Challenges of Providing EAL Education in the Winnipeg Catholic Schools System

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the challenges that the Catholic schools in Winnipeg have in providing English as an Additional Language (EAL) education to immigrant and international students. Manitoba has been successful in attracting new immigrants over the past decade. Similar to the overall Canadian trends in immigration, most of the new immigrants come from countries whose first language is neither French nor English. In addition to the immigration initiative, international students who want to learn English have also been choosing to attend Winnipeg schools. The Catholic schools of Winnipeg have become schools of choice for some of the international students who come for one to twelve months to study English. Considering the limited resources that these schools have, this paper recommends a systemic approach on how the Catholic schools in Winnipeg can build EAL education capacities at the educator, resource and organizational levels in order to meet the needs of the rising immigrant and international students.

INTRODUCTION

The 2003 statistical report entitled Manitoba Immigration Facts highlights a component of Manitoba’s Action Strategy for Economic Growth called “Growing Through Immigration”. With this initiative, the Province indicates that “efforts are directed towards increasing immigration levels to 10,000 annually” (Manitoba. Department of Labour and Immigration, 2004, p. 2). This number represents an increase of 50% for the period spanning ten years from 1993 to 2003. This increase in immigration will continue to expand the field of teaching English as a second language (ESL).

In 2006, the provincial government implemented a change of terminology from English as a Second Language (ESL) to English as an Additional Language (EAL). This change is to reflect the increasing number of individuals who come to Canada who speak several languages and dialects other than English; “this more inclusive position is being adopted in an increasing number of contexts in Canada
According to the Manitoba statistics on ESL, the number of ESL students who received funding support in the province increased from 1,582 in 1981 to 5,809 students in 2005-2006 school years (Manitoba Government. Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2006).

Similarly, Statistics Canada reported in its Canadian Social Trends publication of 2003 that “there has been a dramatic change in the linguistic composition of immigrants entering Canada” in the past 30 years (Canada. Statistics Canada, 2003, p.21). More and more “allophones -- individuals whose mother tongue is other than English or French” immigrate to Canada. The 2001 Census recorded “over three-quarters (79%) of immigrants who came in the 1990’s were allophones, up from one-half (49%) of those who arrive in the 1970s” (Statistics Canada, 2003, p.21). This trend is also consistent with the immigration activity in Manitoba as reflected in its 2003 statistical report entitled Manitoba Immigration Facts. The Province cited that “of the 6,492 new arrivals in 2003, 6.93% reported mother tongue English”; 93.07% of the immigrants reported a mother tongue of other than English (Manitoba Labour and Immigration, 2004, p. 15). In addition, international students attending Manitoba schools have been increasing over the years.

In some ways, teaching English is now like a commodity item for “export” as we continue to attract international students to attend our schools. Dennis Owens, the Senior Policy Analyst at the Frontier Centre for Public Policy, has concluded that “International education has the potential to become an economic powerhouse for the Province of Manitoba… International students are required to pay a tuition fee of approximately $10,000 to cover the cost of their schooling and are also expected to pay for room and board on top of that” (Owens, 2004, Benefits section, ¶ 3 &4). This revenue not only represents increased funding for school divisions but also boosts the local economy since students live in the communities where they attend school.

This trend brings with it many challenges with respect to resources to meet the needs of students whose first language is other than English. Additional teaching resources are required due to the
increasing numbers of students. The teachers and assistants will also require knowledge and skills in providing English language support to the students. As this trend continues, it is safe to assume that the challenges surrounding teaching EAL will only continue to increase over the next decades.

The increase in immigration and international students are important initiatives to ensure not only economic growth for the province but also to sustain our society since the Canadian birth rate has been declining over the years. This phenomenon will then have implications on the methodologies and practices of teachers and educators. Are the schools prepared to handle the significant educational challenges that newcomers to our country bring with them? Do we have the necessary resources to support the teachers as well as the students both young and adults, as they learn the English language that is required in order to function in their new “home”? What is available to provide support for the educational needs of the newcomers?

