LEADERSHIP PRACTICES IN DIVERSE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL COMMUNITIES: REFLECTIONS OF TEN PRINCIPALS REGARDING THE LITERACY LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING STUDENTS

by

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Abstract

This thesis examined what means a group of elementary school principals in multicultural communities used to support and improve the language learning of English Language Learning (ELL) students. In the thesis, multicultural communities are defined as urban schools which have a majority of students whose mother tongue is not English. Although they are challenged to value and honour the diversity of their school communities, these principals must also ensure that their teachers meet the mandated rigors of Ontario curriculum, and that the students attain the desired levels of achievement as defined by the Ontario Ministry of Education.

In an increasing number of schools in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) ELL students form a majority of the student population; yet this reality is barely acknowledged in provincial educational policy or in the professional education of Ontario’s school principals. Nor has educational research adequately addressed the challenges of educating ELL students over the past 35 years. The research literature on the characteristics, activities, and behaviour of effective school principals rarely mentions their knowledge of other cultures and languages or their expertise related to ethnic and racial diversity.
Semi-structured interviews were used to capture the responses of 10 elementary school principals of multicultural school communities. The findings indicate that principals who were successful in leading multicultural school communities and improving the literacy achievement of ELL students had a deep understanding of literacy development, cultural needs of the community, and ESL issues. Although much of the leadership framework is similar to principalship in non-multicultural school communities, principals identified a number of leadership competencies that are particular to a diverse school community. For example, a deep understanding of language learning and the complex issue of community engagement.

The findings have implications for the courses which prepare principals for these schools, the professional development of senior administrators, and the choice of personnel suitable for leadership roles in multicultural communities.
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Chapter One:
Introduction

This chapter includes some general background information on immigration to Canada and Ontario in order to set the stage for the educational context of the English language learner (ELL) in Ontario, and more specifically in greater Toronto area schools. It goes on to delineate the achievement of ELL students based on Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO) statistics and concludes by setting out the purpose for the research and also the research questions. It also provides a glossary of terms, an outline of the thesis, background information on the Canadian immigration policy, and the immigration experience.

Location of Self Within the Research

I was born the ninth of 9 children. My father was of Burmese parents and my mother of Indian parents. The first three children in our family were born in India, the next two in Burma, and the last three were born after we immigrated to England. We were brought up as strict Catholics, saying the rosary nightly; eating fish on Fridays; and observing all the religious observances, such as attending mass every Sunday. My parents placed a very strong emphasis on education and wanted all nine children to be professionals. As a result, we were expected to do homework and assignments above and beyond the expectations of the school; achieve high academic results; and plan to attend university upon completion of high school.

My father came over to Canada 1955 and found employment as a teacher and housing for our family. Our family then immigrated to Canada in 1956 and all the children
attended Catholic elementary and secondary school. At that time, students were required to pay fees after grade 10 because full funding had not come into effect. We lived as an extended family – maternal grandmother and maternal maiden aunts in a modest backsplitt in a Toronto suburb.

As a newcomer to Canada, I felt like an outsider and self-conscious of our family arrangement, i.e., extended family living together and of some of our customs and traditions, i.e., food, clothes. This continued for several years and surfaced at various times throughout my adolescence and early adult life. However, all the children made friends and integrated well into Canadian society of the 1960s. All the children did attend post secondary schooling and have established themselves successfully in various professional careers.

I went on to the Faculty of Education at the University of Toronto and graduated in 1984. I secured an elementary teaching position as a result of my training in French as a Second Language. After having taught French for a number of years, I took my additional qualifications in Special Education and held various positions within that area of specialization.

During that time, I obtained my Master's of Education degree with a focus on the impact of otitis media on early literacy development. I also took my training as a Reading Recovery teacher and taught reading recovery for a number of years. It was during that time that I took a particular interest in the early literacy development of children and wondered why some children came to be literate so easily and others struggled to learn to read and write. I applied much of what I learned from my Master's work to my work with
struggling readers in the various school settings where I taught. Many of the schools were in very diverse communities and the young learners were coping with multiple languages.

After a number of years, I moved into administration and was placed as a vice principal in a small school with very little diversity. From there, I was promoted as principal in a very diverse school community. The neighbouring schools were in very close proximity and as principals, we formed a learning network to support our collective work. We shared similar situations and dynamics within our respective schools.

As the principal of the school, I was able to effect positive change for the teachers, parents, and students. This was seen in our improving EQAO results and the monitoring data of the at-risk students – those students who are consistently performing in reading and writing at or below level 2. I began to wonder if other principals in similar school environments were doing similar things to effect change for their school community. That is when the idea of the research first surfaced. I wanted to know what principals leading diverse school communities did to effect change for their community.

I saw a lot of similarities between my family when we first arrived in Canada and those families new to Canada in the school. I felt that I could identify with their feelings of excitement and apprehension; their expectations for a good education for their children; and their desire to belong.

I feel a tremendous commitment to the families in the community. Many have given up so much to come to Canada. Some have come from very difficult circumstances and they want a better life for their children. By exploring the leadership parameters and
conditions to support the literacy learning of ELL students, principals can make a
tremendous difference in the lives of these children and their families.

Glossary of Terms

**Antiracist education:** An approach to education that integrates the perspectives of and information about, Aboriginal and racial minority groups into an education system and its practices. The aim of antiracist education is the elimination of racism in all its forms. An antiracist education seeks to identify and change educational practices that foster racism, as well as racist attitudes and behaviours that underlie and reinforce such policies and practices. Antiracist education provides teachers and students with knowledge and skills to critically examine racism in order to understand how it originated, how to identify and how to challenge it.

**Canadian citizen:** a person who is Canadian by birth or who has applied for citizenship through Citizenship and Immigration Canada and has received a citizenship certificate.

**Capacity Building:** the planned development of knowledge, skills, or ability to accomplish work by acquiring/sharing resources, funding, and/or people.

**Convention refugee:** any person who:

a. by reason of a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion,
   i. is outside the country of his/her national origin and is unable or, by reason of that fear, is unwilling to avail him/herself of the protection of that country or,
ii. not having a country of nationality, is outside the country of his/her former habitual residence and is unable or, by reason of that fear, is unwilling to return to that country;

b. has not ceased to be a Convention refugee for such reasons as voluntary repatriation.

**Culture:** Attitudes and behaviour that are characteristic of a particular social group or organization. They share values, beliefs, traditions, norms, customs, arts, history, folklore, heritage and patterns learned through shared interaction of a group of people who typically share historical and/or geographical proximity, regardless of race or ethnicity.

**Diversity:** The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

**ESL/ELD:** English as a second language/English language development

**Equity:** A condition or state of fair, inclusive, and respectful treatment of all people. Equity does not mean treating people the same without regard for individual differences.

**Ethnicity:** A common heritage of a particular group who share elements such as history, language, rituals, and preferences for music and food.

**Eurocentric education:** A curriculum that affirms primarily the experiences and achievements of people of Anglo-Celtic and Western European background, and in so
doing minimizes and marginalizes the experiences, contributions, and achievements of people of other origins.

**Exclusion:** The state of group disempowerment, degradation, and disenfranchisement maintained by systemic barriers and supported by an implicit ideology of ethnic or racial superiority.

**Inclusive education:** Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals are respected.

**Inclusivity:** Achieved as a result of groups and individuals helping each other through caring, cooperation, and trust to fulfill aspirations that generate the feeling and the reality of belonging among peoples of different backgrounds, who live, learn, play, and work together.

**Multiculturalism:** Practices within a society that acknowledge the contributions and perspectives of diverse ethnocultural groups.

**Race:** a group of people who are believed to belong to the same genetic stock.

**Social justice:** A concept based on the belief that each individual and group within society has a right to equal civil liberties, moral freedoms, and opportunities for full participation in the social, educational, and economic institutions, together with responsibilities of an adult in the society.
**Tribes Training:** Tribes is a step-by-step process within the classroom to achieve specific learning goals. Four agreements are honoured: attentive listening, appreciation/no put downs, mutual respect, and the right to pass.

Students learn a set of collaborative skills so that they can work well together in long-term groups (Tribes). The focus is on how to help each other work on tasks, set goals and solve problems. Through cooperative learning the members work in supportive groups towards participatory democracy.

**Background.**

A school is a microcosm of the society in which it is embedded. When the society changes, these changes are reflected in its schools. Tectonic shifts in the Canadian economy and society over the past 35 years have transformed our classrooms.

Toronto is now considered one of the most highly diverse, ethnic cities in the world and as a result, this ethno-cultural and economic diversity is reflected in the classrooms of neighbourhood schools. In a recent feature article in the Toronto Star (Kopun & Keung, 2007), statistics indicate that 462 out of 1,000 people in the GTA were born outside Canada. In addition, most of those immigrants speak another language other than French or English. This has created a need to address, not only the educational development of the students, but also the English language learning necessitated by the city’s major multicultural communities. Figure 1 shows the percentage of the population that speaks a language other than English or French as their first language.
How can the elementary school principal translate the many needs of ALL the varied learners in the school into sound classroom practice which assures high achievement? How can the linguistic diversity of children in the elementary schools be reconciled, supported and enhanced, so that they are prepared to perform successfully in a monolingual secondary school and possibly tertiary level institutions, eventually leading to employment in a monolingual economy? English is not only one of Canada’s two official languages, it is now the leading language of trade and technology of the world.

Historically, the academic success of the ethnically different learner has been uncertain. Even the United States, where there has been universal elementary school access for over a century (1885 – 2005), has not realized equal learning achievement (Barton, 2004). The National Assessment of Educational Progress consistently reports that the average eighth grade minority student performs at the level of the average fourth grade White student (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003). Hale (2004) maintains that...
there are documented reasons for the achievement gap. He suggests the following are determining factors. First, the increased focus in education today is on teaching more academic content at an earlier age; this results in minority students' tenuous grasp of critical fundamental learning which has exponential consequences. Second, teachers' lack of understanding of the children's backgrounds; this often results in lack of sensitivity in the delivery of their instructional methods and poor connection to the curriculum content. This is true of poor children even though they are from the ethnically dominant national culture; but it is compounded for those children from ethnically and linguistically diverse cultures. Third, inequity of preschool experiences exists for both sets of minority students, the linguistically and the economically challenged. A century of research on the educational achievement of students demonstrates the high correlation between the socio-economic-educational background of the family and the child's and youth's educational progress. Fourth, poor neighbourhoods are more likely to be burdened by having poor teachers. Grossman and Beaupre (2001) report that children in the highest poverty neighbourhoods and in the highest minority and lowest achieving schools are also roughly five times more likely to be taught by weak teachers. This further compromises the probability of their having much academic success. However, research in several countries has also shown that the schools children attend can make a difference to their academic achievement, even after family background, language and ability upon entering school are taken into account (Raudenbush & Willms, 1991). This suggests that if school leaders understand the correlates of effective schools for diverse communities, they can overcome the multiple challenges to learning that their pupils face; and improve their current and future academic success.
The Ontario educational context.

In Canada, there is no national, governmental body responsible for education. The provinces and territories have constitutional jurisdiction over education and the federal role is limited to transfer payments to the provinces and territories which are intended to cover some of the costs of health, education, and welfare.

Roessingh and Watt (2001) conducted one of the only long-term tracking studies of ELL students in Canada. They followed 540 ELL students in one Calgary high school between 1989 and 1997. Approximately 40% of the school’s population spoke a first language other than English, with Vietnamese, Chinese, Arabic, Spanish and Punjabi being the most common. Their study found an overall drop-out rate of 74% among ELL students which represents two and one half times that of the general student population. Not surprisingly, the researchers found that those ELL students who arrived as beginners in English were the most likely to drop out. Roessingh and Watt go on to say that successful ELL students are those who have an educational background more aligned with the Canadian system prior to entering high school and usually had studied English prior to their arrival in Canada. The researchers found that secondary school students who do not have strong English skills just cannot deal with the complicated language that they encounter in textbooks. Thus they are not able to translate their academic ability into school work which earns decent marks.

Ontario’s educational system is currently undergoing profound change. These changes are taking place as the education system aligns itself with the many demands of preparing students for success in the 21st century.
An important document reflecting public opinion about education in Ontario is the Report of the Royal Commission on Learning (1994). The Commission was mandated by the government of the day to study and report on a shared vision to guide Ontario’s elementary and secondary students and to clarify the accountability components that would need to be in place to meet the needs of all students. This report, the first comprehensive review of the education system since the 1950s, noted that the purpose of education was the intellectual nurturing of students. It also cited other important purposes such as learning to learn, the elements of good citizenship in a democratic society, preparation for work, and instilling values.

The fifth report of the Education Improvement Commission (2000) made a number of recommendations on improving student achievement. These recommendations were based largely on input from consultation across the province.

First, bold investments in early childhood education will pay huge dividends in the future. Second, we must focus on professional development and training and review the characteristics and qualifications we want to see in our educational leaders. Third, we need time to consolidate the gains we have made. Fourth, we should establish a comprehensive accountability framework to ensure that our students’ achievements continue to improve. (p. 18)

During the years 1995-2003, the Conservative government was in power in Ontario. The province saw unprecedented change in the educational system and an overwhelming amount of reform. With these reforms, the schools’ working circumstances changed dramatically and as a result, the role of the principal has become increasingly daunting and complex. These changes took place in a turbulent policy environment, an overwhelming extent and pace of change and a new view of teacher involvement and expertise (Gidney, 1999). Overload, role ambiguity and lack of ministerial guidance and thoughtful planning
has resulted in increased stress for school administrators who are involved in fundamental change efforts in their schools. This may also be the case in dealing with the ELL learner. Just at a time when there was immense immigration of people who could not speak English to the province of Ontario, the province was undergoing massive educational reform. Until recently, the Ontario Ministry of Education has provided very little direction by way of policy documents and curriculum resources to support this struggling group of students. Only in the fall of 2007, has the Ministry of Education released a policy document for school boards to outline procedures to support English language learners in Ontario schools.

Also during these years, a number of initiatives were undertaken by the provincial government to increase accountability within the public education system (Belchetz, 2004). These include system-wide student assessments and evaluations and the development of province-wide indicators and external tests. All these are the mandate and responsibility of the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO), which was established by legislation in June 1996. At the elementary level, tests of reading, writing and mathematics are administered for students in Grades 3 and 6 and results are publicly reported to demonstrate that the expectations of the new Ontario Curriculum are being met. At the secondary level, tests are administered to students in Grades 9 and 10 and success in the literacy test administered in Grade 10 is a requirement for a student’s graduation.

The establishment of the EQAO as an arm’s length agency of the Ministry of Education not only helps to provide the information to government and the public on the quality of education in Ontario through the reporting of educational achievement based on province-wide student assessment, it also provides evidence for system accountability.
**The ELL learner in the Ontario context.**

Census data (Statistics Canada, 2001) indicate that between 1991 and 2001, immigration to Canada accounted for 69% of Canada’s population growth. Most of those new Canadians settled in and around Canada’s largest cities, Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver; many settled in the GTA in Ontario. A very large number came from non-English speaking countries (see Figure 2).
Figure 2. Immigration statistics 2006 (StatsCan, 2006).
As an important first step in understanding and supporting linguistically diverse students is understanding the terminology. Referring to students as English language learners (ELL) is much more inclusive and accurate than calling them English as a Second language students (ESL) according to Nordmeyer (2008). In actual fact, many ELL students may be learning English as a third or fourth language. He goes on to point out that the term English language learner connotes a difference in degree rather than kind. In this research the term English Language Learner (ELL) will be used to denote students who are learning English for the first time even though it may be their third or fourth language. The term ESL will denote the English as a Second language program that is offered to support these ELL students.

Over the past several decades, population growth in Ontario has largely been due to recent immigration. Many new Canadian families settle in Ontario, and more specifically the greater Toronto area, for the quality of life promised by economic prosperity, affordable housing and proximity to employment. However, many of these new families arrive not speaking English and as a result, their children enter the school system with limited English proficiency.

Although the Ministry of Education does not offer a specific definition of the ELL learner, it does offer some operating parameters in the publication, *English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development Resource Guide* (2001),

Students who have immigrated to Canada, students from Canadian communities in which a language other than English is spoken, and students who speak a language other than English at home may come to school with limited understanding of English. These students are usually proficient users of their own languages but may require assistance to learn English, the language of instruction in Ontario schools. English as a second language instruction is designed to provide such assistance. (p. 6)
A disturbing set of test results from the EQAO concern the Grade 10 Literacy Test. Early results from EQAO testing presented a disturbing picture regarding the academic difficulties that many ELL students were experiencing. It was evident that minority students who are identified as ELL were not achieving the expected level of learning success in English. In grade 3 and 6 EQAO results for non-ELL students, the students achieve at times twice the results of ELL students (see Figures 3 and 4). From 2001 through 2004 only slight improvement was noted for ELL learners.
Figure 3. Results of the Provincial Grade 3 EQAO Assessment: % of students at levels 3 and 4 (Method 1).
Figure 4. Results of the Provincial Grade 6 EQAO Assessment: % of students at levels 3 and 4 (Method 1).
In recent years, the demographics of the GTA classroom have changed as seen in Figure 5. However, the achievement of all groups has not kept pace with the achievement of English language students. As a result, we need to look at the different aspects of school life that impact on language learner to uncover the salient practices that have a positive effect on English language learning. Leadership practices in a diverse multicultural school community that impact positively on English language learning is the focus of this thesis. In a predominantly monocultural context, as in southern Ontario in the early half of the twentieth century, making broad assumptions about children’s preschool experiences and exposure to language may have “fit” to some extent. However, this idealized homogeneous group does not exist today. Mirroring society’s transformations, many urban schools have changed into cosmopolitan institutions. Now, as teachers try to educate a global population in the classroom, educational leaders must challenge narrow provincial educational beliefs. Schools are now being asked to educate children who have no prior formal schooling entering grade two; children who have no prior experience with written text entering Grade 4; and children who do not speak English entering Grade 7. If it is to be addressed, it must be by skilled educators who have a deep understanding of their craft and the needs of such students.
Figure 5. The region’s ethnic composition: Comparison between 1986 and 2001.
The constantly changing demographics of the greater Toronto population are challenging educators and school principals to differentiate their teaching. Teachers must learn to recognize the differences in teaching experiences and learning styles of their pupils; to recognize the importance of the roles of family traditions and commitments; must understand attitudes towards cooperation and competition, and recognize the importance of economic and cultural capital, to name a few. All these contribute to learning dilemmas for the cultural minorities and the educators alike.

Educational reform has been on the agenda in Ontario since World War II. Recognition of the importance of principals to school reform and improvement is long standing, but recently the focus on the principal as the key to the improvement of learning for all children has greatly intensified.

The school district that participated in the study was chosen because of its high and increasingly complex diversity of population. For the purposes of this research, the school district studied shall be named the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) School District.

There has been much written about the achievement gap of minority students, it has not taken a specific Canadian or Ontario focus (Barton, 2004; Hale, 2004). This thesis looks at the achievement of English language learners in the Ontario elementary school context with particular focus on the role the principal plays in supporting ELL learning.

**Purpose of the study.**

With particular focus on the literacy development of ELL students, this thesis investigates what has constituted leadership in diverse school contexts through two lenses:

1. the core beliefs of the principal;
2. the leadership of the principal based on those core beliefs which translate into
the manner and use of key people in the school and the innovative practices to
address the literacy learning of the ELL student.

The aim of this small-scale research is to contribute to the knowledge base
concerning effective leadership within a diverse elementary school population with a
particular emphasis on the achievement of English language learners.

