of the service when I had an "Oh no!" moment. One of my speakers was a Grade 7 student who was also listed as the one to lay the wreath on the cross in the gym. This student was Muslim and my next thought was "What have I done?"

I remembered a few years earlier, when I was engaged in a very informative exchange with one of my students. He was writing about his uncle, who had passed away, and he wanted to draw a picture to go along with his story. He was struggling to come up with an idea to draw to represent his uncle's death. I suggested lightly that he could draw a cross. The look of disgust on his face was instant. Had I known then that Muslims do not recognize the cross or Jesus as symbols of Faith, I would not have made that suggestion. I listened quietly as the student unleashed his views of Jesus vs. Mohammed and how we have very different views on Faith. I thanked the student for educating me on aspects of the Islamic Faith and vowed I would learn from this experience.

The memories came flooding back as I thought, what kind of position have I put this student in: to lay a wreath on a symbol that does not follow his beliefs? I was upset that I hadn't even considered the situation I was creating. I knew better, but that knowledge did not surface as I was creating the program. I thought about changing the student's role and switching him to another job. I had made the mistake and I should fix it. But then I realized I should meet with the student and explain. I spoke to the student about how I had overlooked his faith, apologized and offered to find him a different role in the service. I was ready to change roles and make adjustments to the program but I didn't. The student declined the new role and I learned that sometimes he chose to adjust to his surroundings and that he would be

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fine with laying the wreath on the cross. He thanked me for acknowledging his religion and offering him something different, but he was fine with the way things were. I was surprised by his reaction and his decision. However, on my Remembrance Day program I now have a note: Review roles with students and give choices! Next year in October as I begin to prepare for the Remembrance Day service I will look at this year's program, remember the story of the cross and change the way I approach creating a new program. Until next year I will keep in mind that I need to reflect on not only what I am responsible for within the classroom environment, but within the school environment as well.

Reflection of cultural influences. In early December as three large boxes were delivered to my room, my students stopped their work and waited with anticipation to see what was inside. I opened the first box slowly as I received groans and requests to hurry. When at last I pulled out one of the books and held it high for the students to see, a few groans of “books” filtered throughout the room. As I continued pulling out more books and held them for all to see, they became more interested and requests to read them soon followed. My selection of cross-cultural books had finally arrived. The books were ordered earlier in the school year to replace the picture books that I currently had in my room to read aloud to the students. When I took the time to look over the books I was reading to the class and thought about why I was reading them, I knew a change was needed.

I need to understand the impact of my own culture in my classroom before I can begin to appreciate the culture of others (McMahon, 2003; Slavit, Moore, & Maloney 2002). This summary statement of the two articles I read resonates with me. Until recently, I had believed that my culture did not impact my teaching. After reading the articles and then reflecting on my

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own background and culture, I had to acknowledge that my culture did impact my teaching. It impacted how I answered my student's question about Faith and using a cross and it impacted the books I read aloud to my students. The fairy tales, the fables, and children's stories I selected to read aloud to my students were all read with the belief that all students should know these stories. I grew up with these stories – the fact that students entered my classroom in Grade 7 and 8 and did not know the Ugly Duckling, Hansel and Gretel, Little Red Riding Hood etc., I believed was such a tragedy. So I read to them all the stories, fairy tales, nursery rhymes that I thought would fill the gaps of their childhood reading. The stories I grew up with were indeed a reflection of my culture – I just didn't realize it. Looking at my selection of books at the beginning of the year I recognized that the books were from my background, my culture. I may be 3rd generation Canadian, however the stories and nursery rhymes all came from European origins, my origins.

I had to move past the belief that what I grew up with, they should too. With assistance from a Divisional Innovative Grant I began building a set of Multicultural books for my classroom. My new books were based on fictional stories from Korea, China, Kenya, Japan, Afghanistan, as well as, Native Canadian fiction. These stories were selected to reflect the diversity of cultures within my classroom. As well, the grant allowed me to purchase similar books for the Grade 6 and the Grade 7 teachers so they too could read a wider variety of books to their classes. All the stories have a message that the students can learn from and being from a range of cultures, they can inference that all cultures have similar values of generosity, friendship, and acceptance. Added to my multicultural book set are a few of my books from my background. These stories however do not overshadow the others in number or importance. They are simply a part of the set. As I continued to explore celebrating the

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diversity of the cultures in my classroom, new possibilities pushed out into other classrooms in the school.