THE RESEARCH

The Catholic schools in Winnipeg are affected by the same immigration phenomena as those which affect the Manitoba public schools. The greatest challenge that the Catholic schools have in this regard is that, as independent funded schools, they do not receive any additional funding to provide EAL support to their students in need. The lack of EAL funding is a significant issue as the Catholic schools are becoming schools of choice for international students. As much as this is an additional source of revenue for the Catholic schools, more often than not, the schools do not have the necessary resources to provide for the support needed by the international students. This issue is not just isolated to international students. Catholic schools, similar to the public schools, also attract immigrant students. Are the EAL students, local and international, getting the language education that they need to help them succeed in their studies? Are the teachers and administration able to provide for the needs of the students with respect to language education? It is within this context that I would like to explore the impact of the growth of the EAL field on the Catholic schools in Winnipeg.
Both immigrant and international student demands on the Winnipeg Catholic school system are increasing without a change to the funding formula between the Catholic schools and the provincial government. Therefore, the incremental growth of students who require EAL support will continue to be a critical issue for the Catholic schools which gives rise to the research concern. How can the Winnipeg Catholic schools system build capacities at the educator, resource and organizational levels to meet the needs of the rising number of EAL students?

The research concern was addressed by looking at the current organizational and funding structure of the Catholic schools of Winnipeg and then assessing the current capacity to provide EAL education. This was done by reviewing three relevant and related studies from which assumptions were made that the results and findings would be generally similar had the same research been conducted to look at the educator, resource and organizational capacity of the Catholic schools in Winnipeg. The concepts and principles of systems thinking and organizational learning were utilized as the theoretical framework to build the EAL education capacity at the educator, resource, and organizational levels. A literature review was conducted on the issue of culture and language awareness for teacher development. The researcher took the position that this is a fundamental EAL topic upon which other ones can be built for future development. The topic lends well to systems perspective and the principles of organizational learning which uses a process that will sustain individuals and group learning overtime.

Research in EAL specific to Catholic schools is almost non-existent. One research study conducted by Cornell Stefaniuk over 15 years ago in Alberta has been a very useful source of information for this research paper. Stefaniuk (1993) conducted an open-ended survey of ESL teachers in the Edmonton Catholic schools to “determine if regular classroom teachers feel prepared, both from a training and experience background, to integrate ESL students into the classroom” (p. 16). Stefaniuk provided the questionnaire used and the raw data (responses) that the respondents gave as appendices in his thesis. Along with his analysis and conclusion, further information was provided by the raw data as alternate interpretations were gleaned from them. The obvious limitation of this study is the length of time that has elapsed since it was conducted. The situation would likely have changed since then.
An unpublished class project study conducted by Stapleton et al. (2004) offered invaluable insights to the current challenges faced by Catholic schools in Manitoba. Responses about the challenges given by the principals surveyed and interviewed were useful to this research paper especially in the areas about resources, professional development, and organizational structure.

Another significant study that provided insights for this paper is that of Pettis (1998) who surveyed the adult ESL teachers in Manitoba to investigate their perception regarding the relationship between their TESL education and their teaching assignments. The respondents’ perceptions of their knowledge and skills helped validate some of the concerns of this research.

Certain assumptions underlie this research paper. First, the Catholic schools in Edmonton have similar issues so that the findings from Stefaniuk’s study can be applied to analysis, interpretation, and recommendations for building EAL capacity for the Catholic schools in Winnipeg. Second, the issues and challenges found in the literature review were mostly from the public school system, but these are similar and may even be more significant to the Catholic schools due to lack of funding and structural supports from the government. Third, since the Catholic schools are incorporated independently, then they operate independently as well.

This paper provides a brief explanation of how the Catholic school system is structured. Based on the literature and studies reviewed, the section on Building EAL Education Capacity discusses and recommends ideas and considerations that are systemic in nature and builds on the organizational learning concepts.

THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM IN WINNIPEG

Organizational and Funding Structure

There are seventeen Catholic schools in Manitoba. All are located within the geographically boundaries of Winnipeg. The Catholic schools are either under the auspices of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg or of the Archdiocese of St. Boniface. There are nine Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg and eight Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of St. Boniface of which one is a Ukrainian
Catholic school of the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Winnipeg. The schools vary a great deal; some are attached to a parish while others are owned by a religious congregation. They also range in their historical existence some having been founded as early as 1874 to the more recent schools founded in the 1960s. The schools offer a range of grade levels: some schools offer pre-school to grade 6; some offer pre-school to grade 8; there is a school for Senior 1 to 4 exclusively for boys; one from grade 7 to Senior 4 exclusively for girls; there is a co-educational school that offers Kindergarten to Senior 4; and one co-educational high school.