The following figures show the extent of the growth in diversity over the past eight
years in the greater Toronto area. Figures 6 and 7 show the achievement of ELL students
as compared to the rest of the elementary population.
**ESL / ELD Learners: Reading**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Board 630</th>
<th>Province 9679</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>317</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE1**</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating Students</td>
<td>536</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Data</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exempt</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At or Above Provincial Standard (Levels 3 and 4)*** 57% 50%

---

**ESL / ELD Learners: Writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Board 630</th>
<th>Province 9688</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>357</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE1**</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating Students</td>
<td>539</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Data</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exempt</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At or Above Provincial Standard (Levels 3 and 4)*** 64% 58%

---

**ESL / ELD Learners: Mathematics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Board 630</th>
<th>Province 9688</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE1**</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating Students</td>
<td>555</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Data</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exempt</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At or Above Provincial Standard (Levels 3 and 4)*** 68% 59%

---

* Because percentages in tables and graphs are rounded, and because graphs do not show all reporting categories, percentages may not add to 100.

** See the Explanation of Terms.

*** These percentages are based on the actual number of students and cannot be calculated simply by adding the rounded percentages of students at Levels 3 and 4

**Figure 6. Results in Reading, Writing and Mathematics, 2005-2006: Grade 6: English as a second language / English literacy development learners.**
ESL / ELD Learners: Reading*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Board 579</th>
<th>Province 7039</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>33 6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>266 46%</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>118 20%</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>29 5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE**</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating Students</td>
<td>446 77%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Data</td>
<td>5 1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exempt</td>
<td>128 22%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At or Above Provincial Standard (Levels 3 and 4)***</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ESL / ELD Learners: Writing*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Board 579</th>
<th>Province 7039</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>33 6%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>300 52%</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>117 20%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>2 &lt;1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE**</td>
<td>1 &lt;1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating Students</td>
<td>453 78%</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Data</td>
<td>5 1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exempt</td>
<td>121 21%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At or Above Provincial Standard (Levels 3 and 4)***</td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ESL / ELD Learners: Mathematics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Board 579</th>
<th>Province 7039</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>99 17%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>280 48%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>86 15%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>13 2%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NE**</td>
<td>0 0%</td>
<td>&lt;1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participating Students</td>
<td>478 83%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Data</td>
<td>5 1%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exempt</td>
<td>96 17%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At or Above Provincial Standard (Levels 3 and 4)***</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Because percentages in tables and graphs are rounded, and because graphs do not show all reporting categories, percentages may not add to 100.

** See the Explanation of Terms.

*** These percentages are based on the actual number of students and cannot be calculated simply by adding the rounded percentages of students at Levels 3 and 4.

Figure 7. Results in Reading, Writing and Mathematics, 2005-2006: Grade 6: English as a second language / English literacy development learners.
**Research questions.**

By examining the interplay of cultural and linguistic diversity, literacy learning, and leadership in the elementary school setting, the research investigates the role that school principals play in addressing the language learning needs of ELL students. The following specific research questions were addressed:

- To what extent is there congruence in the core beliefs of these principals of schools in a diverse school community?

- To what extent do principals in diverse communities share a common leadership style?

- What were the leadership practices that manifest themselves in the diverse school community and how do principals implement these leadership practices?

- Do these practices reflect the core beliefs and leadership style of the principals in responding to the unique needs of the diverse school communities encompassing students, parents, and teachers?

- What were the critical leadership factors which account for the literacy learning of ELL students?
Context of the Study

The contextual considerations of this thesis are covered in three sections: the Canadian immigration policy; the immigrant experience; and the parameters within which the GTA School District, used for this research, currently works with the ELL learner.

The Canadian immigration policy.

Currently, immigration accounts for a significant part of Canada’s population, its rate of growth and demographic structure. Under the Constitution, immigration is a shared responsibility between the federal government and the provinces, with federal legislation prevailing. Section 8(1) of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act provides for federal-provincial agreements on immigration. The federal government currently has agreements in place with eight provinces and one territory, covering a range of issues including settlement and integration services, language training, labour market access and the Provincial Nominee program, which allows provinces to nominate skilled workers who settle in their jurisdiction.

Since 1967, Canada’s immigration program has been based on non-discriminatory principles both in law and in practice. Citizenship and Immigration Canada assesses foreign nationals, usually in the country of origin, on standards that do not discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, colour, religion, or sex. The immigration program is universal.

The Act establishes three basic categories that correspond to major program objectives: reuniting families, contributing to economic development and protecting refugees. Applicants can be admitted to Canada as permanent residents under three
corresponding classes: Family Class, Economic Class or Refugee Class. Helping families reunite in Canada is a key objective of Canada’s immigration policy. Members of the **Family Class** are people sponsored to come to Canada by an immediate family relative, a spouse, a common-law partner or a conjugal partner who is a Canadian citizen or permanent resident of Canada. Permanent residents admitted to Canada under the **Economic Class** are selected for their skills and ability to contribute to Canada’s economy. The Economic Class is comprised of two streams: skilled workers and business immigrants. Canada values skilled immigrants who can effectively compete and succeed in the country’s knowledge-based economy. Foreign nationals who are skilled workers are chosen for their ability to become successfully established in Canada. Skilled workers are assessed according to a point system (see Table 1). In order to be admitted to Canada, skilled workers must:

1. have at least one year of work experience in a management occupation;
2. have enough money to support themselves and family members in Canada.

**Table 1**  
**Immigration Point System**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selection criteria</th>
<th>Maximum points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Official languages (English and/or French)</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment experience</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arranged employment in Canada</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Business immigrants are selected to support the development of a strong Canadian economy, either through their direct investment, their entrepreneurial skills or self-employment. Business immigration is made up of the Investor, Entrepreneur, and Self-employed person Classes. Business immigrant applications are assessed on a point system as well.

Canada has long had a humanitarian tradition of helping people in need and as such, each year Canada welcomes between 20,000 to 30,000 Convention refugees and other displaced persons. Refugees are accepted into Canada under the following classes:

1. Convention refugees or persons needing protection selected at a visa office abroad;

2. Persons in Canada accepted by the Immigration and Refugee Board as Convention refugees or persons in need of protection;

3. Persons in Canada granted protection under a Pre-Removal Risk Assessment (a formal structured process for reviewing risk before a person is removed).

In a recent discussion paper *Ontario’s Urban and Suburban Schools* (2008), the advocacy group People for Education report that while immigrant populations are beginning to decline in the city centre, there is unprecedented growth in the outer suburbs and the majority of newcomers to Canada settle in Ontario’s urban and suburban areas. However, services to these areas have not kept pace with the change. In 2006, one out of every five Canadians was born outside the country. When immigrants come to Canada, 52% of them choose Ontario as their home (StatsCan, 2006). The number of foreign-born residents in Ontario’s urban areas has increased by an average of 15% since 2001. A majority, 70%, of
the foreign-born population in 2006 reported they spoke a mother tongue other than English or French (StatsCan, 2006). Statistics Canada (2006) census results show that the percentage of Ontario families living in poverty grew from 10.3% in 2001 to 17.3% in 2006. Unfortunately, many recent immigrants are at-risk for living in poverty.

**The stresses of immigration.**

The GTA School District involved in the study, like many other school boards, has created positions for supportive personnel employed by the school district to facilitate relations with new Canadian families coming to school within the district. Some of these positions are funded by the Federal government, such as the Settlement Workers, but there are also a number of positions that are unique to the school district. These individuals work with schools in supporting families to build positive relationships in order to help both the school and the family be mutually successful, with the ultimate goal of enhancing the Ontario school experience for the child. This team does not work directly with families but with school principals to identify programs and agencies to help with student success. Each of these workers represents the various major ethnic/cultural communities within the district. Each worker speaks a number of languages from that community and as a result is able to support families and schools in working together. For the purpose of this thesis, these individuals were interviewed and the issues that emerged in these interviews are reviewed in this section. This experience is not located within a specific community. Regardless of whether the new Canadian may be African, Latin American, Asian, Chinese, or West Indian, the team reported that the immigrant experience is very, very similar. Time and time again, they learned that the experience is the same. Immigrants face major challenges.
One of the team’s major concerns over the years is the huge disconnect in what immigrants understand are the opportunities available in Canada compared to the reality found after arrival. Another is the disconnect between Federal government policies and Provincial government realities. For example, federal agencies are told by local authorities that some communities have a shortage of doctors. This creates the notion that Canada is the land of opportunity for professional people. However, when immigrant physicians arrive and are seeking to settle in Ontario, these professionals find that now they have to deal with the Ontario Medical Association which is the controlling body for the province. Most are told that they have to start back with basic/entry level training if they want to practice medicine in this province. Even in cases where prior medical training is recognized as of satisfactory standard, immigrant physicians have to spend at least a year in remedial study and hospital practice. This is the human tragedy. The longer these professionals spend outside their profession, the less likely it is that they will be able to re-enter without considerable retraining.

**Parameters and directions within the school district.**

The background preparation for the thesis research also involved interviewing GTA School District personnel responsible for ELL learners and program. There was consensus among those interviewed that the school district had made a long term commitment to literacy development of all learners, including the ELL learner. The team highlighted the change in the demographics of the area and reported that the school district was responding in kind with increased services to schools and communities. This was part of the strategic plan for the district.
For example, in 2000, the district had one consultant, several ESL networks in place, three community workers and some translators in place. With the increased ESL enrolment, the District has an increased number of liaison workers, and an increased awareness on the part of administrators. An administrator for ELL services has been appointed with budget and staff, and additional resources and consultants, and increased numbers of Settlement Workers to support families. The team members now also sit on various committees and contribute a voice at various decision-making tables within the school district. Outside of the district, the team has had representation at the Ministry of Education and EQAO in order to influence policies and legislation.

The team has also worked hard:

- to develop demonstration classrooms within the district to model exemplary teaching strategies for ELL students
- to establish an ELL summer school
- to initiate a Reception Centre to receive new Canadians and check their documents as well as screen the children for English language proficiency
- to establish monthly district-wide ELL network meetings to support teachers. Each month, the team puts out an ELL Monthly Newsletter which discusses issues dealing with ELL learners and presents strategies and supports to deal with complicated/unique issues.
The message from the ESL team is clear. All teachers and administrators need to be responsible for the language learning of the ELL students in their schools. There is no one model that fits all the ELL learners.

**Approach to leadership within the GTA school district.**

The GTA School District has developed an in-depth leadership framework which addresses various components of the leadership process: retention and recruitment; mentoring; professional development; and succession planning. The overarching image of the effective school principal is one who demonstrates the emotional intelligence to “ensure a school culture in which a pervasive ethos of equity, inclusivity and mutual respect is fostered and sustained” (p. 6). Figure 8 is taken from the district’s *Leadership Development Framework* (p. 3).

**Leadership Development Framework: A Continuum of Support**

(GTA School District 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emergent Leadership</th>
<th>First time Administrators</th>
<th>Experienced Vice Principals</th>
<th>Experienced Principals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership preparation for teachers aspiring to formal leadership roles:</td>
<td>Required training and professional learning for vice principals and principals new to their role (vice principals in their first four years and principals until their second year in the role)</td>
<td>Required training and professional learning for vice principals in the role for more than four years</td>
<td>On-going professional learning and required training for principals in the role for more than two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Lead Teacher/Subject Head Series</td>
<td>- Mentoring of vice principals by their principal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- PQP courses</td>
<td>- Coaching of first year principals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- VP Internship</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On-going coaching/mentoring, network learning, cross panel and local learning initiatives

*Figure 8. GTA School District Leadership Development Framework (2007).*
The GTA School District believes that the leadership role in the school focuses on the following research-based leadership practices:

- Setting Direction and Sustaining the Vision
- Building Relationships
- Leading and Managing Instruction
- Further Developing the Organization

**Setting Direction and Sustaining the Vision** – In the GTA School District, leaders are expected to build and then sustain a sense of shared purpose. Principals foster a strategic perspective through the school planning process. They will use data to inform their decisions and develop and monitor student achievement. School leaders are expected to value and support parent engagement.

**Building Relationships** – Effective school leaders in the GTA School District are expected to strive to establish genuine, trusting relationships with students, staff, families and communities guided by mutual respect, a sense of equity and inclusivity.

**Leading and Managing Instruction** – In the GTA School District, effective school leaders believe that all children can learn given the appropriate time and support. Principals are expected to utilize their knowledge of teaching and learning to monitor and support growth. Effective leaders engage families and communities as partners to support student achievement.

**Further Developing the Organization** – In response to the complexities of various school contexts, effective school leaders in the GTA School District are committed to
creating a culture of collaboration to support student achievement. They will build opportunities for distributive leadership. They will value the voices of diversity.

Within each of these leadership practices, the school district outlines the competencies which an effective leader would demonstrate. These include:

**Setting Direction and Sustaining the Vision:**
- establish a sense of shared purpose
- use of data to inform school plan
- build consensus around the SPCI
- envisions the future
- delivers on commitments

**Building Relationships**
- is visible and accessible
- builds purposeful partnerships
- appreciates, respects, and empowers others
- mediates and resolves conflicts

**Leading and Managing Instruction**
- fosters professional learning communities
- demonstrates a deep knowledge of teaching and learning
- empowers teachers to be instructional leaders
- engages families and communities
- manages day-to-day operations

**Further Developing the Organization**
- fosters a changing school culture
- fosters growth and development in self and others
- develops leadership capacity of others
- takes responsibility and is accountable
Outline of the Thesis

Chapter 2 is a review of the relevant research literature on diversity, racism, literacy learning, and educational leadership as it pertains to the ELL learner.

Chapter 3 describes the research methods used for the study – information about sample selection, sample demographics, data collection, procedures, data analysis, organization and management are described and the limitations of the research discussed.

Chapter 4 reviews the current documents from the Ministry of Education and the school district. The analysis looks for trends and directions in the documents as they pertain to English Language Learners.

In Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, the research results are reported in terms of the core beliefs of the principals in a diverse school community; the leadership style and the resultant behaviours that they believe are successful in the context of a school with high student economic, cultural / linguistic diversity; and the practices they believe contribute to educating ELL learners in diverse schools. Chapter 6 reviews the feedback from the principals’ focus groups to a series of questions about the major findings of the interviews.

Chapter 7 is the synthesis of the findings and draws out their implications for education. It reviews the research findings in relation to the original questions raised in Chapter 1 and the previous research reviewed in Chapter 2.

The thesis ends with a discussion of implications for educational leadership in the schools of diverse communities within Ontario.
Summary

Urban and suburban school demographics have undergone unprecedented change in the GTA in the last 35 years. Immigration has accounted for a large part of Canada’s and Ontario’s population growth. Many of these new immigrants settle in the GTA and a high percentage speak a language other than English. Unfortunately, many also live in high poverty neighbourhoods. In Boards across the GTA, EQAO test results show that ELL learners achieve less well than their English speaking classmates at the Grade 3, 6, and 9 levels.
Chapter Two;
Review of the Related Literature and
Conceptual Framework of Thesis

This chapter is in two parts. The first reports the review of relevant, related literature; the second, the conceptual framework for the thesis research which was devised by reference particularly to the work of Jim Cummins and Kathleen Cotton.

The Literature Review

The literature review, which was the first phase of the thesis research, proceeded through a number of stages. Relevant articles in three related areas – diversity, literacy and leadership - had been read during the coursework for doctoral studies. These were supplemented by articles cited in the initial literature and by literature searches on the Internet and the Educational Resources Information Centre (ERIC). Finally, the Ontario Ministry of Education documents and relevant Board documents were critically analyzed as to official regulations, guidelines available, support services and provincial perspective.

Cultural and linguistic diversity.

In the early and mid 19th century, immigration to Canada was relatively slow but steady from three sources: Anglo-Celts from the rural populations of England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales driven from their traditional lands by land enclosure, poverty and famine; comparable population from Scandinavian, northwest Europe; and migration from the northern Midwest states to the south of Canada before the American Civil War and the mass movement over the Allegheny Mountains into the Ohio Valley (Ontario: People and History, 2008). These populations were culturally congruent with the former settlers of New
England and the eastern U.S. and with the anglophones of Quebec, what is now known as
the Canadian Maritimes and Ontario.

During the last two decades of the century, there was a steady importation of
Chinese labourers initially from those employed in the U.S. and later directly to Canada to
work as labourers on the building of railways (Ontario: People and History, 2008). In 1923,
to appease a growing public concern fuelled by such large numbers of foreign unskilled
workers, the government imposed a head tax, and as a result, immigration from China was
virtually cut off. Immigration from Britain and Western Europe continued (Ontario: People
and History, 2008).

As the Canadian West opened up, the Laurier government of 1896 – 1905
encouraged thousands of settlers into the Prairies with the promise of cheap land. This not
only attracted British immigrants but also large numbers from West and Central Europe,
from the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Ukraine, and the Baltic states whose mother
tongue was not English and whose ethnic culture was foreign. During those years, the
common schooling provided to all children would today be recognized as elementary
education. In most cases it was publicly supported and free, and consisted of
approximately four to seven years of study. The official language of schools was English or
French, although various areas of what had become Canada, dealt with concentrations of
non-English speaking populations in a mixture of languages. For example, parts of
Manitoba and Saskatchewan had village schools where the language of instruction initially
was Ukrainian or a bilingual Ukrainian and English. But, generally, it may be said that
school authorities made no special arrangements for non-English speaking children.
The prevalent belief in the first half of the 20th century society in Canada was that the country held a set of Christian and civic values, different from and superior to those held elsewhere and that all immigrant groups should accept and incorporate these values or go home. There was the assumption that White, Anglo-Saxon, protestant, values should prevail in civil society (Ontario: People and History, 2008).

As a result, Ontario’s educational system was an operative melting pot; instilling such values in the children of newcomers whatever their ethnic, racial or religious backgrounds. Educational policy in Ontario is replete with these Christian values (Rahim, 1992). This had its roots in the early policy direction of Reverend Egerton Ryerson, Director of Public Instruction for Canada West in the 1800s. It was expected that immigrants who were “foreign” would be brought into mainstream Canadian life through the educational system (Ontario: People and History, 2008). With the discovery of rich mineral resources in Ontario’s north, automobile manufacturing took off in 1903 when Henry Ford set up his car manufacturing business in Windsor, Ontario. In 1906, the water power of Niagara Falls was harnessed with the launch of Ontario Hydro-Electric Commission (Ontario: People and History, 2008). This eventually turned Ontario into Canada’s economic centre.

Following the Second World War, a surge of immigration brought the same mix of Anglo-Celts and Europeans – this time with a larger proportion of Mediterranean and Eastern European peoples – Italians, Serbo-Croats, Greeks, Albanians, Bulgarians, Ukrainians, Poles and Russians. The majority were Ontario-bound although a high proportion did move west. Many settled in the greater Toronto area. In 1939, Toronto was a city of 600,000 people and Ontario was still a largely rural society with a small industrial sector.
The last 50 years have challenged our provincial notions of a common culture, a Canadian identity and common values. The civil rights movement in the U.S. revealed Canadians shared the prejudice embodied in the accepted values. There were not equal educational and occupational opportunities; there was not recognition of the values of minority groups. And the most recent feminist movement extended the claims for equality last heard in the 1920s. But there was now a complex matrix of challenges and changes.

Great political changes also occurred globally in the second half of the 20th century. The British Empire which had been challenged and crumbling in the 1930s was now dissolving. After WWII, India became independent; the Middle East was reshaping itself; Israel was created in Palestine by edict of the United Nations; black African states became independent as did the islands of the Caribbean. The Soviet Union disintegrated; the Berlin Wall was obliterated and the German state reunited; and towards the end of the century Red China opened its doors to trade with the outside world. The independent countries of Africa were wracked with war and corruption. The cold war with Russia freed central European states and the Baltic but their economic and social reconstruction was slow and caused considerable disruption.