Towards the end of February a teacher came to ask if I had celebrated Black History Month, as one of her students had asked if they were going to celebrate it and she didn't have an answer. I said I had and I could lend her some wonderful picture books, informational readings and videos if she needed. She seemed relieved, as if I had given her permission to do something she wasn't sure she was supposed to do. A few weeks later when I went to collect the resources, she didn't have them as after she had used them, she had lent them to another teacher. I was thrilled to see how one teacher's experience impacted another, and how she had shared the resources with another teacher and they too were able to celebrate Black History Month with students. When we share our stories of experiences, the story of one can affect the experiences of another. These experiences influence how we create and shape our classroom environments for our students.

Creating authentic learning experiences. However, creating change in my classroom lead me down a path with obstacles that seemed too difficult to overcome. There was a time when I needed to share my struggles and doubts with others in order to assess my next move on the cultural pathway. Towards the end of the year, my Grade 7 students were selecting countries for their research projects on Europe and the Americas; the last cluster of the Manitoba outcomes in Grade 7 Social Studies. I had asked the students to select countries that they may have a connection with, but when the day came to inform me of their choices I was met at my desk by one of my students wearing a mischievous grin on her face. Her grin changed to a smile and then she pled her case for a change in the assignment. She wanted to

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research a country outside the boundaries of Europe and the Americas. She wanted to research and present a project on her country of birth. I explained to her the choice of countries was dictated by the curriculum, not myself. She stood tall and asked politely for an exception to the curriculum. I told her I would think about it over lunch and I would have an answer for her in the afternoon. She thanked me and went back to her desk. Within minutes, my desk was surrounded by three of my EAL students all with the same grin. I knew then the news had spread that someone may be able to choose a different country. I explained once again that I would have an answer after lunch.

For the first part of my lunch hour I sat in my room debating the requests. Yes, it made sense for students to select a country that they were interested in and if they chose a country outside the scope of the curriculum, what's the big deal? Well, the big deal was that I am the Social Studies department head. My job is to ensure the curricular outcomes are followed. How do I justify ignoring or changing the Manitoba outcomes when I expect my colleagues to follow them? I knew what I should do, but I needed more than my opinion to make the final decision. So I took my debate to the staffroom. Sitting in the staffroom during the lunch hour, I found several of the social studies teachers. I explained my dilemma and asked for their input and comments. After a lively discussion, I left the staffroom with a decision. My Grade 7 students entered the classroom that afternoon and once I had the students all at work I called the four students to my desk. Once again I explained the outcomes for the assignment were to address a country in Europe or the Americas. I saw the smiles begin to fade. I then explained how I took their requests to some of the other teachers and the decision was made that it would be more authentic and meaningful if they were able to choose their home country to research and so I was granting their requests. I saw the smiles back on their faces, high fives being

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exchanged, and I felt great. I knew what the right decision was the minute I saw that mischievous smile at my desk. But if I had questioned the right decision, would others on staff as well? The staffroom conversation brought many issues to the table but when I left with the consensus that learning was the goal and allowing student choice provided for more authentic and meaningful learning, I also left knowing that others on staff would now be able to make the right decision as well.

Cultural bias in the learning environment. While it has been very important for me to ensure that my lessons include my EAL students' culture, it has become just as important to ensure that my lessons do not rely on specific cultural knowledge. Perhaps the most difficult change has been scrutinizing the readings and assignments I use with my students to ensure that specific cultural background knowledge does not play a factor. I was surprised to find the number of references to fairytales, fables, Disney stories, or cultural celebrations in the visual prompts or writing activities that had used in the past. Even references to pop culture: Harry Potter, Star Wars, The Simpsons, all popped up in assignments or examples. I now looked at all my assignments and readings to see if there was a reliance on specific background knowledge – many times there was. I have reluctantly passed over many assignments, as I knew my EAL students would be at disadvantage. I hear myself saying, this would be great but... Sometimes I felt a sense of loss. Ignorance was bliss. It was easier not knowing. I have lost that innocence of not knowing. Would I go back? Never, but that doesn't mean that this new path is easier. Throughout the year, even at teacher in-services I found myself analyzing whether the assignments were free from cultural bias. Then I felt the tension of "Do I say something if they

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are? Do I ignore it? Is this the place to say?” Sometimes I did, sometimes I didn’t. I gauged the audience I was with and made the decision.