The governance structure of the Catholic schools of Winnipeg is under the auspices of either the Archdiocese of Winnipeg or the Archdiocese of St. Boniface. The Catholic schools in the Archdiocese of Winnipeg are under the direction and support of the Archdiocesan Advisory Council on Catholic Education (ACCE) while the Catholic Schools Commission (CSC) supports the schools in the Archdiocese of St. Boniface and the Ukrainian Catholic Archeparchy of Winnipeg. Both offices work cooperatively and share in providing administrative support to all seventeen Catholic schools. However, the Director of Catholic Schools in the Winnipeg Diocese has a lead role in providing shared administrative services to all of the Catholic schools in Winnipeg. The daily operations of the parochial schools are “managed by their existing boards and parish communities” (A New Plan for Catholic Education, Archdiocese of Winnipeg), while schools owned by religious congregations are managed by their respective religious orders.

The Catholic schools of Winnipeg, like the public schools, are faced with the challenge of providing effective programs with limited resources. However, the Catholic schools have a greater challenge than the public schools since government funding amounts to only 50% of what is provided to the public schools. “The Price of Catholic Education”, an article co-authored by Cranston, Fagan and Paslawski (2004), reported that Catholic schools in Manitoba are funded by the government at 50 percent of the public school grants, which does not include capital expenses. Cranston, Fagan and Paslawski (2004) lament that “Catholic schools in Manitoba, which are either operated by a diocese or religious
order, face numerous challenges in ensuring they have the adequate funds to operate. Capital improvements to the schools are done through the parishes, which must turn to the school families to fundraise. Yet, almost all of these families already pay tuition and property taxes for public schools” (Cranston, Fagan & Paslawski, 2004). The Catholic schools in Manitoba currently operate under this funding formula. Despite gains made with regards to funding, the independent Catholic schools continue to be in need of financial support especially since the communities they serve continue to evolve and demand more.

BUILDING EAL EDUCATION CAPACITY

Vision of Ideal Capacity – Systems Thinking and Organizational Learning

To build the ideal EAL education capacity for the Catholic schools of Winnipeg, it is important to first recognize the deficiencies of the current fragmented approach. A way to understand the fragmented approach is to view the schools as one whole system. An introduction to the concepts of systems thinking and organizational learning is essential to appreciate the whole system and the value that these concepts offer when recommending changes and improvements to the school system. The theories behind systems thinking and organizational learning seem to be an appropriate framework for a complex issue such as building EAL capacity in the Catholic schools of Winnipeg.

What is Systems or Systemic Thinking?

According Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, and Smith (1994), “a system is a perceived whole whose elements ‘hang together’ because they continually affect each other over time, and operate toward a common purpose” (p. 90). A school is a system; the Catholic schools in Winnipeg form one system. Collinson and Cook (2007) quoted Kikoski & Kikoski (2004) when they defined systemic thinking as “the ability to see the connections between issues, events, and data points—the whole rather than its parts” (p.5). In addition to these definitions, Senge, Cambron-McCabe et al. (2000) describe the discipline of
system thinking “as the study of system structure and behavior” (p.78). For the purpose of this paper, both terms “systems thinking” and “systemic thinking” will mean the same and will be used interchangeably.

The Catholic school as a system has many interrelated parts such as the Archbishop, the priest or the religious order, the school boards, the principal, the administrative and support staff, the teachers, the students, the parents, the Catholic and secular communities, and the world at large. Senge believes that it is vital that people shift from “seeing parts to seeing wholes, from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in their reality, from reacting to the present to creating the future” (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p. 40). As teachers work individually in their classrooms with the EAL students, it is important to remember that what they do in the classroom is part of a larger whole. As the students learn, they become reactors and creators of the future. And the rest of the members of the school system play a role in the creation of the future. “Senge views systems thinking as the cornerstone of the learning organization” (Merriam and Caffarella, 1999, p.40).

*What is a learning organization or organizational learning?*

Of all systems, it would seem logical that the school ought to be a learning organization. It is unavoidable for learning to take place in the school system. What makes a learning organization? Saks and Haccoun (2007) define a learning organization as:

an organization that creates, acquires, organizes, shares, and retains information and knowledge, and uses new information and knowledge to change and modify its behaviour in order to achieve its objective and improve its effectiveness. (p.32)

Collinson and Cook (2007) examine organizational learning as “a more deliberate process….it involves organizational members actively addressing problems and issues rather than automatically accepting obvious or time-tested solutions” (p.15). This description relies on the adults in the school who are caretakers of the system to “discover erroneous assumptions, questioning existing ways of operating, learning from mistakes, and ensuring that useful ideas and innovation spread beyond individual members” (p.15).
The whole system along with the individual parts that make up the system needs to be examined critically before any action ought to be taken. These core assumptions within the context of systemic thinking are the set of conditions that have been considered when making recommendations on building the necessary capacities for EAL education in the Catholic schools in Winnipeg.