Against this backdrop of displacement, military conflict and famine, there were in North America and Europe, spectacular advances in communications and transportation. The world began to press at Canada’s doorstep. Around the world, since the 1950s, there has been unprecedented population mobility not only driven by dire need but also by economic expectations and intellectual contact.
It was within this context that Canadian Prime Minister Trudeau, in October 1971, announced an official Policy of Multiculturalism within a bilingual (English and French) framework. This, coupled with Canada’s fairly open immigration policy, saw a greater proportion of immigrants to Canada from Southern Asia (India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) and Southeast Asia (the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam). The patterns of immigration changed substantially from the immigration policy of the 1960s (Ryan and Wignall, 1996). It now provided for several special groups – the re-unification of immediate relatives of immigrants who had already entered Canada; the sponsoring of ethnic neighbours provided one could guarantee them jobs; and some provision for refugees, displaced persons who could not remain in their country of origin. This policy became law in 1988.

From the early 1980s, waves of visible minorities began arriving in Canada, reflecting world conditions (Ontario: People and History, 2008). This trend has grown steadily in the first decade of this century. In 2001, according to Census Canada, the country absorbed more than a quarter of a million permanent residents with the majority of newcomers settling in the greater Toronto area. This has changed the face of public education in the GTA.

With the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, adopted constitutionally in 1982, which enshrines cultural and religious freedom and legal equality for all Canadian citizens and legal landed immigrants, now, in theory, newcomers to Canada can keep their cultural identity and live within its confines. However, history shows they pay a heavy price. Without a working knowledge of Canadian English or French, their employment opportunities are restricted to the small service sector which serves only their small portion of the multicultural community. Without high literacy in standard English or French, they cannot
enter the educational institutions which provide entry to technical, professional and executive positions. Without at least a working knowledge of spoken Canadian English or French, these new Canadians are excluded from participating in many aspects of civil urban society.

Along with the children of these new families, however, have come a host of other issues and challenges that impact directly on the school system. Despite the points system, today, more than ever before in our history, students enter Ontario urban schools from non-English speaking countries not only with little or no previous experience of standard English, but from developing agricultural, not industrial, countries; some with no previous or interrupted schooling experience due to political unrest in their countries of origin and long delays in refugee camps. Among such recent immigrants, parents are often illiterate in their own language, poverty levels are high, unemployment is rife and wage levels remain low. In general, immigrants to Canada take low category jobs as an entry group even though the federal government has indicated that there is work in their chosen profession. There is an expectation that they and their children will move up the socio-economic ladder (Rahim, 1992). But the upward progress of diverse immigrant groups is not uniform. It varies with their status and wealth in their former communities. The socioeconomic stratification within the immigrant communities is often more stark than within the mainstream community. For some families, this creates child welfare issues, particularly around nutrition and providing appropriate clothing and shelter; all of which affect the children and hence in turn, the schools.

How well the public education system educates these diverse groups of children and facilitates their transition into civil society will largely determine the country’s economic and
social future. Public educators need to ensure positive outcomes for all children. Public schools must offer young people of different races, cultures, languages, and religions a place to come together and learn about one another while also learning what it means to be Canadian citizens. Literacy is the perfect vehicle with which to achieve this goal. Literacy (speaking, listening, writing and reading) is the natural vehicle for learning. Listening and reading are the receptive sides of literacy while speaking and writing are the expressive components. It transfers from one person to another information, understanding, and meaning. It breaks down barriers of time, space and culture. It broadens horizons and helps transport one into another person’s mind and ethos. Success in literacy is equal to academic success. The acquisition of literacy and its subsequent development begins at a very early age when a child first hears the language of the home. It is a continuous process directly linked to early social interactions and oral language. During preschool years, children develop an array of language skills which are differentially related to literacy. Experiences, such as conversation, shared reading, negotiation of disagreements with siblings and friends, the storytelling of adults and verbalized pretending, have all been found to enhance the child’s literacy development by allowing for opportunities to think in, and about language. Children participate in literacy activities when they listen to adults and older children and help follow recipes, memorize logos, draw pictures and scribble. Such activities help children construct their understanding of sounds and words and written symbols and images and hence, what it means to be literate in our culture.

Literacy is a complex socio-cultural, psychological and linguistic activity. It is at the heart of the educational system. Today, the literate world is much more complex and the nuances and innuendos require a high level of understanding and expression.
According to the United Nations, in its statement on literacy,

Literacy is about more than reading and writing – it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relationships, about knowledge, language and culture. Literacy… finds its place in our lives alongside other ways of communicating. Indeed, literacy itself takes many forms: on paper, on the computer screen, on TV, on posters and signs. Those who use literacy take it for granted – but those who cannot use it are excluded from much communication in today’s world. Indeed, it is the excluded who can best appreciate the notion of “literacy as freedom”. (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization, 2003)

The Ontario Ministry of Education goes further in refining the definition of literacy.

Literacy is defined as the ability to use language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, speak, view, represent, and think critically about ideas. It enables us to share information, to interact with others, and to make meaning. Literacy is a complex process that involves building on prior knowledge, culture, and experiences in order to develop new knowledge and deeper understanding. It connects individuals and communities, and it is an essential tool for the personal growth and active participation in a democratic society. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004b)

Literacy has traditionally been thought of as reading and writing when interacting with books and paper. As we learn more about the nature of literacy, these traditional notions must be expanded to include multiple modes of representing and viewing such as web pages, graphic novels, the internet, email and the arts. Education is the foundation for a modern, democratic nation. Literacy is the heart of the educational system. It is the essential equalizer of a democratic populace, enabling people to escape poverty and disadvantage. Public education is the primary vehicle for promoting social cohesion.

For some students, however, continuous development does not occur in this way. In their early years, in their countries of origin, they had little exposure to written language of
any kind. Food and household necessities rarely came in packages or cans. They were bought at the market and therefore there are no labels to read; few people of their families had books, so pre-school children had no opportunity to look at stories with pictures and thus recognize familiar words. In many parts of the world, formal schooling is not universal.

Oral storytelling is more common in rural/agrarian societies. Outside the family home, in rural settings, there are few billboards or public notices to make children aware of a writing system. Also, many children entering the Ontario school system have come from a non-Latin alphabetic tradition. Reading, in English, is confined to school, which, for some children in some countries, begins at age seven or eight.

At first glance, it would appear that a high level of proficiency is not being reached through the ESL programming from the Ministry of Education that provides for only four years of ESL support and as a result, many ELL learners are failing to succeed. Coelho (2007) points out that the most recent data is more complex. The 2005 and 2006 EQAO disaggregated data indicates that approximately 20% of Ontario’s students in English-language elementary schools are English language learners. Of these, 58% were born in Canada. These ELL students require careful attention and particular consideration in order to help them overcome their academic language learning needs – the mismatch between their first language and the language of instruction. As Coelho points out however, ESL support is usually provided only to those students who are newcomers, not to Canadian-born ELL students. There are, then, two distinct groups of ELL students: those who are newcomers and those who were born in Canada of foreign-language immigrants. Until recently, the Ministry of Education only provided additional funding for those ELL students who were born outside Canada and even this funding was provided for only one to two
years. However, Coelho (2007) goes on to say that the EQAO data does not show the
great variability among children of different language backgrounds and different immigrant
communities. According to a recent study in the Toronto District School Board, students
from certain language backgrounds and certain regions of the world experience
significantly more difficulty in the Ontario school system than immigrant children generally
(Brown, 2006). For example, the study indicates that the students from the English-
speaking Caribbean, from East Africa, and from Latin America, as well as, Portuguese and
Spanish-speaking students have a drop-out rate of 30-40% compared with that of about
20% of Canadian-born English-speaking students while the drop-out rate for students from
Eastern Europe and East Asia is approximately 10%.

According to Cummins (1986) most ELL learners acquire basic interpersonal
communication skills within two years of immersion in the school environment. This means
that they can use English confidently and competently in most day-to-day activities, and
depending on their age, they may also have developed an accent that is indistinguishable
from that of their English-speaking peers. They sound fluent and understand much of what
is going on in their immediate language environment. At this point, ESL instruction is often
discontinued. According to Cummins, however, these learners’ fluency may be misleading.
They may have developed basic interpersonal communication skills, but they need at least
five years of instruction to acquire the cognitive language proficiency necessary for
academic purposes and to catch up to native English speaking peers in academic
proficiency.

Cummins (2007) goes on to say that ELL students may benefit academically from
continual development of their first language upon which to build the complex cognitive and
academic concepts taught in school. Teachers can promote strong literacy development among ELLs by supporting students in relating their pre-existing knowledge to new learning. This will give them the scaffolding necessary to negotiate meaning and develop deep understanding of concepts. By using the student’s first language, Cummins makes the point that we are drawing on a rich and mostly untapped resource. For English language learners, the integration of new learning with prior knowledge involves connecting what students know in their first language to English.

Donovan and Bransford (2005) emphasize the following three conditions for effective learning: engaging prior understandings and background knowledge; integrating factual knowledge with conceptual frameworks by encouraging deep understanding; and supporting students in taking active control over the learning process. The pre-existing knowledge for English language learners is encoded in their home language. Maintaining the learner’s first language then, is not a disadvantage. Research identifies important benefits associated with continued development of the first language while learning English (Coelho, 2006). These include:

- a strong foundation in the first language accelerates second language acquisition and supports literacy development in English;

- students who are learning the language of instruction need access to their own language to scaffold learning tasks;

- students’ languages support their sense of identity and help maintain effective communication within the family and the community;
community languages are used as a resource upon which to draw to enrich the
cultural experiences of everyone in the school.

Cummins (1986) offers a framework for empowering minority students. He maintains that students from minority communities are empowered or disabled as a direct result of their interactions with educators in the schools. Cummins (1986) goes on to suggest that there are four institutional characteristics that support student empowerment. They are the extent to which (a) minority students’ language and culture are incorporated into the school program; (b) minority community participation / engagement is encouraged; (c) the pedagogy promotes intrinsic motivation on the part of the students to use language actively to generate knowledge; (d) professionals involved in assessment become advocates for minority language students. Cummins (1996) goes further to insist that failure to educate all students carries enormous economic and social cost not only for the individual but for the host society as well. To push students out of school prematurely is financially absurd. Linguistic and cultural diversity are expected to increase significantly in coming years. Recent announcements by the federal government indicate that immigration targets will rise and that many newcomer families will be settling outside major urban centres. As educators, we must study any strategy which will encourage and support culturally diverse students to achieve high levels of literacy.

The Greater Toronto context.

The region used in the research covers 17760 square kilometres. In 2001, the region’s population was reported as 725,665. In February 2006, it was estimated at 923,074, almost a 28% rise over 5 years. With an annual compounded growth rate of about
5%, it has become one of the fastest growing Census Divisions in Canada. In the decade from 1991 and 2001, 69% of Canada’s population growth resulted from immigration (Statistics Canada, 2001) and in this geographic area, immigrants contribute to more than half the increase. Moreover, their contribution to population growth is greater than non-immigrants. Between 1991 and 2001, the number of non-immigrants increased by 31%; the number of recent immigrants increased by 132% (Community Snapshots, 2006).

Each year, about 230,000 immigrants arrive in Canada and 55% of these newcomers choose Ontario, with over 75,000 settling in the GTA. Census data show that the Greater Toronto Area has more foreign-born residents than any other region in the world. In 2001, the GTA had the highest percentage of foreign-born residents in Canada (Figure 9). Seventy-eight percent of all non-permanent residents living in Ontario reside in the GTA with refugees making up 2.5% of the city’s population. The percentage of the population of the GTA who speak neither French nor English as a first language is rising constantly, totaling 41% of the population of the GTA. Recently, to help these immigrants and their children learn English, all levels of government, boards of education, colleges and universities and other private and community organizations currently provide an array of ESL programs. However, for a variety of reasons, these ESL programs have all suffered from various degrees of neglect and cuts in funding.
Many new Canadian students come from countries where illiteracy rates are alarmingly high – developing countries such as those in Africa, Southeast Asia, and the Caribbean. The United Nations Human Development Report (2007) reminds us that four out of every ten adults in the world are unable to read or write, to do a simple calculation, or even sign their name. In some twenty countries of the world more than 90% of the population is illiterate – unable to read or write a simple sentence. It is estimated that there are 50 million illiterates in the Arab states; 143 million in Africa; and more than 500 million in Asia. Despite enhanced efforts to promote literacy in recent decades, the number of illiterates worldwide continues to increase. This data may explain in part why these communities experience increased difficulty in the Ontario school system.

Over the years, many researchers and the government’s own ESL curriculum documents have emphasized that the acquisition of English as an additional language takes between 5 and 7 years if proficiency is to be achieved (Cummins, 1981; Ministry of Education, 2001). There is a great difference, however, between speaking everyday,
communicative language and speaking the academic language of school. ELL students quickly acquire Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) (Cummins, 1986) through their daily social interactions with peers while immersed in an English language environment. It may take three to five or more years for students to acquire proficiency in academic language which is the language predominantly used in schools (Cummins, 2007). According to Coelho (2007), academic vocabulary can be classified into four general categories: general academic words; subject-specific words; context-defined words; and figurative language. A student in the early stages of English language acquisition may experience confusion with context-defined words such as ‘face’ as in rock face. It is helpful to explain these words as students encounter them in text. Teachers spend a lot of time teaching subject specific vocabulary i.e. igneous rock, when research has shown that teaching academic words is more helpful i.e. words such as examine, classify because it will assist the ELL student in many contexts (Coelho, 2004). This academic language is found in 75% of tests, i.e., reading tests, writing assignments and science quizzes according to Coelho.

However, students from countries where war or trauma kept them out of school for long periods face even more complex challenges in attaining proficiency in English because of limited education in their first language. In addition, these students often face challenging social issues. Research has shown that it takes five or more years for school-aged English language learners to catch up to their peers in using English for academic purposes. Students who arrive with gaps in their schooling, and students experiencing psychological or social difficulties because of difficult immigration circumstances or
traumatic events before their arrival in Canada may need much more support over a longer period of time.

In literate societies, children’s development of reading and writing skills is a primary accomplishment on their way to full participation in the culture. DeCastell and Luke (1983) argue that, in a multiethnic context, being literate refers to having mastery over the process by means of which culturally significant information is coded. In this view, literacy does not simply consist of a universally defined set of skills constant across time and place. Since cultures differ in what they consider to be their “texts” and in the values they attach to these, they will also differ in what they view as literate behaviour.

Cultural identity, according to Ferdman (1990), involves those parts of the self – norms of behaviour, conventional practice, beliefs and values, by which one defines oneself as a member of a particular group. But it also encompasses the value placed on these uniquely different features in relation to those of other groups. By its very nature, then, cultural identity involves value and affect for the individual. Cultural identity is an emotionally charged concept.

Culture exists as a product of social interaction and organization. DeCastell and Luke (1983) consider literacy as meaningful only in the social context of particular communities. In Canada, being literate involves not only mastering English or French literacy but also in mastering conventional wisdom and common knowledge. What is common and what is conventional is defined in reference to a particular community at a given point in time.
In culturally heterogeneous society, literacy ceases to be a characteristic inherent solely in the individual. It becomes an interactive process that is constantly redefined and renegotiated as the individual transacts with the surroundings and society. Literacy, then, in large part, involves facility in manipulating the symbols that codify and represent the values, beliefs, and norms of the culture. These symbols are themselves part of the culture. To be considered literate, this manipulation must be done in a culturally appropriate way. The enterprise of defining literacy, becomes one of assessing what counts as literacy in a given social context. For example, the skills necessary to be considered literate in a society that employs pictographic writing can be quite different from those necessary in a society that uses an alphabetic system. The particular distribution of skills may also vary from culture to culture, i.e. the importance of spelling, punctuation, and penmanship will vary in different cultures.

In summary then, literacy learning is a process involving social and cultural interactions at home and school (Schmidt, 1995). Children become literate in their family, community and classroom cultures. Children who have home cultures different from the dominant culture will have difficulty becoming literate in the dominant language because, as they develop their literacies, they must function within two cultures (Cummins, 1996). This can be minimal if the home culture and school culture are fairly congruent; but it will be a major disruption in the case of the immigrant from a rural society which has no equivalent to written language. Therefore, the moment children begin to learn to read and write in school, the culture of their homes affects their success or failure (Clay, 1991). Furthermore, in many instances, children from culturally dissimilar ethnic backgrounds to the host culture are unable to share their home cultures with their classmates. Their knowledge of the
language, customs, literature of their country of origin is often ignored or misunderstood. Because literacy is a culturally defined construct, it follows that it should have close links to cultural identity. Therefore, the process of becoming literate will carry affective significance for the individual.

Even with research on the lengthy time required for learning a second language and catching up academically, both federal and provincial governments’ ESL programs disregard this finding when they impose restrictions and limitations on who is eligible for programs and the length of time allotted to complete them. In 1997, when the provincial government in Ontario took complete control of education funding for the province and created one of the most restrictive regulations and funding formulas for public education, they severely impacted on English language learning education. Now in Ontario, the provincial government funds all elementary and secondary ESL programs. and school boards deliver these provincially funded programs.

Historically, school boards in Ontario had developed their own strategies for teaching English as a Second Language in schools (Burnaby, James, & Regier, 2000). As early as 1965, educators have been faced with the challenges of identifying the needs of non-English-speaking pupils, the lack of effective assessment tools, the scarcity of curriculum materials, and the lack of qualified teachers. Over the years, individual school boards, schools, and teachers created their own models of ESL and other support programs to help educate ELL students. Provincial and local policies have evolved on an ad hoc basis.
Prior to 1997, more than half of the funding for education came from local taxes. In 2003, on the recommendation of Dr. Rozanski in his report entitled *Investing in Public Education: Advancing the goal of continuous improvement in student learning and achievement* (2002), a local priorities grant was added to support the province’s smaller schools. In 2006, the grant was eliminated. Over the last two years, funding for ESL programs has increased slightly. However, the province has not changed its ESL funding practices to ensure that the funding reaches ELL students who need it. School boards receive funding for ESL based on two factors: the number of students born in a country where English is not the first or standard language and who have been in Canada for four years or less; and based on StatsCan data, the number of children in the area whose language spoken most often in the home is neither English or French. Funding does not include those students who are born in Canada but cannot speak English upon entering the school system according to People for Education (2007).

Moreover, Boards are not required to spend their ESL funding on ESL programs. At times, Boards may use ESL funding money to cover costs in other areas such as maintenance and facility renewal. According to People for Education (2007) there has been a 23% decline in the percentage of elementary schools with ESL teachers since 2000. Over the same period, there has been a 29% increase in the percentage of schools with ESL students in the greater Toronto area (GTA). This watchdog organization for public education now estimates that 53% of elementary schools with ELL students have no ESL teacher. This represents an increase of 20% over 1999/00 statistics.

In the GTA, schools account for 77% of ELL students in the province. In the GTA, 90% of elementary schools report that they have ELL students while only 54% report that
they have an ESL teacher, according to People for Education (2007). In 2005, the provincial Auditor recommended that every ELL student continue to receive support until he or she has reached a standard level of proficiency. The auditor further recommended differentiated funding to recognize the difference between newcomer students who had interrupted or no schooling and therefore needed substantial support and those students who have strong literacy skills and just require support to learn the language.

This increase in students requiring ESL programming and the cuts to ESL funding has left school administrators and school boards scrambling to address the issue. School principals have had to be creative and strategic in supporting English language learners in their schools.

Language education in Ontario.

The Formative Years (1974) was published under the authority of then Minister of Education Thomas Wells and set out the goals for the primary and junior divisions of the public and separate schools in Ontario. The subsequent document Education in the Primary and Junior Division (1975) provided the philosophical basis and rationale for the program in these divisions. It also indicated how the program expectations set out in the Formative Years could be achieved in an integrated and child-centred framework. These documents evolved from the report of the Curriculum Revision Committee of the Primary-Junior Cyclic Review prompted by the Hall-Dennis Report. Through consultation with teachers, parents, administrators, and others, ideas were identified and synthesized. This led to the creation of support documents in the various subject areas. Within the document Education in the Primary and Junior Division (1975), the Ontario Ministry of Education set
out the values, goals, and objectives for education in the early years. The values included respect for the individual; concern for others; social responsibility; and valid pursuits for all human beings. The goals of the curriculum were: to acquire the basic skills fundamental to education; to develop and maintain confidence and a sense of self-worth; to gain the knowledge and attitudes needed for active participation in Canadian society; and to develop the moral and aesthetic sensitivity for a complete and responsible life. Paramount to the curriculum was the child and his/her individuality. Throughout the documents, teachers are encouraged to consider the child’s stage of development and other intrinsic factors such as emotional state and cognitive abilities. During the 1970s through to the 1990s, the education community drew from the work of Kenneth Goodman and Gordon Wells. These researchers promoted activity centres in the elementary schools based on children’s interests and natural curiosity.