Throughout the year my students’ pride in their cultures shone through in their art, their poetry, and their journals. I never noticed it before... maybe I wasn’t looking for it. Maybe in the past I didn’t provide the environment that allowed them to feel comfortable enough to express their pride? This new path of cultural consideration I am journeying down has many twists and turns and I cannot see the end from where I stand now. I know the path will lead me to a much better place but I also understand there will continue to be obstacles that I need to navigate through. The journey down the path is just as important as the destination. When I finally emerge, I will know what it took to get to the end.

Crossing over to the School Leader Maze

Coteaching: Supporting teachers on their own journey. There are times when I needed guidance to continue progressing through the pathways and to point me in the right direction.

When I first met with the Language Arts department in September, I explained that I was allotted time again this year to co-teach with each of them. Unlike last year however, I was directed to spend 4-6 week blocks with one class at a time and not to divide my time up between the classes each week. I asked them to think about when they would want me throughout the year and to let me know so I could schedule them into my timetable. As the requests came in I slotted the teachers into my calendar into 6-week blocks. The teachers who I have been teaching with for several years were the first ones to ask for a time slot. As I had

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enough teachers to fill my co-teaching time to December, I didn't approach the remaining teachers to set a time.

I was very aware that I carried both roles (co-teacher and department head) into the classrooms and I knew it was very important that I discovered ways to support and encourage the teachers as well as their EAL students. Within a classroom setting a teacher is responsible for 25+ students. Within a classroom setting, the EAL co-teacher is not. While there are many different forms of co-teaching, unless both are directly responsible for all the planning, marking, assessments and report cards, the responsibility ultimately falls on the classroom teacher. But it is not just the teaching responsibility that occupies the teacher's focus, it is the day to day management of the classroom: washroom and water breaks, visits to lockers, finding supplies, checking assignments and behavior issues. This is where a co-teacher has the advantage of seeing more than the classroom teacher can. I could focus in on a few students at a time and spend time observing the students more closely than a classroom teacher could. Using this advantage is when I learned more about the EAL students in the classrooms and tried to incorporate ways to support the teachers.

As I moved from class to class throughout the first part of the year, I would check back in with the different teachers in hopes of continuing the conversations about their EAL students. As December came nearer and my co-teaching time in one class was coming to a close, I approached one of the teachers about starting in her class in January. She declined my offer and suggested I could go to another classroom as she was in the middle of a project and didn't need my help at the moment. I did as she asked and started in another classroom.

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Sharing stories. After months of co-teaching in several classrooms, I discovered two threads that tied the classroom environments together. One familiar thread I observed was that many teachers didn't see the covert ability of the EAL students to blend in with their peers, and to seemingly follow lessons to mask their inability to understand all or parts of the lessons. From my classroom observations I noted that students would copy answers from the board to fill in their blank question sheets when work was being corrected, instead of having the answers down already and just checking the work. They would write long journal responses to writing prompts in hopes of addressing the topic of the writing prompt at some point throughout the process. They would turn to the educational assistant with questions many times instead of asking the teacher and they also relied heavily on peers during their individual work time or when they were able to participate in cooperative groups. While these processes seemed to work well for the students to get by in the class during the day-to-day activities, when it was time for summative assessments, the students very often did poorly and the teachers struggled for answers as to why they seemed to do well in class but they didn't on individual formal assessments.