The ideal vision would be for the Catholic schools in Winnipeg to operate as a system that follows the principles of a learning organization in order to sustain itself into the future. With continued steady demands on the system, the educator, the resources and the organization as a whole need to be viewed within the context of a learning organization to effectively create future leaders of our society.

**Deficiencies of a Fragmented Approach**

Fragmentation often results in lack of communication, duplication of efforts, and re-invention of the wheel, which are costly and something that the Catholic school system cannot afford. Since systemic thinking is a corner stone of organizational learning, it is critical that the Catholic schools of Winnipeg operate as one system. As indicated by the responding principals in the study by Stapleton et al. (2004), they are looking for a unified structure where communication and resource sharing can occur between schools. In essence, they want to increase capacity at the resource and organizational levels; and based on the assessment of the former Director of Catholic schools there is also a need to increase capacity at the teachers level when it comes to EAL education. (Personal Communication, December 6, 2006)

**Developing Resource and Organizational Capacity**

Building resource and organizational capacity for EAL education needs to be viewed together and at two different levels. One level of resource is the financial piece which allows the schools to have the necessary funds to hire an EAL teacher and the materials necessary for the program. The other level of resource which is directly related to the first one, deals with the types of EAL resources and/or programming that can be developed in order to provide a system of effective EAL education.

The greatest challenge that the Catholic schools in Winnipeg have is to provide for the new educational necessities such as hiring an EAL teacher. Without the government funding that is available to
the public schools, it is very difficult to have an additional staff for an EAL program. A principal offered the following comments in the Stapleton et al. (2004) study: “The financial affects what you can do with material resources, [and] what programs you can offer” (p. 53).

How then, can the Catholic schools in Winnipeg build EAL capacity when money is a major barrier? Before this question can be answered, it is useful to get a sense of what types of EAL programming approaches and support are used in the Manitoba public schools. As reported in the Draft of the EAL and Literacy, Academics, and Language (LAL) Manitoba Curriculum Framework, there are three main categories of EAL programming and support available to students: Integrated Programming, Programming provided by an EAL specialist teacher, and Bilingual programming (Manitoba Government, 2006). The integrated programming involves either a resource teacher or a teaching assistant working in collaboration with the regular classroom teacher and operates within the framework of a mainstream classroom. Basically, the EAL learner is in the classroom with the rest of the students and the teacher makes the “necessary accommodations and adaptations for the EAL and Literacy, academics, and language (LAL) learners during instruction” (MB Government, 2006). Programming provided by EAL specialist teachers is another option which could involve the EAL specialist to either work “with the students individually or in small groups inside or outside the mainstream classroom” (MB Government, 2006). Materials used include a combination of curricular content combined with language development, and academic language skills that can be transferred to non-EAL classes and school and community orientation. The third category of bilingual programming does not apply to the Catholic schools.

What then, can the Catholic schools do to build their resource capacity to provide EAL programming that meets the needs of the students within the context of their financial constraints? First and foremost, the Catholic schools EAL programming needs to be viewed as a systemic issue at the Archdiocese level rather than specific to each school that has a significant number of EAL students. The increase in immigrant and international students in the Catholic schools is gradual but constant. With the Province’s initiative to continue to increase the number of immigrants to come to Manitoba, this matter will continue to be present at all of the schools. The next step is for the Director of Catholic Schools (the
Director) to conduct an environmental scan of the whole system with respect to EAL program needs. Environmental scan “involves tapping into both internal and external sources of information and establishing internal and external connections” (Saks & Haccoun, 2007). By doing this step, the Director can collect the important data with which to make the necessary interpretations upon which he can make decisions. The Director can find out how significant the need is for EAL programming; how many students require EAL support from each school; what is currently being done to support the students. An important part of the environmental scan is to obtain external information. This aligns with the concept of systemic thinking. External components affect the school system and therefore, need to be considered. For example, it would be important to get a sense of the demographics of the areas from which the schools derive their enrolment. The other element to consider is the Kindergarten to Senior 4 ESL Action Plan 2005-08 (MB Government, 2006) for ideas that are applicable to the Catholic school system.

During the environmental scan, the inquiry process can be used, which according to Argyris & Schon, 1978, and whether formal or informal, “is an essential aspect of deliberate organizational learning” (Collinson and Cook, 2007, p.33). The inquiry process involves understanding one’s own and other’s assumptions to comprehend others’ views (Senge, 1990). The Director would need to be open to hearing all the views from the various parts of the systems such as the teachers, the principal, the parents, and the students and would need to incorporate these data with the other external information gathered. The data gathered will then need to be interpreted prior to determining the necessary action.