With reference to second language learning, the document, *Education in the Primary and Junior Division* (1975), has a brief section which states that there are basically two contexts in which a child is learning a second language: some children come from a non-English-speaking home such as native ancestry or French Canadian roots and must learn English which is the language of school; while others are studying French as a second language (p.59). The document then goes on to speak further about French language acquisition in schools.

These documents remained the curriculum framework for education until the early 1990s when the Ministry of Education, under the leadership of Premier Bob Rae and the New Democratic Party, brought forward the *Common Curriculum* (1993). The *Common Curriculum* was a vision for education in Ontario introduced by then Minister of Education
David Cooke. The curriculum policies and outcomes given in the *Common Curriculum* replaced the curriculum outlined in *The Formative Years, 1975*. The amendment to the Education Act in 1992 required all school boards to develop and implement antiracist and ethnocultural equity policies. In the *Common Curriculum* policy document it states that school boards must also develop policies on the elimination of inequities based on gender, disabilities, socio-economic background, and sexual orientation. Schools were also required to develop policies on violence prevention in order to ensure that all students had a safe learning environment. With this document, the Ministry of Education introduced provincial standards of achievement. Standards described student achievement of specific learning outcomes at various levels that provided ‘objective’ criteria by which teachers could assess students’ progress towards the achievement of the outcomes. This marked a clear shift of philosophy for the Ministry of Education from child-centered, experiential learning to outcomes-based education. The *Common Curriculum* clearly focused on results. These learning outcomes identified the observable and/or measurable knowledge, skills, and values that students were expected to have developed at certain key stages of their schooling.

The second change was the focus on all students. The *Common Curriculum* was designed to support all students in the mainstream school system. It stated that programs must reflect the abilities, needs, interests, and learning styles of students of both genders and all racial, linguistic and ethnocultural backgrounds. It went on to address the needs of the special education students who may need their program modified. The document also mentioned the ELL students who may need special program support as they develop proficiency in the language of instruction. Whereas in the *Formative Years, 1975* teachers
were encouraged to see children as individuals and develop their programs accordingly, taking into account different kinds of intelligence, different rates of learning, and different ways of seeing the world, the Common Curriculum set out common outcomes which all students were expected to achieve.

More recently, the Ontario Ministry of Education under the Conservative government of Premier Mike Harris brought forward an outcomes-based curriculum for all curriculum areas setting out standards which all students were to achieve thus building on the work of the previous government. This government further streamlined the curriculum by defining what all children in a particular grade in any school in the province would be learning, establishing overall and specific expectations in the Ontario Curriculum. The Conservative government also moved to establish the Education Quality and Accountability Office, which would periodically monitor the achievement of students throughout the province in the areas of reading, writing, and mathematics.

All these government actions have served to further narrow the focus for instruction in today’s classrooms. The curriculum has become so sanitized, standardized, and specific that there is little room for other outcomes to be pursued. This has marginalized some students by limiting the teachers freedom to adapt the curriculum as appropriate to address the needs of the students in the classroom.

**Elementary school leadership in Ontario.**

Traditionally, the principal of the school was its principal teacher who would spend some time actually teaching and was the expert to solve all issues for the school’s teaching staff. As schools grew in size and complexity of organizational structure, the principal took
on many other roles and usually ceased to actually teach the children in order to become the chief administrator in the school. This is a pivotal position of power. The principal is in the ideal position to promote and enhance the teaching practice in the classroom which has a direct impact on student achievement. Perhaps more so than any other individual in the school, the principal is the instrumental player in ensuring an excellent education for all students. The principal sets the course for the school. As Potvin (2004) makes the analogy to the jazz ensemble, it is the leader who lays down the melody line and encourages individual members to improvise around the theme. The principal can intentionally intervene and affect the learning environment, cultivating a professional community, setting goals, and balancing pressure and support while focusing on a common vision. Strong leaders play a major role in building successful schools. They embody many and varied skills. The question is whether in multicultural schools with a diverse population of students, the skills required are specific to the diverse community to support the literacy development of second language learners or are those skills common to all effective school principals.

During the 1970s, the search for factors that make a difference in the learning of the urban poor began to pay off as a result of studies of effective instruction and effective schools (Edmonds, 1979). These included such correlates as a clear mission; tightly controlled curriculum; instructional leadership; high expectations for all learners; and maximized instructional time. However, the utility of the effective schools research has been limited for schools with diverse populations. Historically there has been no mention of dealing with English language learners and diverse communities in this body of school research. Rather than overturning earlier research, subsequent investigations have added
refinements to the findings as well as focusing on areas not addressed in the earlier research (Cotton, 2000).

More recently, much has been written about the role of the elementary school principal (Ontario Principals’ Council, 2004; Ryan, 2003). There is broad consensus in educational establishments around the world that the principal is the key figure for improving the learning of all students. Yet with ever-encroaching political and community pressures on school boards and ultimately school administrators, principals are increasingly caught in battles over power and control over decisions based on educational issues influenced by externally driven agendas.

In a recent study, Castle and Mitchell (2001) found that the position of the elementary school principal is ambiguous on several fronts. In the province of Ontario, contradictions have entered the lives of principals through the massive restructuring of educational legislation and policies since 1996. This restructuring has altered the roles and relationships between teachers and principals (Castle & Mitchell, 2001). The most significant change has been the removal of principals and vice principals from the teachers’ union and the formation of a professional body in 1998 representing administrators from a number of different boards across the province. In a discussion document released in November 2004, the Ontario Principals’ Council pointed out that many studies indicate that the principal is the key player in school improvement, yet in Ontario there is disturbing evidence that the principalship is becoming increasingly less attractive to the very types of leaders needed to develop and sustain excellent schools. The other disturbing finding in the study is that principals are leaving the system at an alarming rate and by 2009 the province will face a crisis in educational leadership.
In her work, Kathleen Cotton (2003) described the role of the principal in terms of 26 behaviours which have an impact on student achievement. The critical ones are those which emphasize a clear focus on student learning, on interactions and good relationships within and beyond the school, and on establishing a positive school culture. Cotton (2003) summarizes research on what principals in successful schools do that contributes to improved student achievement. The behaviours captured fall into five broad categories:

- **Establishing a clear focus on student learning** – having a vision; clear learning goals; and high expectations for learning for all students;

- **Interactions and relationships** – such behaviours as communication and interaction; interpersonal/emotional support; visibility and accessibility; parent/community outreach and involvement;

- **School culture** – shared leadership/decision making; collaboration; emphasis on continuous improvement;

- **Instruction/classroom practice** – discussing instructional issues; observing classrooms; giving feedback; protecting instructional time;

- **Accountability** – monitoring progress and using student data to improve achievement of all students. (p. 23)

Researchers find that while a small portion of the principal's effect on students may be direct – that is, direct interactions with students in or out of the classrooms may be motivating, instructive, or otherwise influential – most of the influence is indirect, that is, it is mediated through teachers and others (Cotton, 2003). She goes on to say that the
principal’s effect on student achievement is not only indirect, it is complex, mediated through principal-teacher interactions. By extension, the principal’s influence on ELL student achievement is also largely indirect and complex.

A discussion document of the Ontario Principals’ Council (2004) supports many of Cotton’s (2003) findings. The Ontario Principals’ Council document discusses eight dimensions of the principal’s role which may be summarized as follows:

- **Building a common vision and mission for the school**
  Principals must work with teachers, parents, students, school board staff, and officials within the broader community to create the sense of moral purpose for the school, together with the vision of how it will be achieved.

- **Ensuring a positive and supportive school climate**
  Student learning is enhanced when a school’s climate is open and supportive. The principal is key in the creation of a positive climate and the way students, teachers, and others work and feel within the school environment.

- **Building learning communities**
  Building professional learning communities requires bringing the professionals within the school and the broader district together in the common mission of continuous improvement. The principal is the catalyst. The principal must be a builder of learning communities.
• **Improving school capacity**
  The principal must engage staff, community, and board officials in efforts towards continuously improving school capacity – the collective power of the full staff to improve student achievement.

• **Facilitating student access to community services**
  The basic social and health needs of children must be met before there can be effective education. The principal provides the necessary leadership to facilitate the delivery of social services and supports so that they are effectively accessed within the school environment to serve the needs of the child and parents. The principal also has a role in fostering and supporting community-based early childhood development programs to help ensure that students maximize their potential when they get to school.

• **Establishing an evidence-based school performance system**
  The principal must work with staff and school board officials to gather the kind of information on school and student performance to enable monitoring and continuous improvement.

• **Effectively managing school resources**
  The principal is charged with the responsible management of human, financial, and physical resources for the school.

• **Aligning with the policy and regulatory environment**
  It is the principal who must keep the collective focus on the moral imperative of public education, while at the same time keeping practices in school aligned with
the education policy and regulatory environment within which the school operates. (p. 43)

This framework by Cotton (2003) and the Ontario Principal’s Council (2006) builds on the effective schools research but also broadens the base so as to allow opportunity for the needs of a diverse community to be acknowledged.

Fullan (2002) points out, however, that there are two areas of expertise needed to seriously improve literacy learning for all students in schools: expertise in the content of literacy, and expertise in leading the change process. Moreover, he recognizes that each involves an entirely different set of skills and knowledge. Since the change process is complex, it can involve managing controlled or chaotic conditions. He, therefore, recommends that circumstances allow for local autonomy and variance so that the district, and ultimately the school, can become responsive to the community context of the school. Internal connections – those among teachers, students and community members – must co-exist with external connections – those of community agencies and society, in a dynamic interplay. In a diverse community, this is of special importance.

Fullan (2003) emphasizes that the principal of the future must lead a complex learning organization by helping to build new cultures in schools. However, Fullan is never specific as to how this work can be done. His work continues to be generic and does not address the principal’s knowledge base. As an example, in his book The Moral Imperative of School Leadership, Fullan (2003) speaks about the principal as a “data cruncher” in order to establish a strong evidence-based approach to school improvement in order to go deeper than surface level change. However, principals are not trained as statisticians, who
re-order and disaggregate data to understand trends. This is one of the dissatisfications mentioned by respondents in the OPC study (2004).

But not all styles of leadership are conducive to leading schools which operate in diverse and complex communities. Ryan (2003) asserts that leadership which relies on manipulative forms of control necessitates choosing one constituency over another and leads to excluding members of minority groups. He thinks that more inclusive forms of leadership hold greater promise of truly addressing the needs of the school community. Collective leadership practices can be very effective in diverse communities because they make it possible for a range of members in the school community to be involved in meaningful ways. Ryan (2003) goes on to say that ensuring that communities that differ from dominant communities have the same opportunities requires that their desires, knowledge, language and so forth become part of the school culture and curriculum. This is not an easy task.

Fullan recognizes that principals are challenged by their roles as managers of the change process while also responding to increased demands for improved student achievement in a climate which includes high stakes testing, target setting, greater parental involvement and engagement, evolving technology, teacher effectiveness, safe schools, character education, and an onslaught of new legislation. Now, more than ever, principals are being asked to manage downloaded responsibilities that would formerly have been addressed by central office. This takes the principal away from the important work of instructional leader. All this is further exacerbated in the school of a diverse community where language and culture create challenges and barriers. Fullan does not touch on dealing with this challenge in his research.
Leithwood and Riehl (2003) believe that as principals guide their schools through the challenge of an increasingly complex and demanding environment, they must become strategic leaders who direct their school with vision, a de-centralized leadership style and yet accept their accountability for students’ growth and successful achievement. This creates yet more role ambiguity for the principal – how to manage the learning environment in a distributive manner and still maintain control over the outcomes. They assert that the successful leaders in diverse communities are those who help identify and implement forms of teaching and learning that are appropriate and effective for the populations they serve. They promote teaching that is culturally responsive. They make appropriate changes and decisions that promote equity and excellence for all students (Leithwood & Steinbach, 2002). However, in reality, principals are not engaged in the hands-on, curriculum-expert style of instructional leadership envisioned in the literature (OPC, 2004). More than ever, tasks other than curriculum supervision are now assuming increasing prominence. Principals are increasingly involved in social-services related issues within their schools. As an example, schools are having to work closely with external agencies such as Children’s Aid and public health. Principals are legally responsible for the safety and security of a school’s population, which is becoming increasingly complex due to the changing nature of families and the public’s perception of what constitutes safety. Principals are now being asked to work closely with parent groups and other community interest groups. While being charged with increasing stakeholder involvement/engagement, there is no clear direction as to what that might look like in a given community. Furthermore, many tasks for central office’s information gathering responsibilities and accountability have been downloaded onto the principal’s desk. The principal’s role has become so bogged down with other tasks
that it does not necessarily focus on educational matters. Yet in the face of all these deterrants, some principals are making a difference for students.

Foster (1989) insists that educational leadership must be transformative and oriented towards social change. Critical to such educational leadership is a vision that opens up possibilities and provides insights on how new social arrangements can become possible. He argues that the leaders’ ethical stance positions them to confront social conditions that are dehumanizing, threatening or unfair. The leadership role in diverse communities demands a strong moral attitude and an ethical stance to ensure democratic consensus and social justice. This speaks to the core values of the principal in a diverse community. These values make a difference for children. Such views, of course, represent a demand for the school to become the vehicle of social engineering and it is questionable whether it accords with the expectations in the Ministry guidelines and view of the principal. Ryan (2003) points out that there are two aspects to these reform efforts, empowerment and enablement. The former targets the lack of power various individuals and communities have over educational institutions due to educational bureaucracies. Proponents argue that these institutions seek to maintain power for themselves and in the process exclude others particularly the poor and ethnic minorities.

The other approach to community inclusion is enablement. Proponents believe that it is up to educators to reach out to the community and draw it in to the school system. Educators are encouraged to provide opportunities for parents to become involved in their child’s education. They believe that by working collaboratively with parents and eliciting the parents’ commitment to the school system will enhance student achievement.
Social inclusion is a process for closing the distance between people; a state of individual or collective well-being which results from interactions in which people feel secure and appreciated. Organizations, such as schools and community services, have an opportunity to reach out to those who may be less familiar. Social inclusion refers to the extent to which individuals and families are able to fully participate in society and have control over their own resources. However, inclusion is messy. There must be constant negotiation and learning to deal with diversity. It also requires that participants question things that to date have been taken for granted. Social inclusion is not about bringing outsiders into the existing mainstream but it is about creating a new and negotiated culture together. This act of joining together to pursue common objectives can generate a change in attitudes and understanding. New learning can overcome negative stereotypes and misconceptions. It can also strengthen a community’s capacity to honour humanity in its full diversity and in so doing improve communities and neighbourhoods. However, promoting inclusion must be intentional. There are some key practices in the research that help promote inclusion:

- articulate a strong vision – this may mean convening focus groups so all people have a chance to make their voice heard; implement dispute resolution to deal with conflict but use conflict to create conditions for learning and change;

- staff should represent many different cultural, religious, ethnic and/or racial groups; all members model an attitude of acceptance and openness;

- take time and effort – work should be responsive to the needs expressed; it is always a work in progress; continually respect and accommodate difference;
• the work should entrench principles of respect, anti-oppression, and inclusion;
  new policies and procedures should be developed;

• leaders must be carefully chosen;

• there must be on-going training;

• must involve the community in all planning and decision-making.

It can be seen that inclusivity does not just happen. It requires a tremendous amount of physical and human support. The physical spaces should be neutral to allow for learning, problem-solving and encountering difference in order to discover common ground. This also becomes the site for innovation and new ideas. Many of the look-fors in developing social inclusion are similar to those in developing successful schools in diverse communities. Both speak of including previously marginalized voices; creating conditions of respect and common goals; and questioning hegemonic practices.

Given the importance of literacy to the elementary students’ progress through the school system, these writers clearly expect the principal to place literacy-based change in their school within what is held to be necessary literacy teaching that will, in turn, enhance all children’s development as readers and writers. In culturally diverse communities, the principal must also look critically at hegemonic practices that subtly exclude or marginalize ethnic students who are the majority in some schools. Administering in a diverse school requires principals to use the lens of antiracist education to inform their actions and guide their direction. Principals need to ask themselves tough questions as they attempt to promote antiracist, inclusive and culturally sensitive practices; as they confront the
contradictions and paradoxes of cultural diversity; and as they link issues-oriented teaching and school practices to social and cultural diversity.

On a webcast from the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (2003), Leithwood speaks about the need for the school to be responsive to its varying community – ‘contextually sensitive’. In his research, Leithwood finds some common variables that are associated with positive student outcomes: active instruction – those effortful strategies used by teachers to keep students engaged; time students are academically on-task; a culture in the school which acknowledges the importance of the academic program and focuses teachers, students, and parents on that as the priority; and the disciplinary climate in the school in which all staff accept collective responsibility for the behaviour of the students.

From the descriptions above, it can be seen that the work of Leithwood, Foster and Cotton agree that there are many common elements to effective leadership – the need to articulate a vision; ensure effective teaching practice; and build and improve community capacity. Principals now need to refine their practices to include strategies for culturally diverse communities.

As educational leaders, principals are strategically positioned to shape the direction of their school, to influence the lives of students and equip them with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and sensibilities necessary for citizenship within our democracy and global community in the 21st century.

**Educational leadership framework in Ontario.**

In response to the anticipated exodus of principals from the Ontario system mentioned in the OPC study (2004), the Ministry of Education and many local school
boards have developed leadership strategies to address the concern. In 2005, a commitment was made to a number of initiatives intended to develop, support and sustain high quality leadership in schools and school boards across the province. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education, school leadership is second only to teaching in its influence on student achievement. However, the OPC study discussed a number of points of dissatification by principals based on survey results.

The Provincial Leadership Strategy outlines a four point action plan to focus on steps needed to develop and support effective leadership in Ontario schools and school boards. This framework describes a set of core competencies and practices for leadership in today’s schools. The core leadership practices delineated in the framework are those that have been supported by research to have the greatest impact on student learning. The competencies and practices described are broadly defined and according to the Ministry of Education, this is intended to be inclusive of the diversity found in Ontario schools and communities. The Leadership Framework is made up of two parts:

1. leadership competencies and practices that have been shown to be effective in improving student achievement;

2. system practices and procedures that boards of education should have in place to support school and system leaders to be effective.

In part one, the Ministry of Education distinguishes between leadership practices and leadership competencies. Leader practices are the actions, behaviours, and functions found through research and professional experiences to have a positive impact on student achievement; whereas leader competencies, according to the Ministry, are the skills,
knowledge, and attitudes of effective school and system leaders. These are organized into five domains: setting the direction, building relationships and developing people, developing the organization, leading the instructional program, and securing accountability. In part two of the Leadership Framework, the Ministry captures system practices and procedures which support successful school leadership. These are organized into six domains: school and district improvement, fostering a culture of professionalism, leadership development, administrative structures, parent and community supports, and succession planning. The Ministry of Education makes it clear that contextual factors must be taken into account when reviewing the frameworks for successful school leadership and is responsive to the diverse nature of Ontario’s communities. The contextual and demographic diversity in Ontario’s schools, together with the province’s commitment to high levels of student achievement have heightened the importance of school leaders as instructional leaders who support the diverse needs of all students through their commitment to equity in student outcome.