When I first spoke to the teachers about some of my observations of the EAL students in the class they seemed a bit taken back. I could tell they were uncomfortable and weren't sure how to react. After I explained my story about Monica and how I also had misjudged her level of understanding, the teachers seemed to relax and were open to a discussion about what to do next. Our discussions included direct teaching of specific concepts, involving peers to help explain directions or vocabulary terms, frames for writing responses, the use of the iPad for translations from first languages and for visuals, as well as, teacher directed check in times to help with any other issues that may come up. I also had discussions about how an open

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discussion with the students about their difficulties in class could really help both the students and the teacher understand what changes need to be made. As well, knowing the need for extra support also changed the amount of work we should expect from the students. Asking questions and looking up words and phrases take an additional amount of time and in order for the students to focus more on the quality of work than on the quantity of work, we needed to reduce their work load. Instead of 10 comprehension questions we would ask for five. When it came to the higher-level evaluation questions the students were able to write out their answers in their first language and then use an app to translate it to English or they could orally explain their responses instead of writing them.

Sharing strategies. All the strategies I use in my own classroom I offered to my colleagues. I was there, in that moment, a few years ago and I knew how it felt to learn that I needed to change to meet all the needs in the classroom. One of the most important changes I made as a teacher was setting up check in times for each EAL student. I explained to the teachers that this could be a place to start and I explained why I no longer rely on the students to come to me with questions, as many times they still don't. Instead I make a habit of visiting each student at their desk at least once each class and asking if they want further directions or explanations. I ask the students to explain what they are doing and what their next steps are so I know they understand what they are expected to do. I emphasized that it is during these check-in times that the teachers will become more aware of the abilities and the needs of their students. Teachers will become aware of their students' level of understanding and they can adjust the supports in place on an assignment-by-assignment, class-by-class basis. While peers and EAs may be part of the students' support system, teachers are aware that the peers and EAs

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are being used as a support, and they can make adjustments to the supports and the scaffolding for individual as well as group work. Coteaching provided me the opportunity to share specific strategies for EAL students with teachers and to acknowledge the strategies they were already using. There are times when teachers use a particular strategy and don't realize how powerful that strategy can be in helping EAL students.

A shift back in time. I recall a time when I left a colleague's class thinking about how I was supposed to be co-teaching, but instead I spent the period learning. This teacher placed the EAL students in the front row so he could monitor their understanding by watching for their reactions. During the lesson he noticed that one of the EAL students was not able to follow the lesson and was unsure of what to copy off the board. He continued his lesson but asked another student to put a sheet on the overhead so others could follow along and write the answers down as the lesson progressed. This really helped many of the students in class, not just the EAL students. The EAL student who was struggling now had a model to follow and she seemed to relax and become more engaged in the lesson. He was able to make this small adjustment so naturally during his lesson. What did I learn?

- (1) Special placement of EAL students can help teachers monitor their progress and learning.
- (2) Small adjustments to a lesson can make all the difference to the students regarding their comfort level in the classroom.

While he placed his EAL students at the front of the room, I had my newest EAL student at the back of the room. I thought about placing him at the front but he is very quiet during lessons and does not contribute in class. He had a good understanding of English and he told me his goal was to increase his oral language. Would this have increased if he were at

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the front? I'm not sure. I do know that while he was at the back of the room beside my desk, in the mornings, at breaks, and during work time in class, he asked me questions, made small talk and seemed to enjoy the back and forth we exchanged. I believed I could help him more with his oral language by engaging him in small talk during class and at break than during formal teaching time. Both seating plans were done for a purpose - with a goal in mind.

Walking softly. During my coteaching experiences, I discovered that while EAL students benefited from direct teaching, the classroom teachers benefited from an indirect teaching/mentoring approach. When I was coteaching I used this time as an opportunity to mentor the teachers to think about their lesson plans and their students. During times when the teaching of the lesson was my responsibility, I would meet with the teacher ahead of time; briefly explain the lesson, the materials chosen and the adaptations I had made for the students who needed the supports. Sometimes the teachers asked about the materials used in class and I explained why I chose them. The writing prompts and reading selections were carefully selected so they do not rely on specific background knowledge. All the students have some connection to the materials that were based on family or friendship and they were able to participate in the lesson. During my lessons I relied on modeling: for the students and for the teachers. I modeled how to answer questions in complete sentences, modeled how to begin an outline for writing, and modeled my thinking as I approached answering a critical thinking question. I modeled for the students so they would understand the lesson, and I modeled for the teachers so they would understand the importance of modeling. I also asked the teachers to review any additional scaffolding I selected for some students to see if they were indeed supporting the students or if they needed to be adjusted. At times I would ask the classroom

