

## Myrna Ordon Case Five Synthesis for Margot Filipenko

Dear Journal,

It's been a long time! Busy writing parent newsletters and I got asked to put together a guide for new teachers. I decided to take a break from reading math journals to reflect on my own past few weeks. After all, journal writing reduces anxiety! Am I anxious? Well, yes to be frank. I'm starting my guided reading program on Monday and I think I've got a better grasp on how to implement it. At first I was unsure how to choose appropriate texts for my 5/6's. Of course there is the Five Finger Test, but what other considerations are there? A majority of my students are emergent readers, and there is a small number of fluent readers. My former instructor at UBC (oh I miss her!) suggested the bible of Guided Reading, by Irene Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell to calm my nerves. I am now familiar with the leveled reading books to suit the needs of my students. I've memorized two numbers to ensure the levels are appropriate: 95 (percent) for support and 5 (percent) challenge = 100% success. Right? Gosh, I hope...

I love the dynamic that is going on between my EL learners and the rest of the class. They seem to be getting along with everyone (for the most part) and they are communicating well in class (good BICS!) However, their confidence in speaking English is not reflecting well in guided reading and other subjects. They seem to clam up when it comes to academic vocabulary. This rings true of Jim Cummins's idea that ELL students develop social language first before academic! So, in my guided reading program I've considered MGR to support my EL students. I plan on implementing vocabulary journals (with high emphasis on CALP words) to support those students in their cross-curricular studies. I understand that with EL learners, acquiring academic language can take longer if they did not have a literacy-rich learning environment previously. I've also been noticing different varieties of English being spoken in the classroom - fascinating to hear, but I worry this interferes with their learning of the curriculum. The last thing I want to do is to prohibit them from speaking the English that they know; the idea of code-switching could be introduced to show the importance of context (academia vs. leisure.) This all brings me back to what Ms. Potter said about Core French being a burden on EL students' learning. What she needs to understand is that students should not have to compartmentalize reading, writing, listening and speaking; they should be able to connect them all together. Thanks to the new curriculum, technology plays a major role in teaching literacy. Especially for EL learners, technology is powerful in helping them connect their background knowledge to what they learning. When it comes to teaching a language, I've always had the cycle of motivation, engagement and success at the back of my mind.

What is also stuck in the back of my mind is the "terrorist" incident on the playground brought to my attention from Mrs. May. I think Emma and Sophie may be too influenced by the media these days, or perhaps influenced by their parents? A scary thought. So Mrs. May thinks we need to revisit racism in our school at the next staff meeting, which I 100% agree with. I mean our school mascot is the RedSkin for goodness sake. Let's not forget the body paint incident at Halloween last year...Clearly systemic racism is present at our school. Unfortunately, some of my colleagues deny it exists. In my opinion, I think our staff need a little history lesson on racism. I plan to suggest a viewing of a CBC Massey Lecture on Racism. Being a visible minority myself, this issue is dear to me and I would hope that the rest of my colleagues will reconsider their attitudes

on racism. Having a refresher on the expectations of students from the new curriculum would not hurt either. We as educators need to model these behaviours and skills. Perhaps the next professional development could focus on racism in our school community? As much as I appreciate the apology given to Mohammed by the girls, I think this issue needs to be addressed in my class. And what better way to discuss social justice issues than in guided reading? With small groups, I can raise questions so each student has a chance to share either their own experiences or views. I think it would certainly raise awareness that our words and actions really do have an impact on each other. Also, opportunities for cooperative learning can engage the students in the core competencies of communication, positive personal and cultural identity, and social responsibility - all very important in addressing an issue like racism.

Speaking of cooperative learning after that seminar I attended, I fully believe it has a place across the curriculum. I learned Johnson's Five Basic Elements: individual accountability, face to face interaction, processing and positive interdependence. There are clearly some benefits in cooperative learning, like promoting democracy among students and practicing active listening skills. The only challenge I would see is initial personality differences and inability for students to work independently. If cooperative learning is balanced with individual learning, perhaps students will have a richer learning environment? In fact, I need to incorporate cooperative learning more in classroom to enhance interpersonal skills among all of my students.

I mentioned earlier I was taking a break from math journals. I'm happy to report that I think I've made a good decision bringing this into math. I remember reading an article by Marilyn Burns and how she thought math and writing were like "oil and water." But after facing her fear of math and introducing them to her class, she had no regrets. This motivated me to do the same; I related to her completely. I feel like I have gained so much insight into my students' math learning already just by reading their responses. I decided as my first topic to ask the students to describe their favourite number and why. They also needed to show me the number visually in different ways (graphs, charts, illustrations) and how their number is the answer to a variety of equations that they knew. This way I could see how they express their numeracy and also get an idea of where they are at in math. The last entry I read by Ty indicated to me that he may have some math anxiety. He wrote "I like zero but I don't know why." No pictures, nothing else. It is clear that I need to raise his motivation level so I replied to his entry: "Is it because it's the easiest number to deal with in math? I would love to see a picture next time!" (yes I know zero is hard to draw...) From most responses I got, the reason for their favourite number was because it was meaningful in their life - birthdays, number of pets, number of yo-yos the own... They connected math to their everyday life, which is what mathematicians do, right?! Mr. Raymond next door recommended that once I start these journals, there's no going back. I need to commit and make these journals a routine. His voice also rang in my head as I was fighting the urge to correct grammar in some of my students responses: "It's the content that counts! Not the grammar!" Oh! I just got a brilliant idea! I will have the students design their journal title page to get them excited to write their next entry... Another thing to add on the neverending to do list! Well, I guess I should get back to it. This actually helped me clarify my thinking a lot. I can say I'm a bit relaxed...for now!