In 2003, the Ontario government launched a strategy to markedly improve student achievement. It included establishing the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, a department committed to evaluating and implementing proven tactics associated with improvements in education. As part of the Ontario government’s 2003 strategy, the Ministry has mandated a goal that 75% percent of 12 year-old students would achieve or exceed the provincial standard by 2008.

Another key part of the secretariat’s mandate is leadership for learning, which encompasses leaders at all levels – schools, school boards, and the community – and describes leadership that is purposeful and focused on student learning. The Ministry
maintains that distributed leadership is very important in schools. Principals must set the
goals and collaborate with teachers. Principals need to delegate and share leadership
opportunities with the teachers. The Ministry goes on to say community leadership is
important and Boards need to create partnerships to enhance student learning.

Principal's courses in Ontario.

In Ontario, a number of different universities and the Ontario Principals’ Council offer
programs in Principal's Qualifications. Three major course providers’ program outlines were
reviewed i.e. University of Toronto, York University, and the Ontario Principals’ Council with
regard to candidate preparation for leading a diverse school community. All three programs
offered Part 1 and Part 2 in the qualification to become a principal with each part including
approximately eight learning modules.

Basically all three programs were broken into modules which covered many
operational topics such as staff supervision, special education, and legal responsibilities.
Change management strategies were presented in all programs with an emphasis on
moving the organization forward and dealing with resistors. All three programs relied
heavily on participants’ presentations of topic material. As such, the material would vary
according to the presenters’ background and choice of material.

With respect to topics which included diversity and cultural sensitivity in dealing with
students and community, there was limited exposure in all three programs. Each program
had a portion of one of the module dedicated to leading diverse communities. Once again
these modules were presented by participants and therefore information and depth of
knowledge would vary.
From this very brief overview, there is little emphasis on the knowledge or skill set necessary for a principal to lead a diverse community. There was no discussion around culturally sensitive practices or developing a basic knowledge of various ethnic and/or faith groups present in Ontario schools. Few if any resources and/or supports were mentioned by way of Internet sites or further reading. None of the programs had a keynote speaker that addressed diversity and leading diverse communities.

Conceptual Framework

Resnick (1997) insist that humans have a basic need for supportive relationships – a sense of connectedness or belonging which is provided by family, friends, work and religious affiliations. And, too, a growing body of research confirms the benefits of building a comparable sense of community in schools. Students in schools that share a strong sense of community tend to be more motivated to achieve academically (Solomon et al., 2000).

A survey of students from low-income ethnic minority and racially varied background, showed that they attend schools which have lower levels of community than do schools which have affluent students, or all-white schools with students of mixed income – middle, low middle and low income. In other words, if one is not welcomed, accepted or encouraged to “belong”, the sense of belonging to one’s school community is low (Battistich et al., 1995). According to research conducted by Kaufman et al. (2001), 13% of students aged 12 – 18, at school during the previous 6 months, had been called a derogatory word related to their race, ethnicity or religion, and about thirty-six percent had also seen hate-related graffiti at their school.
Killen and Stangor (2001) found that the majority of 13 year olds favoured excluding some others from peer activities because of gender or race. These trends speak to the “hidden” curriculum in the school, the basis for which children bring to school family and home attitudes and background and communities’ cultural models are as important as within-school factors in effecting inclusion/exclusion. However, Ogbu (1992) also found that what goes on inside schools, including the curriculum, is of great importance to minority students. Cummins (1986) noted that, over the past twenty years educators in Canada and the U.S. have implemented a series of costly reforms aimed at reversing the pattern of school failure among students labelled as “minority” or “visible minorities” by virtue of colour of skin, language and customs – and in some cases by virtue only of their poverty. The list includes compensatory programs in preschool, various bilingual pull-out programs, remedial assistance programs and just the employment of more teachers to reduce class size. Yet, in the U.S., minority students continue to do less well than White middle-class students and, in some cases, as a group, their achievement is actually declining.

Coelho (2004) points out that it is important to prepare all students to live and work effectively in the culturally diverse communities that are increasingly common in the cities of Western countries. All students, even those in schools with a homogeneous student population, benefit from a curriculum that encourages them to: value linguistic and cultural diversity; enrich their store of cultural knowledge; expand their world view and understand perspectives different from their own; and recognize and challenge bias and discrimination.

The following conceptual framework incorporates an inclusive education ideology because literacy achievement is an equity issue. Ryan (2003) speaks of an antiracist stance as challenging an unjust system and mentions issues of gender and class.
However, the low literacy achievement for English language learners which does not even keep pace with that of their regular education classmates is also an issue of social justice based largely on racial difference and possibly challenges a systemic difficulty within the educational system. Upon the review of Ministry policies, very clearly literacy achievement for all learners is mentioned as a priority (Ministry of Education, 2008). Explicit in the Ministry’s initiatives is bridging the gap and raising the achievement of all students. The Ministry of Education (2008) has outlined three priorities in the *Reach Every Student: Energizing Ontario Education*. These are:

1. high levels of student achievement
   a. going deeper and wider on literacy and numeracy;
   b. continuing innovation in secondary school;

2. reduced gaps in student achievement
   - reducing the gaps in achievement for those groups of students who need extra help;

3. increased confidence in public education.

Certainly, literacy development has been the work of the GTA School District for the last 8-9 years and the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat for the last six years. The GTA School District has engaged Michael Fullan to support the system reform in literacy. Figure reflects the approach to leadership in the GTA School District. It is based on the review of the literature and the documents of the District.
In educating pupils towards literacy, schools vary enormously in the degree to which they incorporate the cultural views of the ethnic groups to which their pupils belong. To the extent that a school reflects the dominant culture, its pupils will find consistency between the various constructs of literacy and test higher than other students of other schools where the dominant culture is unrepresented.

Literacy education is at the heart of the elementary school agenda because the ability to speak, read, write and think in words and numbers is foundational to all later learning. Children become literate in the literate image represented in their school and by their school. There is then, in many instances, a disconnect between the cultures represented by the pupils and the culture of the school which mirrors the culture of the society. This is most noticeable in some of the publicly funded schools in a large metropolitan city – particularly the schools which have a majority or large minority of students not from the mainstream culture. The problem of developing English literacy in the GTA is exacerbated because the minority students are not one homogeneous group, but represent many different cultures, languages, races and religions. Moreover, the culture of the classroom is determined by the classroom teacher him/herself who acts as a representative of the dominant culture even if he/she is racially or linguistically a “minority” person. He or she has acquired English literacy of a higher order by his/her education, s/he has become acclimatized significantly to “live” in two worlds: the one of his/her family, the other of the dominant culture, now also his/her society.

In Ontario, multicultural education began to emerge in the 1960s as a response to the problems created by the longstanding policy of assimilating immigrants into the dominant culture. Multicultural education is the process by which schools help prepare
young people to live in the dominant culture with greater understanding, cooperation, effectiveness, and dedication to equality in a multicultural nation and interdependent world (Cortes, 1996). Multicultural education has attempted to prepare young people to respect diversity while finding commonalities with others. Over the years, it has expanded from an attempt to reflect the growing diversity in classrooms to include curricular revisions that specifically address the academic needs of students of the minority cultures. Proponents of multicultural education endorse equivalency of achievement; more positive intergroup attitudes; and pride of heritage (Dunn, 1997; Mansfield, 1994). The essence of much of the criticism of multicultural education is that it is inadequate, naïve, and counterproductive. One of the most serious criticisms has been that it has done little to redress the low educational achievement of minority students which is not unrelated to their employment and material in equalities and other inequities of opportunity between minorities and the dominant cultural group (Kehoe, 1984).

Antiracist education emerged as an alternative to multicultural education in the 1980s. The purpose of antiracist education was to develop within each teacher, student, and support staff the abilities, knowledge, and skills needed to be a contributing and responsible participant in a changing society (Coelho, 2004). This commitment envisioned schools that were dynamic, purposeful, and inviting places where the learning of all students is the primary focus. In embracing antiracist education and ethnocultural equity, schools would commit themselves to positive and equitable outcomes in all education programs and services for all students. It represented, in part, the reaction of radical educators and scholars to the apparent inability of multicultural strategies to improve the position of ethnic and racial groups. Among other things, antiracist educators were particularly critical of the
way in which multiculturalists employed the concept of culture. They believed that highlighting the surface manifestations of what was essentially an apolitical version of culture could do little to change the position of ethnic and racial minority students. Antiracist education emphasized fostering intergroup equity, and opposing institutional racism, advocating equity of outcome, exposing unequal power relationships and cultivating political agency through critical analysis.

In the early 1990s, when the New Democratic government held power in Ontario, the provincial government appointed a commission to explore solutions to the exclusion and racism experienced in racialized communities in Ontario. As a result of the commission’s findings, the government set in motion a multi-pronged approach to address systemic race and equity issues. For antiracist educators, school failure was intimately tied to enduring patterns of subordination and domination that characterized relationships between the generally white, middle-class groups and various racial minorities. In other words, the real problem was not that various racial groups were different but that certain groups were subject to systemic racist practices both in and out of the school. The new antiracism and equity policy included:

1. the appointment of the first Assistant Deputy Minister whose responsibility included fostering antiracism and ensuring equity;
Figure 10. Conceptual framework: Leadership practices in diverse school communities.
2. the inauguration of a new Equity Department in the Ministry, which would among its many duties, examine Ontario curriculum with view to addressing bias, racism, and exclusion;

3. antiracism training for Ministry staff;

4. plans for principals’ courses and all teacher training to include antiracism education;

5. the development of new employment equity policies and new policy to address the lack of diversity in new teacher candidates;

6. a directive to school boards that every board must develop and implement its own equity and antiracism policy and strategies.

In 1995, before the policy had been fully implemented, it was dismantled after a change of government from New Democratic to Liberal. The Equity Department was closed, the review of the curriculum cancelled and boards were no longer held accountable for developing local antiracism and equity policies. Provincial funding for equity programs and policy was cut.

Currently, there is no comprehensive equity policy at the provincial level even though research continues to show a disproportionate drop-out rate among students in racialized communities (People for Education, 2008). In combination, multicultural and antiracist education could provide learning experiences that promote strength of individuality through cultural diversity which would work to ensure racial equality between all racial groups. Antiracist education must continue to examine past and present historical
inequalities such as slavery, colonialism, structures of power, institutional racism and organizational racism.

Through the 1960s and 1970s the inclusive education movement began to emerge to represent the needs of students with learning exceptionalities in the province. Prior to the 1970s, it was rare to see children with exceptionalities educated in their home schools along with their siblings and neighbours (Inclusive Education, 2008; Romo, 2002). However, as the movement has evolved the distinction between regular education and special education has become blurred. Inclusion has now come to represent the confluence of several streams of thought, social and political, as well as educational (Thomas & Vaughn, 2004). The moves towards inclusion in fact come not from one direction but from several directions – from research; from an imperative to greater social justice; from calls for civil rights; from legislation; and from the voices of common citizens themselves. All of these factors, have in their own ways played their part in the changes that have occurred in the last quarter century of the twentieth century towards a call for a more inclusive education system (Thomas & Vaughn, 2004). However, the move towards inclusion has been slow. Beginning with a whisper for ‘mainstream education’ with a major policy shift in 1980 when Bill 82 was introduced in Ontario. Significant amendments to the Education Act recognized the rights of students with disabilities to receive appropriate education at public expense and permitted parents to appeal the identification of their child as exceptional (Hutchinson, 2007). Since the 1990s, inclusive education has taken on a broader meaning and now the Ministry of Education (2009) defines it as:

Inclusive Education: Education that is based on the principles of acceptance and inclusion of all students. Students see themselves reflected in their curriculum, their physical surroundings, and even the broader environment, in which diversity is honoured and all individuals respected. (p. 4)
Recently, inclusive education has come to include ELL students and their language learning needs. In the Ministry of Education document *Education for All* (2005), the strategies mentioned in reference to special education students are really just good teaching strategies that would benefit all students.

Some minority students quickly accommodate to the norms of mainstream behaviour even though it differs from that of the home because the social distance between their former and present statue is not too great. Their parents may be bilingual (English and the mother tongue); they may have been and continue to be successful members of a skilled working, white collar or middle class group; and they may not be too different from the dominant socio-economic group in their new neighbourhood. However, many new immigrant who view success in school as incompatible with their family’s cultural identity. Ferdman (1990) points out that for such parents adopting new and different norms, assumptions and codes of conduct, such as their children participating in class, asking questions and doing homework, are associated with being “white”. To adopt these cultural features is viewed derisively by fellow members of the minority group.

Ferdman’s research suggests that, if schools wish to be successful in diminishing the achievement gap, they must reduce the racial and ethnic conflict exhibited in both the academic and the *hidden* curriculum. For many children and youth from racial and ethnic minority communities within a city like Toronto, the Euro-centric focus of public education is not only dysfunctional, it can be an alienating experience. On the one hand, the curriculum should reflect the diverse population taught. *All* learners must see themselves validated and their life experiences and learning valued by the school. Nevertheless, to live a
comfortable and productive life as adults, first they all must also become literate in the dominant culture. The problem is how to reconcile both goals.

Unfortunately, the curriculum has become so sanitized it is difficult for students to contribute in meaningful ways. In an effort to be seen as fostering equality, fairness, and transparency, contemporary school reform movements have favoured standardized, outcomes-based curriculum. Unfortunately, this further distances the schooling process from its diverse community. As Solomon (2002) points out, such reform fits cogently with the new global marketplace and free-market economic arrangements. Tremendous pressure is placed on schools to respond to the demands of such an economic system at the expense of preparing students for democratic citizenship in a heterogeneous world. Hyland and Meachan (2004) conclude that with standardized curricula there is little room for diversity. Current practices do not acknowledge the social, intellectual and cultural or political capital of students and their families of diverse communities. Students continue to find that curriculum does not reflect their reality, their heritage, their diversity (People for Education, 2008).

Within this conflicting arena where the school is viewed by some as the agency which prepares children and youth to be successful in life and others view it as the agency for economic and social engineering, schools are judged ultimately by children’s achievement in the dominant society. For this literacy, in the more limited use of this term - as the ability to speak, listen, read and write well, quickly and with pleasure in the dominant language of society - is essential. A focus on the attainment of literacy in a collaborative and supportive context, will encourage and engage students. Literacy education, when it acknowledges the role of both the dominant and the minority cultural identity, can serve to
enhance self-esteem. The Centre for Inclusive Education (2008) had developed some characteristics of an inclusive school. These are:

- **Supportive environment:** A school’s culture and climate refer to the school’s atmosphere, values, and policies. These lead to particular expectations and behaviours on the part of staff, students, and parents. Feelings of acceptance are promoted by a welcoming school atmosphere and a school culture that accepts different kinds of behaviour in the classroom and does not make assumptions about children’s abilities.

- **Positive relationships:** Teachers encourage the development of relationships. Many strategies are used to promote positive relationships for all children.

- **Feelings of competence:** Children need to feel competent and believe that they can succeed. By understanding children’s areas of strength, teachers can help students value themselves and develop a strong sense of self-esteem.

- **Opportunities to participate:** All children need opportunities to participate. This also helps them develop a sense of self-worth and good self-esteem (p. 2).

In the greater Toronto area, almost every classroom we enter includes a great diversity of students – physical, intellectual, emotional, linguistic, social, economic, and cultural diversity. They come to school with years of personal experience and knowledge.
Dei (1994) urges that schools capitalize on this “resource”. He believes that a positive, deliberate antiracist, inclusive education would be an effective educational strategy for addressing issues of racism and social oppression if it were action-oriented. It would be a call for fundamentally restructuring power relations in the schools and the wider community.

Based on an antiracist framework with an inclusive education focus, multi-centric education would acknowledge multiple ways of knowing and making sense of the world, represented by different centres of knowledge based on diverse cultural and spiritual traditions. But the problem in applying Dei’s views in schools lies not in acknowledging different cultures but in according them equal value where different meanings and ways of knowing are in conflict with, hostile to, the enforcing behaviours of the dominant society.

The objective of antiracism is the elimination of the marginalizing, oppressive and self-destructive impact racism has on people of minority groups. The objective of an inclusive education strategy is to help all children feel part of the school community. Despite the fact that there are many different ways of knowing, only one dominates most Canadian schools – a Euro-centric, largely Anglo-Celtic national approach.

It is the challenge of school principals to value and honour diversity and at the same time to ensure that all students successfully meet the demands of the curriculum. Teachers are the means by which this can be accomplished. A multi-centric curriculum framework would work actively, not to eliminate the dominant Euro-centric knowledge, but to de-centre it so the other knowledge of non-European cultures may share centre stage and be incorporated into all aspects of teaching and learning. The danger, of course, is that the other culture’s knowledge will appear quaint, even interesting but irrelevant to the dominant
society and, in particular, irrelevant to the skills and knowledge essential to get on in real life by progressing successfully through the school system.

Classroom literacy programs need to reflect the nature of Canadian society as well as the Euro-Anglo-Canadian nature of the local community. Students who see themselves respected and valued in curriculum which is relevant to their life will be more likely to engage in their learning with enthusiasm and pleasure. In schools and other educational institutions, antiracist education is designed to operate at multiple levels.

According to Solomon (2002), at the level of individuals, antiracist education focuses on attitudes and actions to eliminate behaviour which impacts negatively the persons of difference in the group. At the institutional level, it critically examines structures and practices which entrench and reproduce racism. Solomon believes that educational institutions in post industrial societies have faltered in working equitably with racial difference and diversity. Solomon feels that antiracist education has been resisted by educators on the grounds that it has threatened the autonomy of teachers. Although in Canada, antiracist education was accepted in principle, Solomon makes the point that it was often followed by limited or contradictory classroom and school practices. Schools have standardized their curricula and this leaves little space for diversity; hence voices, perspectives and cultural capital of the socially different become marginalized. Solomon concludes that the goal of antiracist literature is to analyze, challenge and change power relations; to advocate equitable access for minority communities to power and resources; and to ensure full participation of minority communities in a racially diverse society.
Allan Luke in a (2005) webcast from the Ministry’s Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat explained that educators need to teach children to read and understand the world through critical literacy which is a disposition or attitude toward print; a learned skepticism. It helps children anticipate and/or reject ideas. This is especially important in light of the internet media and a cable-serviced environment. Luke went on to say that teachers need to develop a ‘family of practice’, that is a set of competencies, in order to help students to be literate in today’s society. Teachers need to move away from reading a text and answering comprehension questions. All children need direct instruction in two main areas: decoding and comprehension. For ELL students, they may need additional instruction in decoding i.e. letter knowledge; phonics; and phonemic awareness - especially if they have come from a non-alphabetic writing system. Luke makes the point that there are other aspects to literacy that are especially important for ELL students – pragmatics and critical literacy. Pragmatics or functional literacy helps students learn how to interact around the text i.e. reading the menu; presenting oneself at the job interview. It helps teachers move away from a literary approach to understanding literacy in everyday life. In our post modern, multi-mediated cultures, however, texts are pushing and pulling people in many directions, positioning people, so educators must add a new basic – critical literacy. To get through in a literacy-saturated culture, readers need to be able to ask: Who wrote this text? What is the author’s intent? Who is represented? Who is missing? What is the text trying to do? Luke contends that this teaches world citizenship because it helps the reader weigh and distill the message. Today’s students are engaged with popular culture in a digitalized communication environment. They need to be critical consumers.
There is mounting pressure and an increasing expectation for schools to ensure that all students acquire the literacy skills they need to succeed within the school system and on into future life. With the reality of diverse populations represented in urban Toronto classrooms and immigration from non-European countries increasing, the questions must be asked:

- How will school principals ensure literacy learning for all students including those who must also learn English?

- What are the successful leadership strategies principals use to lead diverse communities?