Similar to the recommendation in the Kindergarten to Senior 4 ESL Action Plan 2005-08 (MB Government, 2006), and based on the information gathered from the environmental scan and inquiry process, a Diocesan EAL programming framework should be developed to provide policy and procedure guidelines to which each school can turn for direction. Given that the greatest limitation of the Catholic school system is the ability to provide for the necessary programming due to lack of finances, a shared services model within the EAL programming framework for meeting the EAL needs of the schools would be an important addition to the system.
There are 17 Catholic schools in Winnipeg, to hire an EAL Consultant or Specialist at the Diocesan level to provide support to each of the school would be an effective use of resources. The EAL Consultant or Specialist could provide the much needed programming support such as advice, and development of resources and materials. More importantly, the EAL Consultant or Specialist would have the whole system perspective which is significant in light of the financial limitations of each school. In Stefaniuk’s study (1993), the teachers in the Edmonton Catholic Schools provide evidence that an EAL Consultant or Specialist is an important role at the Diocesan level when they “responded in the affirmative and noted the contribution of the ESL Consultant” (p. 53). In the Stapleton et al. (2004) study, a comment from one principal indicating that “In general, we collaborate minimally and do nothing with programming for subjects” (p.71), highlights the need for a “central figure” that can be the catalyst for collaboration as a direct result of his/her job responsibilities. Disseminating and sharing of EAL resources such as books, learning materials and library resource for teachers would become part of the responsibilities of the EAL Consultant/Specialist. This would create a system to better use the limited financial resources available to each school.

**Developing Teacher Capacity in EAL**

Teacher development in the context of this paper refers to the continued professional development of practicing teachers throughout their careers. In the article Teacher Learning and Student Learning in TESOL, Freeman (2001) maintains that teachers are central mediators in students’ learning in the classrooms [therefore,] teachers must engage in professional learning in order to improve student learning (p.608).

Comparable to the process outlined in developing resource capacity, a good starting point to develop teacher capacity is to inquire about, and determine the current knowledge, skills and abilities the teachers have with regard to teaching English as an additional language. Do they have any educational background in EAL? What experiences do they have? In Stefaniuk’s (1993) study, “only 7.9% of the teachers in the Edmonton Catholic Schools have a university background in ESL (at least one course)…at
the opposite extreme, almost three quarters (74.6%) of the teachers have no ESL training, either from university courses or through district in-service” (p.45). Based on the comment made by the former Director of Catholic Schools of the Archdiocese of Winnipeg about the teachers’ lack of knowledge in teaching EAL (Personal Communication, December 6, 2006), a high percentage of teachers would likely report the same lack of EAL training as their counterparts did in Edmonton.

In his article, Canadian Catholic Education and the New Evangelization, Stapleton (2003) points out that “The preparation of teachers and administrators of Catholic schools is generally considered to be of vital importance for the success of these institutions” (p. 7). And so, within the EAL programming framework previously recommended, it would be prudent to include plans for the development of teacher capacity. Inclusion of this action in the EAL programming framework ensures that the matter of teacher development is handled in a systemic rather than in a fragmented manner. This approach allows for better use of resources as duplication is avoided, and better communication can develop between schools, and therefore, greater insights are generated which would lead to better teaching.

Continued development for teachers take many forms. In the article Teacher Preparation and Development, Bailey (2001) poses the following research questions that are also relevant to the Catholic school teachers in Winnipeg: “How can in-service development best be promoted and sustained? How do effective models of in-service development change, given local needs and circumstances? How can teachers bring about their own continued professional development?” (p.610). The questions will be addressed after first discussing what topics ought to be included in building EAL teacher capacity. A major issue that has been generating attention in the research field is the role of culture in second language training.

Culture and language awareness is a multifaceted issue which requires review of each of the following inter-related areas of teacher educators, teachers and their practice, and the language learners themselves, in order to effectively address this complex matter. Addressing all three areas is a holistic approach and more aligned with systemic thinking, is beyond the scope of this paper. For the purpose of this paper, culture and language awareness will be discussed only in the context of teacher education and
teachers and their practice. Although there are many knowledge concerns about teaching EAL, focusing on culture and language awareness is critical because it is fundamental to any knowledge, skills and abilities of teaching EAL.