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teacher to act as another set of eyes during the instruction part of the lesson and to look for students who were not focused or following the lesson. After the instruction, we circulated around the class and addressed any questions or issues. During the students' work time small amounts of information would be exchanged between us about what was working, and who needed more assistance. This was a time when I would ask questions about the students. Do you notice she is always asking her friends about what she should be doing? How many times does he ask to go to the bathroom before he begins to work?

I now see the classroom from a different set of lenses as I am becoming more aware of the struggles of our EAL students. I look for the specific signs of a student struggling with their work while they are working instead of waiting for the work to be handed in. Work avoidance, behaviour issues and increased communication with peers all are signs there could be a problem with the level of work provided to the student. Modeling teaching strategies, asking questions, and sharing stories are ways that I found I could help mentor the teachers without coming across as the department head telling them what to do.

It takes time to change. Every strategy I have used in my own classroom becomes a conversation with the other teachers. But that conversation begins when the other teacher asks for ideas. I share what I do in my classroom to give direction and guidance as to what supports could be in place. From there, it is up to the individual teachers to select some of the supports suggested and to develop new ways that suit their own classroom situation. I am in their classrooms as a support, a resource. While my department head's hat wants to ensure all the supports are in place right now, my co-teacher's hat understands that teachers need time to reflect on their practices in order to change and small changes are still steps in the right

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direction. When Spring Break was days away I approached the teacher once more. She laughed when I told her I would make the co-teaching experience as painless as I could. I learned she didn't like having other teachers in her class as it made her uncomfortable. I acknowledged her feelings of discomfort and offered to try it out for a week and if she wanted to end it we could and I would continue on. She agreed. We taught together for the next six weeks.

Each teacher I have co-taught with was so different in his/her classroom management, teaching style, and lesson delivery. As I ventured into different classrooms, I encountered different learning environments, each one unique as their classroom composition. I was very aware that I carried both roles into a classroom and throughout the year I had to discover ways to support the teachers as well as the EAL students in their classrooms. While some EAL specialists have commented about feeling marginalized in a co-teaching environment (McClure and Cahnmann-Taylor, 2010), I cannot say that I ever experienced this. Being a department head and an EAL specialist carried a different balance of power, but a power nonetheless that had to be acknowledged.

Collaboration in Middle School: Sharing the pathway with others. When others join me on my path and share my journey, the obstacles I encounter are manageable, the conversations are powerful, and the successes are shared.

Collaboration within a middle school setting takes place during both formal collaboration times including staff meetings, department meetings, grade level meetings and informal collaboration times such as hallway, lunch hour and photocopier conversations. While staff meetings and department meetings tend to have more staff involved, throughout the

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year I have noticed that the more informal collaboration times tend to meet more of the specific needs of the teachers.

Staff meeting agendas at our school are set by the administration, but input is welcomed. During the 2013-2014 school year information for the teachers on EAL learners have been added to the agenda at my request. Interesting and informative articles I have encountered have been shared with the admin and in turn the admin has provided overviews during staff meetings and the articles have been provided to all the staff members. While our staff meetings times are set and there are many items to get through, having EAL on the agenda opened the lines of communication.

Language Arts department meeting and the Grade 8 level meeting agendas are set by me and input is welcomed. In order to make EAL more commonplace in our discussions this year I included EAL questions and concerns as a set agenda item. More so than at the larger staff meetings, teachers tended to ask more questions and discuss concerns about their EAL learners more openly. As well, during co-teaching blocks with teachers, specific questions to address the needs of their EAL students could be discussed before, during, or after each of the classes.