**Summary**

In 1971, the Prime Minister of Canada, Pierre Elliott Trudeau introduced the official policy of Multiculturalism. The Charter of rights and Freedoms was adopted constitutionally some eleven years later in 1982. This opened the door for increased immigration from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East and paved the way for increased diversity in Ontario classrooms. However, different ELL populations experience variability in academic success in literacy. Cummins (2007) points out that ELL students may benefit from continued development in their first language to support their academic growth. Research now shows that it takes five to seven years to become proficient in a second language and academically competent in that language (Cummins, 2007).

Many new Canadian students arrive with a complex history of interrupted schooling or no schooling at all. They also have many social/emotional concerns depending on their immigration history.
Language education in Ontario has undergone many changes over the past thirty years. Research now shows that literacy is a complex socio-cultural, psychological, and linguistic activity. Both the demands of increased immigration and the dynamic nature of second language and literacy development have increased the complexity of the principal’s role.
Chapter Three:  
Methodology

This chapter justifies and describes the methodology used in the thesis, both the nature and the gathering of information. It includes documentary analysis of both policy documents and guidelines of the Ministry of Education and of the cooperating school board, and interviews with school participants, structured but discursive, one-on-one meetings which provided information as to their practices, beliefs and activities. The methodological limitations and ethical considerations associated with conducting a qualitative study of this nature are also discussed.

Research Rationale and Methodology

The research for this thesis was within the qualitative research paradigm. Such research has a long and distinguished history. It is employed in the traditional scholarship of the humanities and the social sciences, and cuts across disciplines, fields and subject matter. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) characterize such research in North America in seven historical categories which they define as traditional (1900-1950); modernist or the golden age (1950-1970); blurred genres (1970-1986); the crisis of representation (1986-1990); the post-modern period (1990-1995); the post-experimental inquiry (1995-2000); and the future, from 2000 on.

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of materials – case study; personal experiences; introspection; life story; interview; artifacts; observations; texts – that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual’s lives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).
Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied and the situational constraints that shape the inquiry. They may seek answers to questions of how social experience is created, but they also seek information from informed respondents. Shermann and Webb (1988) note that qualitative inquiry implies a direct concern with experience as it is “lived” or “felt”. It also aims to understand experience that is truly significant “as early as possible as its participants feel or live it” (p. 7).

Thus by its very nature, qualitative research is interpretive. It seeks to present as objectively and fairly as possible, the information and views gathered. However, without distracting or misinterpreting them, the researcher is guided by a set of beliefs and feelings about the world and how it may be understood and studied.

Interviewing is a common means of collecting data within the qualitative tradition. In qualitative research, the main purpose of the interview is to obtain information that may not be available through observation. It is also necessary to interview when the researcher wants to know how decisions are made; when situations preclude the presence of an observer; and when events have already occurred. Interviewing may be necessary to obtain the perspective of a large number of people in a short period of time.

The most common way of deciding which type of interview to use is for the interviewer to decide on how much structure is desired. On a continuum, highly structured questionnaire-driven interviews would be at one pole and open-ended, conversational formats at the other (Merriam, 1990). In the highly structured interviews, questions and the order in which they are asked is decided ahead of time. This type of interview is used when
a large sample is to be surveyed, when hypotheses are to be tested, or when quantification of results is important. Less structured alternatives to this highly standardized interview are also part of the interviewing tradition. In a semi structured interview, certain information is desired from all the respondents. These interviews are guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to the new ideas on the topic.

Unstructured interviews are particularly useful when the researcher does not know enough about the phenomenon to ask relevant questions. Thus there is no pre-determined list of questions and the interview is essentially exploratory.

Within the tradition of qualitative research, the research was conducted by semi-structured interview using a protocol devised by the author. In the past twenty-five years, sociologists and educational researchers using qualitative research designs, have focused more attention on the “voices” of their respondents (Marcus & Fischer, 1986) on the interviewer / respondent relationship (Crapanzano, 1980), and the roles of such intervening factors as race, social status and age (Seidman, 1991).

Preface to the Research

The research began in the fall of 2006 after appropriate permission was granted from the University of Toronto and the GTA School District. The researcher contacted the participants and began the formal interview process at that time. All the documents reviewed in the study were available to the participants at the time of the research.

According to the backgrounds of the participants (see Table 2), many would not have been in education at the time of the Formative Years in Ontario. However, they would
be more familiar with the *Common Curriculum* and the most recent *Ontario Curriculum Expectations* outlined by the Ontario Ministry of Education beginning in 1996.

**Table 2**  
*Participant Principals’ Profiles*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1           | - Female  
- 10+ years as principal in 3 different schools  
- 3 years to retirement  
- 600+ students in school  
- S/E area of GTA school district |
| 2           | - Female  
- 7+ years as principal in 2 different schools  
- 5 years to retirement  
- 400+ students in school  
- S/E area of GTA school district |
| 3           | - Female  
- 5 years in same school  
- mid-career (10+ years to retirement)  
- 600+ students in school  
- S/E area of GTA school district |
| 4           | - Female  
- 5+ years in 2 different school  
- mid-career (10+ years to retirement)  
- 400+ students in school  
- Central area of GTA school district |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 5           | - Female  
- 5 years in same school  
- 5 years to retirement  
- 600+ students in school  
- West area of GTA school district |
| 6           | - Female  
- 5+ years in 2 different schools  
- 3 years to retirement  
- 600+ students in school  
- West area of GTA school district |
| 7           | - Male  
- 5 years in same school  
- mid-career (10+ years to retirement)  
- Central area of GTA school district |
| 8           | - Male  
- 3 years in same school  
- mid-career (10+ years to retirement)  
- West area of GTA school district |
| 9           | - Male  
- 5+ years in 2 different schools  
- mid-career (10+ years to retirement)  
- West area of GTA school district |
Document Review

In interviews and observations, the researcher gathers data for the purpose of the investigation. In so doing, both techniques intrude into the setting they are to describe. Documents, on the other hand, are usually produced for reasons other than the research. They are, in fact, a ready-made source of data easily accessible to the researcher. Documents in the broad sense can include novels, newspapers, songs, diaries, and so on (Merriam, 1990). One of the great advantages of using documentary material is its stability. Unlike interviewing, the investigator/researcher does not alter what is being studied by his/her presence. Documentary data is particularly good for qualitative studies because the documents can ground the researcher in the context of the problem being studied.

A number of documents were reviewed for the research; the Ministry documents reviewed for this study were focused on literacy; they included:

**Ontario Ministry of Education documents.**

a practical everyday guide designed to support teachers, principals, and other education professionals at the elementary and secondary levels in working with English language learners.

*Education for All: The Report of the Expert Panel on Literacy and Numeracy for Students With Special Education Needs Kindergarten to Grade 6* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005a) – based on the report of the expert panel on Literacy and Numeracy Instruction established by the Ministry of Education to improve and reinforce effective instruction of reading, writing, oral communication, and mathematics to students Kindergarten to Grade 6 who have special needs.


*A Guide to Effective Instruction in Reading: Kindergarten to Grade 3* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003) – a reference guide that builds on the strengths of the Ontario education system. It seeks to develop capacity at the school level by sharing effective literacy strategies.


*A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction: Grades 4-6, Volume One: Foundations of Literacy Instruction for the Junior Learner* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006) – based on
the junior expert panel document, this guide provides a framework and practical resources for planning a successful junior literacy program.

*Think Literacy Success: The Report of the Expert Panel on Students at Risk in Ontario Schools* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003) – based on the findings of the expert panel, the resources and information are intended to support those working in leadership roles with at-risk students.

*Think Literacy: Cross-Curricular Approaches Grade 7-12* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003) – a resource document intended for teachers of all subject areas Grades 7-12. The guide provides practical approaches to help struggling students in all subject areas.

*Supporting Student Success in Literacy: Grades 7-12, Effective Practices of Ontario School Boards* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2004c) – a compilation of strategies from Boards across the province which focus on literacy learning in Grades 7-12.

*English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development: A Resource Guide* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2001) – a document that describes programs and procedures that support students who are from countries or communities in which Canadian English is not the primary language of communication. The guide is intended to help schools and teachers provide accommodations and modifications that will enable students from a variety of linguistic, ethnocultural, and education backgrounds participate in all program areas.
GTA school district documents.

Antiracism and Equity – a Board generated document filled with a compilation of materials related to antiracist practices and ideas to promote equity within the school.

SEEDS: Sustaining Equity Education and Diversity System-wide – a series for system leaders, principals and managers, to promote cultural sensitivity and awareness to help foster inclusive learning and working environments.

English Language Learners Sharepoint – a web-based site for the sharing of information regarding the ELL learner.

GTA School District Plan for Continuous Improvement – a Board generated plan to improve practice and improve student achievement for all learners. The sections include Quality Programs; Quality Workplaces; and Parental Engagement.

All these documents were selected because they pertained to language learning. They are reviewed to substantiate the principals' concern that the Ministry of Education was not providing enough guidance regarding instruction for English language learners in the curriculum. The research wanted to uncover whether the documents from the Ministry addressed the issue of diversity.

The Interview

After securing ethics approval from the GTA School district and the University of Toronto, the researcher was given access to the EQAO results from the various elementary schools within the Board. The schools were then selected according to the criteria and the researcher contacted each principal to invite them to participate in the research (see
Appendix A). The respondents were then sent an informed letter of consent (see Appendix B) which was signed and kept on file.

In qualitative research, interviews may be used in two ways. They may be the dominant data collection strategy or they may be employed in conjunction with other techniques such as questionnaires/surveys, and other means of data collection. In this study, interviewing was the dominant strategy supplemented by documentary analysis. Descriptive information was collected in the subject’s own words in response to a semi-structured question format but the informant then was encouraged to continue in a relatively open-ended fashion. There was a focus on particular topics, guided by the general questions but care was taken not to steer the participants. By such a semi-structured approach, the researcher can obtain comparable data across participants, and still have rich data in words that reveal the respondents’ perspectives. There were, of course, probes, from time to time, for clarification, specific examples, further elaboration and useful quotations. Each interview lasted approximately 1.0 to 1.5 hours.

Also as part of the research, interviews were conducted with Board personnel who work directly with the new Canadian population coming to the Board and the personnel who focus on ESL development, planning and implementation.

**Developing the Interview Schedule**

Key to the effectiveness of the interview is that the author be quite clear as to the purpose of each question and its relevance to provide the sought information. The questions and conduct of the discussion must elicit rich descriptive material. Patton (1990) warns that this is most important since it determines how the interviewee responds. To this
end, researchers need to reflect on what the yield of the interview must be in order to formulate appropriate questions. Although there is a relationship between the research question and the interview question, the latter must be more contextually specific than the broad research question (Glesne, 1999). However, in general, both the questions and answers must contribute to understanding the research questions.

Another consideration is to formulate the topic of the question in more than one way, on more than one occasion during the interview so that it may be discussed from a variety of angles. Patton (1990) advises researchers to include different types of questions in the same interview – experience / behaviour ones; opinion / values; feeling; knowledge and sensory questions. Patton also reminds us that questions may be formulated as of the past, present and future, but questions about the future tend to elicit rich descriptive answers but of speculation and wish lists rather than of actual conditions.

And finally, the questions asked must be anchored in the respondents’ reality. The questions must be drawn from the respondents’ lives. The researcher had a background in and working knowledge of the reality of the respondents and was therefore well positioned to ask topical questions.

The Sample

The goal of qualitative research is not to generalize to the general population of the subjects in question but rather to illustrate some problem or its possible solutions by discovering what is occurring, the implications of that discovery and linking relationships. Therefore, the non-probability sampling is not necessary even though general applicability cannot be concluded from the evidence provided (Merriam, 1998). According to Patton
(1990), the most common form of non-probability sampling is “purposeful sampling based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 62).

The 10 school communities chosen represent diverse communities with two-thirds of the school population being ELL learners at various stages of English language development. For the study, 10 elementary school principals were selected from a GTA School District of approximately 147 elementary schools. The participants ranged from 30 to 50 years old; all were experienced administrators whose tenures as principals varied from 3 to 20 years. There were 4 males and 6 females. The participants represented a mix of backgrounds. All were fluent in English, but for some English was not their first language. Their schools varied in size from 350 to over 800 students, and were located in different areas within the school district. The proportion of their total school population of ethnic, linguistic or racial minority ranged from 65% to 75%. These schools were selected based on the following criteria:

1. EQAO results higher than 50% for three consecutive years;
2. Principal has been in the school for 3 consecutive years;
3. More than one third of the school identified as ELL learners.

Two other sources of information were used in the sample. These were human sources by way of school district personnel. Both sources were interviewed and the data incorporated into the discussion.
The GTA School District gave the researcher access to the individual school’s EQAO results and based on the demographics of the school population, the researcher chose the top 10 schools with diverse school communities which met the criteria.

**Data Analysis**

Analysis of the information gathered through qualitative research is carried on by systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes and other materials, organizing them into manageable units, synthesizing and searching for patterns of response to explain, discover and provide understanding and meaning (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). The researcher then develops categories (a coding system) to organize the data according to the “themes” represented by the questions, reading and re-reading the material to discover and elucidate regularities and irregularities (or inner conflicts between the material being presented by the respondents), patterns and ‘mavericks’. This involves coding the categories and sorting the data several times. A copy of the interview schedule is included in Appendix C.

In this research no computer program was used for analysis purposes. The researcher read and re-read the transcripts and pulled out emerging themes. These were then sorted into categories. This helped the researcher discern relationships, patterns, and themes that ran through the categories. The analysis of the data was not the last phase in the research. Although the data analysis is systematic and comprehensive, it is not rigid.

As the data was organized, it is reported in the two chapters entitled Findings. During the research, the emerging data was presented to two focus groups to check for validity of what was being seen by the researcher. As the data was disaggregated and
emerging patterns surfaced, focus group questions were formulated for the participants (see Appendix D). The participants were invited to comment on the findings and the formatted questions. The findings from the interviews are reported verbatim and this is indicated by quoting the interview number, the page of the interview and the lines quoted.

Focus Group

As the data was disaggregated and the themes began to emerge, the participants were invited to attend a focus group session. The focus group was an opportunity for the participants to hear the emerging themes in the data and give direct feedback about those themes in order to clarify their responses. There were two sessions held. One session accommodated four of the participants and the other session accommodated three participants. The three remaining principals were not able to attend either session. Those principals were given a transcript of the findings and invited to add their comments and thoughts. None of those principals responded. During this group discussion, the participants shared their thoughts about what the interview data was indicating and verified and substantiated the findings or added more details and comments. This data is reported subsequent to the two chapters on Findings.

Other Sources of Information

Three other sources of information were consulted in order to gain a clearer picture of the servicing of the ELL student within the school district. The first was a document analysis. These included curriculum documents both from the Ministry of Education and the school district pertaining to literacy learning and specifically to the ELL learner. The findings of this analysis are found in Chapter 4.
The second two were human sources, by way of school district personnel. Both sources were interviewed and the data discussed within Chapter 4 entitled Contextual Considerations.

**Limitations of the Research**

The purpose of this research is to capture those leadership practices in diverse school communities that are perceived to make a difference for ELL students’ literacy learning. At the outset, it must be stated that this is not an exhaustive study. It has a modest goal to further delineate what an elementary school principal does on a daily basis in leading a diverse school community in order to enhance the literacy learning for minority language groups. In doing this, it is hoped that the findings will help to push the margins of our current knowledge base about successful school leadership in diverse elementary communities. As such, in reviewing the very large body of research, the study took an Ontario perspective and as such was not exhaustive in the literature review but instead the research gave weight to recent work in local Ontario studies. It does not try to give a long term, historical synopsis of educational leadership in Ontario. The study does not conduct quantitative analysis but instead relies on the feedback of those practitioners in the field. The analysis of the findings does, however, focus on the behaviours of the principals as opposed to their theoretical frameworks. This relates back to the purpose of the study – to investigate the core beliefs of practicing principals in diverse communities and the practices they employ to address the literacy learning needs of ELL students. In so doing, it is hoped that these practical findings can broadened our understanding of the scope of practice of leaders in diverse elementary school communities in order to better prepare and support leaders for these challenging roles.
Summary

The research worked with a small but representative sample of elementary school principals who lead diverse school communities as defined by the criteria of the study. A qualitative research design was used which included documentary analysis; semi-structured interviews; and focus group sessions. The practical findings are intended to broaden the understanding of the scope of practice of principals working in diverse communities to support literacy learning and achievement of ELL students.
Chapter Four:  
Document Review

In this chapter, a number of documents from the Ontario Ministry of Education and the GTA School District were reviewed. Each pertained to literacy and some were focused specifically on the ELL learner. The focus of the documentary review was to determine whether the Ministry and Board addressed the issues of the ELL learners and, if so, to what extent the documents gave direction and support to principals in dealing with this particular group of students.

The review was organized around the framework of key messages; strengths; and shortcomings of each document.

Ontario Ministry of Education Documents


Key Messages: designed by the Ministry of Education as a practical document to support teachers, principals, and other education professionals work effectively with English language learners at the elementary and secondary levels. The book is a source of practices and strategies. It is organized into 3 sections: Tips for the Classroom, Tips for the Whole School, and Digging Deeper.

Tips for the Classroom – the purpose of instruction is to:

1. promote basic understanding of English by:
   a. learning useful phrases
   b. supporting teaching by using visuals
2. build bridges by:
   a. using student’s first language as critical foundation i.e., dual language approach
   b. build on prior knowledge
      i. value oral language
      ii. teach language everywhere i.e. charts, maps, subject-specific word walls

3. use of varied and appropriate assessment

Tips for the Whole School

1. establish a welcoming process for new families
2. be inclusive in school practices and operations
3. complete an initial assessment on all new Canadian students
4. connect to the community

Digging Deeper

a compilation of websites and resources to help deepen the educator's understanding of the needs of the ELL learner

Strengths: This is the first practical response in many years from the Ontario Ministry of Education to support English language learners. The document provides a brief but informative guide to dealing with ELL students in the classroom and the school. It is written in teacher-friendly language in a clear easy to read format. The document is brief. It deals with English language learning in a cursory manner; not going into any depth in any one area. The book would provide guidance at a very basic level. However, it does include references for further reading.
Shortcomings: The document is brief and deals superficially with the complicated challenge of supporting the ELL learner in the classroom and school. The suggestions are fairly straightforward and basic in nature.


Key Messages: For many years in Ontario, school boards were not required to offer special education programs and services to all students in the province. In 1962, the Ontario government repealed most of its human rights laws in order to make way for the Ontario Human Rights Code. The Code affirmed the right to equal access to services, including education. In 1980, Ontario’s Education Amendment Act, Bill 82, required special education programming be provided by each board. Regulation 181, enacted in 1998, legislated the requirement that the first consideration regarding placement for an exceptional pupil be placement in a regular class with appropriate supports. Ministry policy now requires that a range of options continue to be available for students whose needs cannot be met within the regular classroom.

This report is divided into eight sections: Planning for Inclusion; Assessment and Evaluation; Develop Learning Profiles; Learning Communities; Research into Practice; Effective Instructional Approaches; Organization and Management; and Assistive Technology.

Strengths: This report is a very comprehensive document that gives clear direction to teachers to help them in accommodating diverse learners in their classrooms.
Written by educators for teachers, the report clearly lays out the various areas to address when providing support for learners with special needs. The overarching message is that most learners can be supported in the regular classroom with appropriate resources.

**Shortcomings**: When focusing on the needs of the ELL learner, this report is helpful in addressing general classroom accommodations to support all learners. However, none of the suggestions are specifically related to the ELL learner. The report is written for students with special learning needs. Although, ELL students may not have special learning needs in the sense of special education concerns, many of the strategies discussed in the document are good teaching for any student.


**Key Messages**: The report addresses the teaching of reading in Ontario with the understanding that there are two official languages in use in the province – English and French. The report acknowledges that immigrants with a language other than English or French make up about 25% of Ontario’s population but does not feel that is an obstacle to reading achievement. The panel sets out four guiding principles for early reading instruction:

1. Reading instruction should be based on the evidence of sound research that has been verified by classroom practice.
2. Early reading success is critical for children.
3. The teacher is the key to a child’s success in learning to read.
4. Teachers need the support and cooperation of instructional leaders at the school and Board level for on-going professional development.