**Culture and Language Awareness – Literature Review**

The idea of “culture” in language classes is not a recent notion, and has been a subject of research studies in various forms over the years (Auerbach, 1993; Krumsch, 1996; Stern, 1992). However, due to the complexity of the concept, it requires further examination within the context of teaching English to speakers of other language (TESOL). In addition, topics such as understanding cultural awareness (Knutson, 2006; Lessard-Clouston, 1997), teacher education (Gay & Kirkland, 2003; Gosh & Tarrow, 1993), teacher practices (Pratt-Johnson, 2006; Quintero, 1994) are important areas to delve into when considering the relationships between culture and language.

Theorists and scholars seem to agree on the notion that to define culture, one needs to understand the context from which it comes. Krumsch (1996) defines culture from two perspectives: one from the humanities which talks of culture through works of art, literature and social institutions, and the other from the social sciences which deals with the “attitudes and beliefs, ways of thinking, behaving and remembering shared by members of that community” (p.2). Stern (1992) offers the cultural perspectives of Pre World War I and after World War II. The former era was a period when people began to recognize the importance of understanding the country and its people in order to learn about a particular language; and, the latter period of Post World War II, teaching culture “derives from social and cultural anthropology, which aim to provide a comprehensive description of the way of life of a society” (Stern, 1992, p. 205). Regardless of the perspectives, one can not refer to culture void of context. Individuals belong to some kind of a community whether homogenous or not. The individual’s ways of thinking and behaving are informed by the lived experiences shared within the community.

In her article “Communicating Cross-Culturally: What Teachers Should Know”, Pratt-Johnson (2006) referred to Lustig’s and Koester’s definition of culture as “a learned set of shared interpretations
about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people” (Introduction section). This variety of definition which is similar to that of Kramsch’s, was commonly proposed in the array of literature reviewed for this paper. It provides a more comprehensive view of the multi-layered aspects of culture. This type of definition validates the various layers of cultural and moral fiber that the EAL students bring with them in the classroom.

Language and culture are interconnected and Stern (1992) succinctly stated “that it is not possible to teach a language without culture, and that culture is the necessary context for language use” (p. 205). Educational initiatives of “multicultural” and “intercultural” were developed over the years and highlighted that language and culture intertwine.

Critical language pedagogy (Kramsch, 1996), critical theorists (Freeman & Richards, 1993), and critical approach to TESOL (Pennycook, 1999) promote cultural awareness in language classrooms by seeking to create context within which to have a dialogue and that, in turn could be the base to explore differences between people’s values and attitudes. (Kramsch, 1996, p.7) Critical approaches to understanding culture in language teaching help create an environment for both native learners and non-native English learners to dialogue about their own culture in a meaningful way. This approach goes beyond the usual cultural education of providing information on cultural food, festivals, and customs. The pedagogy provides the teacher and both native and non-native English the learners the means to get deeper in each other’s beliefs, values and assumptions about one’s culture, hence creating further and meaningful understanding. Pennycook (1999) argues that in critical work, “awareness is an initial step in the process of change” (p. 336). Multicultural and intercultural initiatives hope to create awareness in students and teachers to begin the process of change towards understanding of each other.

Teacher Education

The rapid increase of EAL learners in the classrooms presents a challenge as well as an opportunity not only for teachers who are directly responsible for the education of the students, but for the educators of these teachers as well.
Ghosh & Tarrow (1993) recognize that curriculum change in the schools are important, however, it will not “make a significant difference if teachers, who present and translate the material, do not have the knowledge, attitude and commitment to the ideological change implied in equity and justice” (p. 81). How can teachers help students if they do not know what and how to do things?

In his article “The Changing Global Economy and the Future of English Teaching”, Warschauer (2000) talks about the implications for English language educators; he asserts that “culture remains an integral part of language learning, but the approach toward culture must become multifaceted” (p. 514). This belief is consistent with other authors on the subject of teacher education. Pratt-Johnson (2006) affirms the complexity of culture and that as a teacher, “being culturally competent also involves an understanding of how cultures differ under the surface and how cultures respond differently to similar situations” (Cultural Competence in the Classroom section). How does a teacher become culturally competent? How can a teacher adequately prepare to teach and interact with a culturally diverse and multi-lingual class?

Recent works suggest a movement that favours critical approaches to teaching second language learners. Gay & Kirkland (2003) argue that “developing personal and professional critical consciousness about racial, cultural, and ethnic diversity should be a major component of preservice teacher education” (p. 181). This would be equally important for and applicable to in-service teacher development as well. Especially as the growing numbers of EAL learners are no longer concentrated in the urban areas of the city. The once predominantly homogenous culture of the suburbs is also changing. And, if the goal of multicultural initiative is to deal with the social diversity and pluralism that exist in classrooms, then the teachers need to be equipped with knowledge and practice to carry out this objective. Inclusion of critical approaches to teaching second language learners therefore, need to be part of the general teacher education and professional development strategy.