While the more formal collaboration times are set up to encourage focus and discussion of our EAL learners, I was surprised this year at the amount of impromptu informal collaboration in the hallways, photocopy room and staff room about our EAL students. Numerous times throughout the year, teachers would approach me before classes to talk about their EAL students. Some just wanted to share their stories of observations and strategies that were successful, others wanted to ask for support for a particular student and a time was set to meet. Several times while I was in the photocopy room waiting for my turn, discussions of

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cultural differences, hurdles and achievements were shared and the stories continued until the bell rang for the next class.

Choosing a space to share. This impromptu sharing of stories and observations suggests there is a need for others to have an arena to share their ideas, insights and questions. Informal collaboration occurred when teachers had specific questions they needed answers to and they seek out others for knowledge and advice. They could apply the knowledge right away and try the different strategies to meet the specific needs of their students. But it seems to be a personal arena where the teachers chose the time and place and what they want to share. When I reflect on the arena that I chose; it was the staffroom.

Upon entering the Masters program in September 2011, I would share stories of my classes, new knowledge, and concepts in the staffroom the morning after each weekly class. One of the teachers whom I had coffee with would ask about my latest class and I would give a quick overview of the concepts and what I had learned to the five or six of us around the table. Usually the conversations started with my statement of “I didn’t know that.” We then would have conversations about BICS and CALP, early arrivals vs. late arrivals, cultural considerations, scaffolding, and supports. I enjoyed sharing the new knowledge from my classes and as my colleagues had asked about my courses, I felt the conversations were valued.

During the 2013-2014 year I was enrolled in a Cross-Cultural Education course from September to December. This course led to lively discussions on white privilege, refugee students, war affected students, and culture in the classroom. I enjoyed sharing stories of the seminars and of the projects I was working on. I also enjoyed the feedback from the staff that I

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elicited advice and input from. After my course work was completed in December of 2013, my conversations in the staffroom in the morning ended.

Creating new stories. It wasn't until May 2014 that my conversations began again. This time though it wasn't about new knowledge I had learned, it was about how I was transferring my knowledge into my own classroom. New ideas for lessons were shared, and changes made to assessments to make them more inclusive and authentic to our EAL students were discussed. The staffroom once again became my sounding board for ideas with my colleagues. As I reflect back on the gap in staffroom conversations, I believe I felt that since I was no longer attending classes, I no longer had new knowledge or new stories to share. But as the teachers once again began to listen to my new ideas and share their input and understanding I realize that these new stories may be more powerful than the former. These new stories were no longer from a graduate student immersed in articles and seminars, they were from a classroom teacher sharing her efforts, her ideas and her challenges while trying to change her own classroom into a more inclusive environment. As my sharing of stories began again, the other teachers in response began sharing their own stories of their EAL students as well. My stories of my successes and struggles with my EAL students will continue as I share my experiences and my thoughts with my colleagues. These stories are important in continuing the conversation and the focus on our EAL students.

Negotiating the Mazes

As I explored the different mazes of classroom teacher and school leader within the middle school labyrinth, the different pathways travelled were lined with stories of insight,

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tension, and new opportunities for supporting my EAL students in the mainstream classroom. Many times the pathways in the mazes crossed over from classroom teacher to school leader and it was difficult to identify which maze I was in. Was I a mainstream teacher sharing with her colleagues EAL instructional strategies and stories from her middle school classroom, or a school leader sharing stories? During the 2013-2014 school year, I was a middle school mainstream classroom teacher, an EAL specialist, a department head and a co-teacher. My stories were influenced by all the different experiences I lived. These stories guided and encouraged me throughout my journey while they uncovered new pathways and helped towards supporting EAL students in mainstream classrooms.