The report is divided into nine sections – Setting the Context; Why Early Reading Matters; Effective Reading Instruction; Help for Children with Reading Difficulties; Target Setting and School Improvement; The Role of the Teacher; Supportive Leadership; Home and Community Connections; and Conclusion.

**Strengths:** The report is written by educators to support teacher practice. It is well laid out and gives a brief but informative overview of reading in the early years. With respect to ELL learners, the report does have brief sections about the language learning of ELLs in the context of Ontario classrooms and making community connections. However, there is no specific reference to the language of origin and what impact that may have on learning to read in English.

**Shortcomings:** The report only mentions very briefly the challenges of learning to read in a second language. It does not provide any strategies other than providing a rich language environment for supporting ELLs. Also in the section on assessment, the document does not mention that consideration may need to be given to ELLs in the types of assessment used in classroom practice.

*A Guide to Effective Instruction in Reading: Kindergarten to Grade 3* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2003).

**Key Messages:** The Ontario Ministry of Education introduced its Early Reading Strategy in 2001. Under this strategy, elementary schools are required to participate in a regular cycle of assessment, target setting, and improvement planning. The
reference guide builds on the strengths that exist in the Ontario education system. It is designed to translate theory into practice by providing practical strategies in the areas of oral language, read aloud, shared reading, guided reading, independent reading, reading comprehension, phonemic awareness, and the role of writing and assessment in the reading process.

**Part 1** – provides a framework for school improvement and discusses those elements that have proved effective in achieving and sustaining improvement. This section also discusses the contributions to effective reading instruction by various members of the school and larger school community.

In schools successful in working to improve student achievement in reading, teachers, administrators, centrally assigned staff and central office work together in implementing and sustaining effective reading practices.

**Part 2** – Effective Reading Instruction

An effective reading program is complex and multi-faceted. The framework provides the essential components of an effective reading program. Among the essential components are four instructional strategies – read alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading.

**Strengths**: This document serves as the companion to the Early Reading Strategy. Released the same year as the Early Reading Strategy (2003), this document provides teachers with the practical component of daily practice. Based on the latest research, the guide helps teachers incorporate the proven components of a balanced reading program. The document is well laid out and teacher friendly. It
provides outlines, organizers, and samples to help teachers incorporate the various components of reading into their literacy program. Each section is supported by many references for further inquiry.

**Shortcomings:** With respect to the ELL student, there is only a brief mention of “adapting...programs to suit the needs of these (ELL) students as they develop English language skills” (p. 2.19). The document goes on to say that like all students, those learning English “learn better, academically and socially, when they interact and engage in the learning process with their peers” (p. 2.20). There are no specific strategies or practices that are mentioned to support English language learners in the regular classroom. In the section on assessment, there is no mention of accommodating ELL students in the assessment process. The guide does not offer suggestions for assessing ELL learners in order to obtain an accurate picture of their learning.


**Key Messages:** This report sets out a framework for all students in Grades 4 – 6 in publicly funded schools in Ontario. It recommends that all junior learners receive the strategic instruction and support they need to develop as readers, writers, talkers and thinkers. The report is grounded in current research. It attempts to offer a vision for all educators in Ontario to promote literacy instruction in the junior division. Building on seven guiding principles, the report provides a broad framework for planning and supporting literacy learning in the junior grades.
**Guiding principles:**

1. Literacy learning in the junior grades can transform children’s lives.

2. The goal of literacy instruction is to enable students to make meaning from a wide range of texts.

3. All junior learners can develop as literate learners.

4. Students are motivated to learn when they encounter interesting texts on topics that matter to them.

5. Teachers continually assess the literacy learning of their students.

6. Teachers continually develop their professional knowledge to improve their classroom practice.

7. Successful literacy learning in the junior grades is a team effort.

The report is divided into thirteen sections. These include: the junior learner; the learning environment; approaches to teaching and learning; assessment; talking and listening; reading; writing; building school success; professional learning; and the path forward.

**Strengths:** This report was written by educators for educators. It was developed by a bilingual panel of experts. The report is comprehensive in its ambitious plan for high quality programs to address the literacy learning in the junior grades. It looks at literacy as a whole instead of focusing just on reading. The report explains clearly how reading, writing, listening and speaking are all interconnected under the umbrella of oral language. The report does a good job of laying the foundations for literacy learning in the junior classroom. The report includes charts and tables which
capture the key messages. It also has sections for school leaders and literacy
teachers which outline the roles that both have in supporting high quality programs.
More than any previous document, the report has sections about supporting the ELL
student in their literacy learning.

**Shortcomings:** More than any of the other Ministry documents, this report
addresses supporting the ELL student in the classroom. However, when speaking
about the second language learner, many of the references and examples are of
French-speaking students and not students from other linguistic backgrounds. This
is a serious gap in a province where 25% of students have another language other
than French or English.

*A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction: Grades 4 – 6, A Multivolume Resource
from the Ministry of Education.*

*Volume One: Foundations of Literacy Instruction for the Junior Learner* (Ontario

**Key Messages:** The guide is based on the research and advice set out in the expert
panel report released in October 2004. It provides teachers with a framework and
practical resources for planning a successful literacy program that is intended to
equip junior students to grow as readers, writers, and thinkers. Effective literacy
instruction is the backbone of teaching and learning in the junior grades. Although
these learners have a basic understanding of reading and writing, teachers need to
explicitly teach the students skills that will help them understand increasingly
complex texts and concepts.
The four major literacy goals for junior learners as set out in the guide are:

1. to become strategic readers, writers, and oral communicators;
2. to expand thinking skills by developing the necessary habits of mind;
3. to deepen the motivation to learn;
4. to develop independence as a learner.

The guide is broken into four sections:

1. Chapter 1: The Junior Learner
2. Chapter 2: Knowledge and Skills Required for Literacy
3. Chapter 3: Principles of Effective Literacy Instruction
4. Chapter 4: Appendix – Strategies and Tools

**Strengths:** this is first of the companion documents to the *Literacy for Learning* (2004) report. It was written by a bilingual panel of experts who speak English and French and is a very comprehensive guide to literacy in the junior grades. This first volume addresses the foundations for literacy instruction. In each section, the document includes strategies and suggestions for supporting the ELL student in a junior classroom. It includes a signature article by J. Cummins on the importance of academic language for the ELL learner. One of the main themes running through the document is that of differentiated instruction in order to address the needs of various learners in the junior classroom.

**Shortcomings:** With respect to the ELL learner, this document is the most supportive to date. It weaves strategies for support throughout the document.
**Key Messages**: The report was written for all educators in Ontario. It calls on teachers, school administrators, families, community members, superintendents, and directors to work together to ensure student success. It is a framework for embedding high literacy standards and effective practices across the curriculum. Based on current research, it compiles the extensive expertise of members of the panel from across the province. It is not intended as a technical guide but rather as a resource for developing and implementing cross-curricular literacy plans.

Specifically targeted at supporting the at-risk students in the school system, the report first defines the at-risk learner and then goes on to outline a framework for success by addressing: roles and responsibilities of educators; family and community connections; and professional development.

The document first reviews the research and the foundations of cross-curricular literacy skills and then goes on to explain how to use information to improve student achievement. Finally the resource makes some recommendations to promote innovation and accountability for adolescent literacy.

**Strengths**: The document is well laid out written in clear and direct language. It makes a strong point that literacy development is a continuum based on oral language. However, early literacy success in language and subsequent literacy is no insurance against difficulties in middle and senior grades when requirements for
learning are more complex. The document is based on nine guiding principles for adolescent literacy. These are:

1. Literacy is the key to lifelong learning.

2. All students have the right to acquire the literacy skills they need for lifelong learning, and it is the duty of schools to make this happen.

3. Literacy instruction must be embedded across the curriculum. All teachers of all subjects are teachers of literacy.

4. Effective literacy instruction starts with the needs of the learner.

5. Quality instruction for all students enhances the learning of students at-risk.

6. All teachers must be equipped with the knowledge and skills to model and teach effective literacy skills in their subject area.

7. Families and communities must be encouraged and supported in taking action to promote literacy.

8. Decisions about next steps in literacy must be based on a wide range of timely, relevant, and accurate information.

9. Effective literacy learning may occur in or require a variety of innovative and flexible structures within the school and community (p.5).

The document does stress that literacy and learning are not solely school issues; they are family and community issues as well. Although the document does not talk about ELL students and their families, it does promote family involvement.

**Shortcomings**: this document supports the assumption that language and literacy continues to develop over the student’s school career and it is important for all teachers to be strong teachers of literacy no matter what their subject specialty may
be. However, there is no mention or reference to ELL students in any part of the
document. Yet we know that many ELL students struggle in the intermediate and
senior grades due to the demands of the curriculum and the added challenge of
learning a new language.

*Think Literacy: Cross Curricular Approaches Grade 7-12* (Ontario Ministry of

**Key Messages:** This document provides practical, hands-on classroom ready
strategies that apply across subject areas in Grades 7-12. There are three main
sections in the document:

1. Reading
2. Writing
3. Oral Communication

Each strategy begins with a two-page spread containing all the information needed
to use the approach in the classroom. The left-facing page describes the strategy
and its benefits and offers the teacher tips and resources. The right-facing page
describes what teachers and students do before, during, and after the strategy.

Although the document has been divided into three separate sections, it is prefaced
by saying that student literacy learning is enhanced when reading, writing, and oral
communication skills and strategies are taught through an integrated program.

**Strengths:** The document began with a focus on students at-risk and is the
companion document for *Think Literacy Success* (2003). It became clear that all
students would benefit from the strategies suggested. The resource is intended for
teachers of all subject areas in Grades 7-12. The resource document was developed by teachers for teachers. Contributions were made from elementary teachers, secondary teachers and consultants from the public and Catholic boards. There was input from special education and English as a second language teachers. The document is clearly laid out and teacher friendly. The index identifies the various aspects of literacy and then suggests the strategy i.e. getting ready to read – finding signal words.

**Shortcomings**: The underlying philosophy of the document is that all students can benefit from good teaching. There are no specific strategies suggested for ELL learners as a result. However, the document is comprehensive and does have a section describing what struggling readers need to learn. This may apply indirectly to the ELL learner.


**Key Messages**: A booklet organized into five sections each containing strategies that can be implemented at the classroom/school/ Board level. The section themes are as follows:

1. Using Data
2. Cross Panel Planning
3. Cross Curricular Strategies
4. Information Technology
5. Literacy Outside the Classroom
Each theme then draws examples from various Boards across the province to illustrate effective practices.

**Strengths:** The document shares stories of effective school practices which help students Grades 7 - 12 improve their literacy learning. It informs teachers and school board staff about successful literacy strategies currently being used in Grades 7 - 12 classrooms across the province. The Ministry of Education feels that by sharing these successful strategies staffs can enhance their expertise in reading and writing instruction and offer stronger literacy programs. The booklet only captures a few examples of strategies being implemented throughout the province.

**Shortcomings:** This document is aimed at showcasing the various practices throughout the province to support student learning. Although the ideas are interesting and may be effective to some extent, there is little relevance to developing programs/practices for the ELL learner in the classroom.


**Key Messages:** This guide describes programs and procedures that support students who are from countries or communities in which Canadian English is not the primary language of communication and who may have difficulty meeting the expectations of the Ontario curriculum because of their lack of proficiency in English. It is intended as a resource guide to be used by teachers in conjunction with the various curriculum policy documents that make up the Ontario curriculum Grades 1-8. The guide is designed to help schools and classroom teachers provide
accommodations and modifications that will enable students from a variety of linguistic, ethnocultural, and educational backgrounds to participate as fully as possible in all program areas of the school.

The guide is divided into three sections:

1. Part 1 ESL/ELD Program Considerations;
2. Part 2 Descriptions of Skills at the Four Stages of Second Language Acquisition and Literacy Development;
3. Part 3 Sample Adaptations and Modifications for Selected Teaching Units.

Part 1 ESL/ELD Program Considerations – provides an overview of the factors influencing ESL/ELD development including background, age, family disruption, previous exposure to English, and first language proficiency. It goes on to review the stages of second-language acquisition which include:

1. Stage 1 Survival/Orientation
   a. becoming familiar with the sounds, rhythm, and patterns of English;
   b. trying to make sense out of messages;
   c. responding non-verbally or with single words;

2. Stage 2 Using English in Supported Contexts
   a. listening with greater understanding;
   b. increasing confidence;
   c. using personally relevant language appropriately;
3. Stage 3 Using English Independently (in most contexts)
   a. speaking with less hesitation;
   b. demonstrating increasing understanding;
   c. producing longer phrases and sentences;
   d. participating more fully in academic content areas;
   e. able to use newly acquired vocabulary to retell, describe, explain, and compare;
   f. reading independently;
   g. writing for a variety of purposes;

4. Stage 4 Using English with Proficiency
   a. using a more extensive vocabulary with greater accuracy and correctness;
   b. able to use reading and writing skills to explore concepts in greater depth;
   c. increased confidence in academic content areas;

The section then describes the types of program delivery depending on student need or on local circumstances:

1. Integrated classroom program – students are placed in a classroom at the appropriate grade level for their age and receive ESL support from the classroom teacher/and/or the ESL teacher.

2. Tutorial support – is appropriate for students who still require some assistance to reinforce their language skills and/or their cognitive development. For these students, small group instruction for a short period of time may be necessary. Instruction is usually provided by an ESL teacher.

3. Intensive support – is appropriate for students who are in the early stages of learning English and/or who have had limited educational opportunities. These students are usually withdrawn from the regular class for literacy support with an
ESL teacher. However, most of their day is spent with English-speaking peers in a regular classroom.

The section ends off with a description of the roles of the teachers, both classroom and ESL teacher, and the role of the parent.

Part 2 Description of Skills at the Four Stages of ESL Development – provides a continuum of developmentally appropriate skills in the four areas of English language development – orientation, oral expression, reading, and writing.

Part 3 Sample Adaptations and Modifications for Selected Units – provides sample teaching units that illustrate various ways in which ESL/ELD students can be helped to meet the expectations of the Ontario curriculum. These sample units are intended to demonstrate how to meet the needs of ESL/ELD students and provide appropriate teaching and assessment strategies. The sample units contain the following information:

1. Expectations – the expectations from the curriculum to be addressed in the unit;
2. Culminating task – a multi-faceted task appropriate for assessment purposes that provides evidence of the extent to which a student has met the unit expectations;
3. Assessment rubric – provides teachers with a framework with which to assess the ESL/ELD student based on their stage of English development;
4. Prior Knowledge and skills – identifies basic knowledge and skills that students should have in order to perform the unit tasks;
5. Teaching strategies – are provided that are appropriate to meet the needs of the ESL/ELD students in the context of that particular unit;
6. Assessment and evaluation – the unit adaptations describe assessment strategies appropriate to the needs and abilities of the ESL/ELD students at the grade level.

**Strengths:** The guide provides a very basic and cursory approach to addressing the ELL learner. It gives a description of skills at the four stages of second language acquisition and literacy development. This helps teachers to understand the general profile of a student at a particular stage of second language development. The guide then goes through sample adaptations and modifications for selected teaching units. Along with the unit is a sample assessment rubric and possible diagnostic, formative and summative assessment strategies. Teaching strategies are also included with each unit. Over the grade levels, various subject areas are selected so that there is a variety of curriculum material addressed.

**Shortcomings:** The guide is approximately 8 years old. It does not touch on the engagement and involvement of parents / community in a diverse school environment. It does not address the complexity of need associated with many ELL students i.e. disrupted/interrupted education; family separation issues; ELL vs. special education. The guide needs to be updated and brought into line with more recent research and direction from the Ministry of Education.

Key Messages: This document sets out the policies and procedures for the development and implementation of programs and supports for English language learners in English elementary and secondary schools in Ontario from Grade K -12. The goal of Ontario’s policy for English language learners is to provide school boards with direction and support in meeting the needs of ELL students so that these students can develop the proficiency in English that is necessary for success in school. The Ministry goes on to say that it is committed to supporting ELL students by providing funding; providing leadership on educating ELLs; collecting student data; providing focused support for professional development; and encouraging faculties of education to enhance opportunities for teachers to acquire knowledge about ELL students. The document is divided into two parts: Part 1 Framework for the K-12 Policy; and Part 2 Components of the Policy.

Part 1 Framework for the K-12 Policy: this section offers a definition of the ELL learner differentiating between Canadian-born English language learners and newcomers from other countries. It then goes on to clarify the goals of the policy and outline the implementation strategy for the Ministry.

Part 2 Components of the K-12 Policy: the document outlines the services that boards will provide to support ELL students. These include:

1. Board planning – data collection;
2. Reception and orientation of ELL students and their families – information about courses, explanation about programs, reporting policies;

3. Initial assessment;

4. Placement of ELL students;

5. Programming for ELL students;

6. Graduation requirements for ELL students;

7. Substitutions for compulsory courses;

8. Ongoing assessment, evaluation, and reporting;

9. Involvement of ELL students in large scale assessment;

10. Discontinuation of ESL/ELD support;

11. Appropriate allocation of resources;

12. ESL teacher qualifications and professional development.

**Strengths:** The policy document is brand new. It gives direction from the Ministry of Education to school boards in providing for the needs of the ELL student. The bolded statements are mandatory requirements that will be met by all school boards and schools. This is very helpful in addressing the needs of the ELL student. It also demonstrates the Ministry’s commitment to supporting this group of learners. The document is well written and clearly laid out. The expectations/requirements are specific and clear.

**Shortcomings:** This document has been a long time in coming. It is the first step in updating out-dated materials regarding supporting ELL students. It is a much needed clarification of direction and programming with respect to the English
language learners. It will help to align procedures in all Ontario boards with regards to services for ESL programs.


**Key Messages:** The Kindergarten Program was reviewed and revised in 2006. The revised curriculum emphasizes the importance of building on prior knowledge/skills to help the child learn. This is the same for ELL students in the K program. An additional language cannot be seen as a deficit but must be seen as an asset. The document is presented in four parts: Who are English language learners in the K classroom?; Working with families and communities; Working with English language learners in K; and Working as a whole school.

Who are English language learners in the Kindergarten classroom? : This section begins with a definition of the ELL student. It distinguishes between English language learners born in Canada and those who are newcomers. There is a brief section on the importance of first languages and some language development strategies to support children in each phase of second language acquisition.

Working with families and communities: This section supports the message that schools and teachers must help newcomer families to feel validated and welcome in Ontario schools. It briefly describes strategies that can be used by schools and teachers to help families feel supported. In a question/answer format, the document answers frequently asked questions in dealing with newcomer families.
Working with English language learners in K: The largest section of the document, it provides teachers with practical suggestions and strategies to help K students feel welcome and at ease in the classroom.

Working as a whole school: For English language learners, it is particularly important to establish an inclusive school. It helps to confirm their identity and build their trust in the school as a place where they belong.

**Strengths**: The most recent of the Ministry documents to be released, the K support document outlines the most recent and up to date thinking about supporting young ELL students in the K program. The document incorporates the idea of supporting children through their first language in order to build knowledge and skills; creating an inclusive whole school environment; and also supporting the parent/community needs. The document is well laid out. It clearly outlines programming strategies and suggestions and presents information in a question and answer format to help support teachers.

**Shortcomings**: With this being the most recent release from the Ministry, it is aligned with the direction that the Ministry is taking in recent years. This is not a shortcoming but rather this document has a focus only on Kindergarten. The Ministry needs to produce more documents for various grades.