By asking critical questions such as how and why things are the way they are, and encouraging practicing teachers to do the same, alternate views are explored. This is a way that teachers can become culturally responsive to the diversity of their classes. Teachers can give voice not only to themselves but
to the students they teach as well. The constraint here however, is the difficulty to make this work. It will involve the teachers themselves to self-reflect and question their own culture, values and assumptions before they can begin to facilitate their students to do the same; a practice that is not commonly performed.

Gay and Kirkland (2003) also list several ways to overcome preservice teachers’ resistance to cultural and critical consciousness and self-reflection: create learning climates and expectations where self-reflection and cultural consciousness are normative demands of preservice teachers; dialogue with each other; model the process of critical racial and cultural consciousness in their own teaching; and, use of other genre of writing such as poetry to examine critical social and educational issues from the perspectives of different ethnic groups. The strength of their proposed ideas is that these practices can be equally meaningful if adapted and used for in-service teacher development opportunities.

Knutson (2006) referred to Damen (1987) who “has argued, awareness of self is a necessary corollary to awareness of others” (p.597). To become aware of one’s own values, beliefs and assumptions makes one appreciate others. If at least, to recognized and accept that the other individuals have the legitimate right to also have his/her own values, beliefs and assumptions. What is involved in making this happen in class? How can this education be transferred in the classroom? What must teachers practice in the classrooms?

**Teacher Practice**

How do teachers adapt to the changing student demographics and the demands this create? What are the implications for their practice? Teachers have a great influence on their students. Therefore, it is paramount that the influence is that of a positive one. To raise cultural awareness in a linguistically and culturally diverse classroom is a great challenge for teachers. Information about different cultures abound. However, there may be more than one culture present in any given language class. How does a teacher choose and then, teach a particular culture? How can the students, both native speakers and EAL learners, take away something that is meaningful to them and the class as a whole?
Knutson (2006) argues “for increased emphasis on an understanding of self as cultural subject and openness of mind toward cultural difference” (591). This is one direction of a critical approach to teaching a multi-lingual and multicultural class. The focus is on learning how to learn a culture rather than learning facts. Depending on the activity used, this approach allows to teach many cultures at the same time. For instance, a teacher can use a questionnaire to elicit learners’ attitudes, and have students answer the questions relating to or comparing with their own individual culture prior to whole class discussion. This helps transition the students to the process of learning culture by knowing about their own “selves” first; this approach allows teachers to understand and acknowledge learners’ attitudes that may be foreign to them (Knutson, 2006). As the teachers practice cultural critical consciousness and self-reflection with the students, greater cultural awareness and meaning are promoted. This practice develops life-long skills in that, when specific information about a culture has been forgotten, the students and teacher alike will always know how to learn about a culture.

**Developing EAL Teacher Capacity in the Catholic Schools**

The preceding literature review on culture and language awareness provides a sound argument that this would be a critical topic for teacher education and development for the Catholic schools teachers of Winnipeg. Pettis’ (1998) thesis also revealed the significance of this topic when the survey results showed that “Cross-(Inter) cultural Awareness (4.48) is one of the top ten topics, and may therefore, be considered another topic of substantial importance to respondents” (p. 54) when the participants were asked “In which topics do teachers consider it important to have professional knowledge, principles and skill for their particular teaching assignment?” In fact, when the results were ranked by “Overall Important Topics”, cross-(inter)cultural awareness was sixth immediately after the technical skills of speaking, lesson planning, listening, teaching vocabulary, and needs assessment.

Similar results were collected by Stefaniuk (1993) from the Edmonton Catholic Schools teachers’ survey. Under the category of training needs, “the most frustrating experience, identified by 42% of the teachers, is their inability to communicate with ESL students” (p. 44). Although Stefaniuk interpreted this
data as the degree of comprehension of the English language, it could also infer a larger “communication” issue related to cultural differences. Because when the teachers were asked what would help them deal more effectively with ESL students, “information about cultures represented by the students”, was identified and ranked sixth, again immediately after the more technical topics (Stefaniuk, 1993). When the teachers were asked about their interaction with the ESL students, Stefaniuk (1993) summarizes that “some of these comments reveal a culture disjuncture between classroom teachers and ESL students, the dynamics of interaction on which these responses are based are undoubtedly complex and would be another investigation in itself” (p. 49).