**CHAPTER FIVE: LOOKING BACK AND MOVING FORWARD: REFLECTIONS
OF MY JOURNEY WITHIN THE 2013-2014 SCHOOL YEAR**

a classroom teacher
entered the maze
graduate student
seminars, lectures, course work
a new pathway emerged
research in
her classroom and her school

searching for insight
through different lenses
graduate student
teacher and leader

field notes
 reflection
 stories

common threads
tensions
shifts in thought
new meaning

culture and iPads
in the classroom
instructional strategies
co-teaching and collaboration

stories
 inquiry
 reflection
 new stories

new pathways
for my students
my school
pieces of the puzzle
in place
moving
 forward

Making it count
Making it worth it
Making it meaningful

The Maze of the Graduate Student

When I first entered the maze of the graduate student I carried with me the hope and determination to find the answers for supporting my EAL students in my school. As I traveled through the different pathways of course assignments, lectures and seminars I gained knowledge, and developed an understanding of second language acquisition. Entering the new pathway of narrative inquiry, I carried with me the knowledge of the past two years at the university and the support of my colleagues. Choosing the narrative inquiry path has provided me the opportunity to seek insight to my questions within my own classroom and my own school. It is in this place that I have been able to question, record, analyze and reflect upon the day-to-day journey of a mainstream middle school teacher and leader.

Finding Answers at the End of the Path

The different pathways traveled have helped me to understand how my experiences as a graduate student, a co-teacher and school leader had influenced my classroom practices and the school community and in turn have created my new lived experiences.

My experiences as a graduate student: My university seminars, classes, and assignments provided me with an understanding of second language acquisition and effective teaching practices. Transferring this knowledge into my classroom and reflecting on the experiences with my EAL students gave me the opportunity for analysis and evaluation. As classroom teacher, these experiences have impacted, both my instructional practices and my classroom environment.

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Knowledge of effective instructional practices. Within the classroom setting I no longer use separate materials with my EAL students. Instead, I use a variety of specific instructional strategies to support and scaffold the students while incorporating the students within the learning outcomes of the classroom. However, finding the right balance of the effective instructional strategies to meet the varied needs of my EAL students required continued reflection so I could adjust the supports for each student. These effective instructional strategies for EAL students became easier to infuse in my teaching practices with the daily use of the iPads. The success with the iPads in providing a bridge for our EAL students toward learning English as a second language should encourage other school divisions to ensure technology is available to all EAL students within the classroom setting (Kalyanpur et al., 2006). The technology however, is not enough. Teachers need professional development opportunities to learn and understand the effective instructional strategies that scaffold and support EAL students (Carrier, 2005; Cummins, 2014; Lewis-Moreno, 2007; Rubinstein-Avila, 2003) so the technologies can reinforce the strategies, not replace them. Ongoing professional development as well as a collaborative dialogue amongst teachers should be a focus of all schools (Dove & Honigsfled, 2010; Harklau, 1994; Teemant et al., 2000). With the increasing numbers of EAL students in our schools in Manitoba, mainstream classroom teachers require ongoing support from their schools and their divisions in order to meet the diverse needs of their classrooms.

Improving the classroom environment. As a classroom teacher it takes a concentrated ongoing effort to provide an inclusive environment for all my students. I needed to look into my own cultural background and worldview in order to understand what values and beliefs I

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brought to the classroom and then I had to become aware that my culture did indeed have an effect on my classroom. This awareness, along with acknowledging the variety of cultures, and including materials that reflect the many cultures within the classroom was my beginning to providing an accepting and inclusive environment. In order to teach the whole child in our increasingly diverse school systems, I needed to connect with students' lives outside of school and value the cultural experiences they brought to the school (Cummins, Mirza & Stille, 2012). This knowledge about individual students, including their past and present lives and existing skills is essential (Haneda, 2008). Providing opportunities for students to learn about their culture and share their experiences, their background knowledge, and their celebrations may encourage all students to believe that diversity in a classroom and in a school is valued (Miller & Endo, 2004). I understand that I am only using the contributions and additive approaches to multicultural education (Cumming-McCann, 2003) and I have a long way to go before I move into the transformative approach but knowing that there is a new pathway before me that can lead to the affirmation of my students' identities encourages me to continue moving forward. My students' voices are beginning to be heard: to have their celebrations recognized and to have their learning outcomes changed to include their interests and background. However, providing authentic learning opportunities brought about tensions with following curricular outcomes. The Manitoba Education Grade 7 Social Studies implementation document (Manitoba Education, 2006a) does not address the diversity within the Manitoba classrooms nor provide for alternative outcomes. The draft document for the Manitoba Framework for EAL Programming provides valuable information regarding the development of language proficiency, the principles of instruction and implications for the middle years classroom including scaffolding strategies, integrating language skills, ensuring social relevance and

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raising cultural awareness (Manitoba Education, 2011). Although the draft is currently available online, it is not in a printed format as are the other curricular documents and professional development opportunities to engage with the document have not been provided by Manitoba Education yet. Now is the time for the Manitoba EAL programming draft to emerge as a published companion/supplement document for all Manitoba Curricular Frameworks so that teachers are informed and supported when providing diverse authentic learning opportunities to their EAL students in all subject areas.