To address this major EAL issue of culture and language awareness, is to also address the previous research questions cited from Bailey’s (2001) article with regard to teacher development: “How can in-service development best be promoted and sustained? How do effective models of in-service development change, given local needs and circumstances? How can teachers bring about their own continued professional development?” (p. 610). The principles of systemic thinking and organizational learning can provide the framework for the teacher development program.

**Applying Systemic Thinking and Organizational Learning Approach**

The topic of culture and language awareness aligns well with the concepts and principles of organizational learning and systemic thinking. Dealing with culture in the context of language teaching is very complex and requires a multi-dimensional approach to make this happen in the classrooms. Clearly, building the teachers’ capacity in this major area is not going to be an easy task. And, if systemic thinking and the learning organization principles are applied as the theoretical framework suggested, then other players or parts of the Catholic school system will need to be educated as well in the concept of culture and language awareness.

One approach to deal with the topic of culture and language awareness from a system’s perspective would be to begin a dialogue process and plan a one day of professional development session with all of the teachers and administrators of all of the schools. It would be useful to bring outside
knowledge by having a guest facilitator who is versed in the topic. This is the foundational discussion upon which other EAL related topics can be built for future in-services and professional development sessions. The teachers and the administrators alike need to be able to discuss the issues together as they lay the groundwork and begin the learning process.

From the one-day cultural and language awareness session, other programming formats and EAL topics can be developed. The EAL programming can be clustered under two main categories: 1) Diocesan/Organizational level, and 2) School/Local level. The Diocesan or organizational level involves all of the schools and may be specific to EAL teachers or open to all teachers including administrators. The school or local level could range from formal to informal type sessions. Individual schools can have “lunch and learn” sessions where by EAL related topics are discussed within the framework of real life experiences of the teachers. Sharing of insights, practices and knowledge can form the content of these sessions.

The idea behind either category of programming is to have an on-going learning opportunity to build capacity by creating a network of individuals interested in questioning their practice and implementing innovative change. The EAL Specialist/Consultant can play a major role in facilitating these system-wide and organizational learning events.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Based on the comparison of the three studies and the literature review, it can be concluded that:

1. A centralized system that supports EAL teachers will greatly benefit the Catholic schools in Winnipeg.
2. The teachers need knowledge and skills development including culture and language awareness to teach EAL.
3. The sharing of resources to support EAL teachers is a cost-effective way to gain knowledge.
4. A better system and structure within which the Catholic schools of Winnipeg can help build EAL capacity at the educator, resource and organizational.

To view the Catholic schools in Winnipeg as one system and to apply the principles of organizational learning will not only help build capacity but also create the vehicle to sustain development over time.

**Recommendations**

On the basis of the conclusions from the research the following recommendations are made:

- Create an EAL Specialist/Consultant position at the Diocese level that would provide shared services to both the Winnipeg and St. Boniface Archdioceses. The position reports to the Director of Catholic Schools of the Winnipeg Diocese whose role is to assist the educational leaders in the schools to ensure that high quality education is provided.

- Develop English as an Additional Language Programming Framework.

EAL is an issue for all of the Catholic schools in Winnipeg therefore it is a systemic matter for both Dioceses. Looking at the issue from a systems’ perspective allows for better resource allocation as well as for effective program development. Communication will be enhanced not only between schools at the administrator level, but also at the teacher level. Collinson and Cook (2007) assert that “Discussion that allow members to hear multiple perspectives or perceptions are therefore a vital part of organizational learning as well as a potent source of innovation” (p.75). An EAL Specialist/Consultant can provide the “big picture” and systems perspective by being responsible for the central coordination of resource and services that is integrated, efficient and cost effective. Appendix A outlines the recommendation and details the roles and responsibilities of the EAL Specialist/Consultant.

An EAL Programming Framework provides the template and direction for programming for the individual schools as well as for the Diocese as a whole. The framework could include the following:

1. An EAL policy statement from the Diocese.
2. Role and Responsibilities of the EAL Specialist/Consultant.

3. Types of EAL programs and description (e.g. integrated, individual or group support outside of mainstream classroom).


5. EAL Resource Guide for Teachers – list of resources: books, websites, materials, lesson models, activities, etc.

6. Develop a “bank of interpreters” at the Diocese level to assist in communicating with parents at Parent/Teacher meetings.

7. Annual EAL Teacher Development program plan for the schools.
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