My experiences as a co-teacher and school leader. As a school leader who is co-teaching in her colleagues' classrooms I have learned that all the hats you wear accompany you into the classrooms whether you try to take them off or not.

Supporting teachers. Understanding that there was an imbalance of power within the classroom, I made every effort to maintain and develop positive working relationships with the teachers before, during, and after I entered their classrooms. I elected to first co-teach with those teachers who were willing and open to the experience. Those who were apprehensive about co-teaching, I encouraged them to talk to other teachers about their experiences and they were given the opportunity to shorten the 6-week time period. While there are many challenges to coteaching (Friend, 2008; Pawan & Ortloff, 2011; Dove & Honigsfled, 2010; Peercy & Matrin-Beltran, 2012; McClure & Mahnmann-Taylor, 2010; Bell & Baecher, 2012) within the landscape of my school, I discovered indirect mentoring, modeling of effective instructional strategies (Dove & Honigsfled, 2010) as well as a genuine understanding of the complexities of the mainstream classroom were helpful in supporting teachers toward meeting the needs of our EAL students. The literature on mainstream classroom teachers who are EAL

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specialists, hold a leadership role in the school, and co-teach in their colleagues' classrooms is not yet available. It is my hope that my stories and experiences will encourage other department heads and classroom teachers to take on an EAL specialist role and provide leadership and support to their colleagues and to the EAL students in their schools.

Moving Forward

As I leave the Maze of the graduate student, I take with me all the stories of experience that have marked my route along the pathways. These stories will be the foundation to build new experiences and to create new stories as I continue investigating new mazes in the Middle School Labyrinth.

- 1) I will continue to write down my thoughts and my reflections on my EAL practices and experiences within my classroom and my school. The writing and reflection will allow me to search for meaning, to create new experiences and to move forward one step at a time as I continue to navigate through different mazes in order to meet the needs of my EAL students.
- 2) Creating a supportive and inclusive classroom environment requires knowledge of effective instructional strategies and an informed understanding of one's culture and practices in order to ensure other cultures are affirmed. As a classroom teacher I need to support and scaffold my EAL students with effective teaching strategies and to model the acceptance of diversity within my classroom. My day-to-day actions need to reflect the belief that all students deserve to have representation, affirmation, and validation within the classroom while they actively participate and contribute to the

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learning environment. This will be an ongoing goal that I need to attend to, so I continue to move forward each and every day.

- 3) I will continue to share the stories of my EAL experiences in order to promote ongoing collaboration with my colleagues. The stories of my successes, struggles and obstacles may encourage others to reflect on their own story and make changes within their classrooms. It is my hope that the sharing of stories leads to the understanding that second language acquisition is not just a process that the students engage in alone. It is a journey that the school community must travel together, in order to provide the support, understanding and encouragement to all our EAL students.

My stories of today have been shaped by my past stories and experiences. Each day new experiences shape my understanding of who I am in each of the roles I own. Through the reflection of my experiences as a middle school classroom teacher, a school leader and a master's student, I have gained a better understanding of who I am today. While the chapter of being a teacher, leader, and graduate student has been completed, I look forward to beginning the next chapter. I am not the same person today that I was when I first entered my Master's program nor when I began to look for answers within my school. My new story today impacts the students and the staff that I work with on a daily basis. As I look to the future, my story will continue to change and evolve. As I share my stories, my journey, I am reminded that each experience, each story, each new pathway in the labyrinth is linked with a common goal: to make the time in my classroom count, to make it worth it and to make it meaningful.

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