**Key Messages**: Over the last number of years, the Ministry of Education acknowledges that the needs and contributions of parents have been undervalued. It
acknowledges that this is an area of re-building. The parent-factor must realize its full potential. The policy is based on common respect, mutual responsibility, and agreement about results. The Parent Involvement Policy will recognize effective parent involvement as a new measure to be expected of the publicly funded education system. The policy lays out requirements for the Minister of Education, the Ministry, school boards, schools, and their staffs to contribute to successful outcomes. The main thrust of the policy is the onus on decision-makers to create the conditions for parents’ engagement in their children's education. Parent groups will be provided with exclusive or joint control of resources. With this policy, existing school councils will be made more flexible to accommodate parents’ interests. Boards will be asked to establish a parent Portal at the local level with authoritative information and updates for parents. School boards will be required to establish a Parent Involvement Committee with a direct link to the Director and the trustees. Ongoing provincial support will be made available to support provincial parent organizations. A provincial fund will support projects that enhance parent involvement. Schools will be asked to create a welcoming environment for parents, practising better family-school communication, effectively dealing with parent issues and inviting parents to participate. School councils will be asked to develop outreach programs which focus on engaging parents and fostering involvement in their children’s education. Provincial assistance will be available for parent development programs. A special provincial advisory committee will be established made up of principals and parents to consult on fundraising, dispute resolution, and addressing diversity.
**Strengths:** The policy is a major step in moving schools and school boards towards creating a more inviting and supportive space for parents. It attempts to make the structures of schools more accessible for the vast majority of parents i.e. school councils. It is certainly a move in the right direction.

**Shortcomings:** The policy falls short of examining the very structures of schools that make them less accessible and inviting spaces for parents from diverse communities i.e. school councils. It also does not address the very diversity it is trying to come to terms with i.e. cultural and linguistic diversity. Furthermore, it falls short of suggesting alternate ways to involve and encourage parents in their child’s schooling and education.

**GTA School District Documents and Websites**

*Ensuring Student Success: Towards the Antiracist School* (GTA School District, 1999).

**Key Messages:** A document developed by the Board to address antiracist education. It contains five sections: Policies and Procedures, Standing Memoranda, Learning Resources, Awards and Grants, and Documents.

**Policies and Procedures** – this section contains information about student admission requirements; antiracism and ethnocultural equity policy and implementation plans; a guideline for accommodations of religious requirements, practices, and observances; antiracism indicators; and questions and answers for antiracism and ethnocultural equity.
Standing memoranda – provides guidelines for the observances of significant faith
days; and a list of interpreters/translators.

Learning resources – provides a guideline for the selection of student learning
resources and is informed by the Human Rights Code; Policy/Program
Memorandum #119 (Antiracist and Ethnocultural Equity). It addresses the issues of
race, culture, faith and gender equity in the selection of resources.

Awards/Grants – this grant-type program is designed to encourage and support
schools and other workplaces in the development of locally-based inititatives to
assist with the implementation of the Antiracist and Ethnocultural Equity policy.

Documents – a compilation of activities that have an antiracist education focus
designed and implemented by teachers. These documents encourage participants to
learn about and critically examine prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination.

Strengths: The document contains many relevant pieces of information. It would
help a school principal to get started with antiracist education in the school setting.
Certain sections would help staff and administration reflect on the conditions in their
school regarding operations and resources and make some first step changes. The
documents: Accommodations of Religious Requirements, Practices, and
Observances: A Guideline and Antiracism Indicators for an Antiracist School are
very good and help to establish an inclusive school environment.

Shortcomings: The document is dated. Much more relevant and timely information
is available through periodicals, journals, and literature on antiracist and inclusive
education. With reference to ELL learners, the document would set the context of the school and the learning environment. It is basically about operational issues/matters. There is no direction about community engagement/involvement and this may be due in part to the date of publication.


**Key Messages:** A workshop format that touches on various topics and concepts of interest to administrators and managers in the school district concerning equity education and diversity training. The sessions include keynote speakers, panel presentations, discussion of articles and professional materials, and a self-reflection piece asking how this learning will be translated into practice in the workplace. The series is on-going and topics have included:

1. Equity Training;
2. Engaging the Community;
3. Understanding the Southasian Community;
4. The Culturally Proficient School
   a. Part One
   b. Part Two

**Equity Training:** Through a series of workshops with keynote speakers such as Patrick Solomon and Zenana Akande and workshop presentations, principals and managers develop a heightened awareness of various issues dealing with equity
that are present in the organization i.e. hiring practices, resources, and institutional
barriers to equity.

**Engaging the Community:** Through a series of workshops highlighting various
keynote speakers from various cultural communities and community organizations
such as Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education, Maytree Foundation, and The South
Asian Women’s Support Network, principals and system managers develop an
awareness of how to support students and families in their workplace.

Understanding the South Asian Community: The session involved an overview of the
various cultures that make up the South Asian region of the world. It reviewed some
commonly held beliefs; the political system; the various educational systems; the
languages spoken; and finally some common gestures and body language
understandings.

**Strengths:** the workshop approach helped to promote dialogue and gave the
participants an opportunity to ask questions to dispel commonly held myths. It
helped to bring people together for a common experience and face-to-face
encounter which helped to promote understanding.

**Shortcomings:** as in any workshop, most of the information is generalities and
generalizations about a very complicated and complex subject such as cultural
diversity. Within the South Asian region there are many cultures, all with their own
unique intricacies.
English Language Learners Sharepoint (GTA School District, 2006).

**Key Messages:** Established in 2005, the sharepoint is a web-based site for sharing of various information about the ELL learner in the Ontario school and classroom. With sections for elementary and secondary-specific information, the site is a central location at which both teachers and administrators can expand their knowledge of the ELL student. A central message of the site is that all educators are responsible for the achievement of the ELL student.

There are nine links on the sharepoint:

1. Event calendar – an outline of the events planned for the coming month relating to ELL;
2. Reception/Orientation – strategies to develop a welcoming school;
3. Literacy @ school – a listing of ELL demonstration classes and how to schedule a visit;
4. Workshops – network meeting calendar; workshops on various aspects of a balanced literacy program; and after-school workshops;
5. Classroom Resources – strategies for both elementary and secondary classroom teachers to support ELL students; list of translators available;
6. Professional Resources – listing of articles and professional journals to support ELL students;
7. System Resources – translation support services available; Reception Centre information; community liaison workers contact numbers; professional library resources; media literacy resources; ELL newsletter entitled ‘Shared voices towards a shared understanding;
8. Community Connections – calendar of upcoming community events;
9. Meet the Team – names and accompanying pictures of the ESL support team.
**Strengths:** It is a good idea to have one site where staff can go to get support for ELL students. The site is welcoming and very user-friendly. It is easy to navigate. The ideas on the site are very practical and would help to support the ELL student in the classroom. The site demonstrates a commitment to the ELL student in the GTA school District. It is an effective way to share information through the effective use of technology.

**Shortcomings:** In order to have this site be useful to teachers and administrators, it must be maintained regularly and updated at frequent intervals. The information must be timely and relevant. Some of the links had not been updated and as such the information was outdated. Similarly, some of the links had nothing posted such as the Community Connections link and the Events Calendar.

**GTA School District Plan for Continuous Improvement**

According to the GTA School District’s plan for continuous improvement, the overall priority for the District continues to be improved literacy achievement for all students. The District’s literacy priority provides the context within which the board continues to strive to achieve three specific goals (p. 2):

1. Quality Schools: Goal – to ensure that all students acquire the literacy skills which will enable them to be successful in the future

2. Parent, Family, and Community Engagement: Goal – to enhance family involvement and community support for student learning including the acquisition of students’ literacy skills

3. Workplace Climate: Goal – to ensure continuous improvement in the delivery of programs and services
Figure 11 is a portion of the District’s plan for continuous improvement as it pertains to the achievement of the ELL student. It is taken from the quality schools section of the plan under the sub section which addresses equity (p. 11):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Key Performance Standards</th>
<th>Targets</th>
<th>Strategies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading, Writing and Mathematical Literacy</td>
<td>EQAO, Report cards, PM Benchmarks assessment results disaggregated by gender, special education and ELL (ESL/ELD) Students achieve at or above level 3 in reading, writing, and mathematics.</td>
<td>By June 2008: EQAO Targets for ELL Grade 3 Reading 58% Writing 64% Math 71% Grade 6 Reading 46% Writing 56% Math 64%</td>
<td>Supporting the needs of ELL (ESL/ELD) students by: - providing specialized after-school PD for ESL teachers and embedding within all professional development key messages re: ELL programming for all teachers and administrators; - providing learning opportunities through ESL summer programs (gr. 3-12); - focusing on effective programming, assessment, and resource selection using the ELL Ministry document; - extending administrator and teacher knowledge of ELL through communication tools such as Sharepoint, the shared Understandings newsletter and monthly network meetings; - operating the Reception Centre to standardize initial assessment of ELL students’ literacy skills; - continuing to equitably support ELL learners through itinerant teachers; - providing appropriate accommodations/modifications; - accessing available supports and resources including translation services, community liaisons etc.; - facilitating Reception Centre assessor training to support current and consistent practices</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 11. District plan for continuous improvement.*
Key Messages: The District is committed to improved achievement of all learners in the area of literacy.

Strengths: the District is to be commended for its commitment to the achievement of all learners and its attempt to outline strategies with which to reach targets.

Shortcomings: the targets are vague and not monitored strictly. Many of the areas referenced a TBA, indicating a need for more clearly defined outcomes within a set time frame.

Summary

Upon review of the Ministry of Education documents regarding literacy, there was very little support for English language learners. The documentary review and analysis found that the Ministry provided very little direction for the teaching of English language learners both in the larger class or within a withdrawal/resource program. However, review of the GTA school district documents (see Table 3) revealed more support for ELL students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ministry of Education and GTA school district documents</th>
<th>Strategies for ELL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Many Roots, Many Voices (2005)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education for All (2005)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Guide to Effective Instruction in Reading K – 3 (2003)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Guide to Effective Literacy Instruction Grades 4 – 6 (2006)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy for Learning Grades 4 – 6 (2004)</td>
<td>Yes, in reference to French-speaking students only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Literacy Success: Grades 7 – 12 (2003)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Think Literacy: Cross Curricular Approaches Grades 7 – 12 (2003)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting Student Success in Literacy Grades 7 – 12 (2004)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English as a second language and English literacy development (2001)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English Language Learners: ESL and ELD programs and services K – 12 (2007)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting English language learners in Kindergarten (2007)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
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<td>Ministry of Education and GTA school district documents</td>
<td>Strategies for ELL</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ontario Parent Involvement Policy (2005)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>GTA School District Documents</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensuring Student Success (1999)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEEDS: Sustaining equity education and diversity system-wide (2004)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English language learner Sharepoint (2006)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTA School District Plan for Continuous Improvement (2007)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Five: Core Beliefs of the Principals

This section reports the core beliefs mentioned by the participant principals of high diversity communities. Their core beliefs have been reported in four broad statement categories: (a) diversity is a strength; (b) all children can learn given time and support; (c) the mandate of a school principal is to improve student learning; and (d) in a diverse community, the principal must work to build capacity. Capacity building is defined as the planned development of knowledge, skills, or ability to accomplish work by acquiring/sharing resources, funding, as well as people. In the case of a diverse elementary school, the principal would support parents in building their knowledge and skills in literacy development in the Ontario education context.

However, first, to set the context of their opinions and beliefs, they comment on diversity in their schools. It is important to understand the extent of diversity in the selected school communities.

(Interview # 10, p. 1, line 1-12)

Our school is one of the schools that is truly culturally diverse. Not diverse because there is a large percentage of kids from one group…but it is truly diverse because of the range of kids, because of the mix of kids from each of many different places….These kids are from all over the world, east Asia, Europe, South America. Truly it is the most diverse school I have been in.

(Interview #5, p. 1, line 1-4)

We’re very, very multicultural. We’ve got south Asian, Asian, … we have Russians, um, Albanians, Iranians, Persians….Oh we have 42 different languages spoken here.
Along with the cultural diversity, the principals touched a number of different aspects of diversity, including socioeconomic factors.

(Interview #4, p. 1, line 1-8)

This school is probably the most diverse school that I have been in because not only is the diversity racial and ethnic and linguistic but also socioeconomic. So in every way it is diverse. We have an old established community of well-healed parents, and we have everything in between right down to families who are on welfare.

Some principals also spoke of how their communities were changing which brought another type of diversity.

(Interview #6, p. 1, line 1-4)

In the last 6 years, the population has changed dramatically. It has gone from WASP and Catholic to East Indian. So basically, the main language is now Punjabi.

(Interview #9, p. 1, line 1-11)

Historically, this school was about 99% Asian when it opened in 1999. And I think over the years there has been a real influx of the Persian culture… and some Iranian students, Greek, Italian and other Mediterranean cultures.

So it can be seen how diverse these school communities are; a diversity not only culturally but also in many other aspects such as socioeconomic status, linguistic, religious beliefs and years in the country. However, all the principals who participated in the research stated very clearly that they felt this very diversity was a strength for their community.
Diversity is a Strength

All the principals interviewed clearly saw diversity as a strength even though it posed many challenges. They gave many reasons for this viewing diversity as a strength but not unequivocally in reply to questions.

**Diversity is reflective of society.**

Diversity was reflective of society, Toronto and the world generally.

(Interview #10, p. 3, line 40-46)

I see it [diversity] actually as a real strength. And as you know, It's much more representative of our world… Our kids have the experience of being in a place that isn’t one dominant group. And that’s the world that they have to fit into. So they get a chance to actually live that in their school.

Diversity in the school population also allows the children to mix more with other groups of children.

(Interview #10, p. 2, line 29-35)

Kids are from so many different places so, I find that the children tend to mix much more and you don’t get the clustering by racial groups or language groups. There really is much more interaction.

**Children learn from one another in a diverse community.**

Diversity affords children greater opportunity to learn from one another, perhaps in ways that would not be evident in a monocultural community.

(Interview #9, p. 1, line 12-16)

I definitely think that it [diversity] is a strength… I think that the kids have learned a lot from one another.
Children learn many lessons they might not otherwise learn by being exposed to diversity.

(Interview #4, p. 3, line 55-58)

Some of our Canadian kids – well, it’s a very good lesson for them to hear that a child wasn’t able to go to school in their country because of war or this, that or the other thing.

(Interview #4, p. 3, line 47-50)

The things that they [immigrants] bring, the experiences that they bring from their own countries, the way that [the children] can help each other… all those things I see as very positive.

**Diversity promotes global awareness.**

Respondents spoke about the opportunity to promote global awareness through diversity in their schools – not only for the minority student but also for the other children in the school.

(Interview #5, p. 2, line 24-29)

I think that cultural diversity is a strength if you look at it the way that I look at it. You know, when you come from different backgrounds and everyone tries to learn from one another and about each other, we become stronger and we become more aware globally. We become globally aware of what’s going on.

(Interview #8, p. 1, line 12-14)

I think that cultural diversity gives a great educational opportunity to the children and their parents in terms of developing global awareness.
So it is up to us as educators to be trying to expand that [global awareness] in knowing what is going on in different aspects of the community and also knowing that we are preparing children for a future in a global world. So … we ensure that we not only reflect the representation in our school but we also expand that reflection to ensure that the children are comfortable in a world that is diverse and not only one or two cultures.

**Diversity helps to build character in children.**

This was another positive dimension as mentioned by the principals interviewed. School was seen to be the natural setting to build character, i.e., to develop empathy, tolerance, and acceptance.

It’s a strength for the staff and for the students, in general, in the school to have this diversity and to be living in this milieu day in and day out because this is what Canada is now. So it’s really good practice for the students and they have a tolerance and acceptance of each other that is really gratifying to see. I mean, it is the best of diversity and multiculturalism.

It’s because those kids knew how hard it is to suffer because a lot of these kids come from war-torn countries and their parents understand that too and so with an open heart, they just brought money. We had a great big bottle in the front and the money just grew in the bottle. These kids have empathy towards other people. And even when you talk about, in discussion of stories and stuff, they are able to bring that empathy out.

In a diverse community, children learn to accept and appreciate people for who they are and not their external appearance.
The other thing that we focus on in regards to cultural diversity, is that we actively promote the fact that it is okay to be different. That it is okay to be who you are and where you come from as an individual. And that makes us strong.

It’s not what you look like or what language you speak, it’s who you are and what you bring to our community.

**A diverse community values education.**

In general, these principals feel there is strong support for education in a diverse community – parents speak of the educational opportunities of their children. They see education as the way to “get on” in life in Canada.

The nature of some of the children who come from different parts of the world, and the way that parents see their educational experiences and the way they see their own educational experiences is perceived like an opportunity… a chance to make themselves better and so forth.

I think because their parents have been immigrants and some of them are immigrants, first generation immigrants … they have a passion to make sure that their kids do well.

We know that there are huge assets to what these students are bringing. They come from very loving homes, very giving homes, homes that believe in
formal education and believe in what the teachers are saying and are supportive of teachers and the school.

Some participants, however, went on to offer a word of caution about the negative effects of the diversity in their schools, mentioning specific challenges and speaking about the complexity of working in a multicultural setting.

(Interview # 2, p. 2, line 38-42)

Yes, there are very complex community issues that immigrants face and this is an immigrant experience. This is not related to a particular community and this is something that we need to be very clear about… Immigrants have very unique challenges.

Others spoke of language barriers, differences in parenting styles and expectations, and difficulties in navigating the Ontario school system.

(Interview # 1, p. 23, line 323-326)

Another problem is the way that children are disciplined at home. Sometimes there’s a conflict there. But we’ve gotten quite good at handling those situations now.

(Interview #4, p. 5, line 41-45)

There are also some factions where families and children are coming from a much less democratic society, I would say, and their culture may be one of … being very physically aggressive with one another and as a result, they are constantly coming into conflict.

It was also pointed out that within communities what may appear at first glance as similarities, actually are cultural differences and this increases the complexity of dealing with a diverse community in one school or one classroom.
Well, colour wise, the children all look brown. But they are not all the same culture. Because Iranians, Shias are totally different from Iraqis vs. people from India. But when you look at them, they all look the same. So the general perception is, they are all South Asians. They must all be Muslims, but they are not. There are brown people who are Christians. So when you look this sea of people, they may all look the same, but they are very different. So it takes a lot of skill and expertise to deal with all these different cultures.

Not all problems arise from cultural or socio-economic differences due to individual immigrant experience; many current new Canadians face complex mental health problems than are difficult to discuss openly.

Many of them [new Canadian males] feel isolated. These are not issues that they feel comfortable addressing outside the home. This is a very big immigrant issue. It boils down to a loss of identity, loss of standing in the community, loss of face, that’s how they explain it. They have lost their identity within their family, within their extended family. They don’t feel… self-esteem is a huge issue. It is an enormous issue... Then there is tension in the family. That tension affects every single person in that family. And it affects their mental health. So it will affect the child’s work at school.

As Villegas and Lucas (2007) point out, successfully teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds involves more than just applying specialized teaching techniques. It demands a new way of looking at these learners.

As Coelho (2004) reminds us, in choosing a new country, emigrants are influenced by many factors. These include the scale of the country’s immigration program; its record
as a place of safety, tolerance, and peace; the availability of educational and career opportunities; and its reputation for promoting social, political, and religious freedom. She goes on to point out that new immigrants progress through a number of stages in adjusting to their new country. Stage 1 is arrival and new impressions (p. 43). During this stage, immigrants may experience feelings of adventure, optimism, and even euphoria. Stage 2 is culture shock (p. 45). As newcomers begin to identify intimidating, distasteful, or strange aspects of their new environment, they may experience feelings of discomfort, dislocation, and alienation. Students’ feelings may fluctuate between feelings of curiosity and adventure and feelings of sadness, loss, and despair. During this stage, individual members of the community or family may react differently. Some may feel a sense of loss so intense that they are overwhelmed by pessimism and withdraw or act out. Teachers must be alert to these signs and prepared to give these students special consideration.

All Children Can Learn Given Time and the Right Support

The respondents felt this strongly. Principals who see students from an affirming perspective and truly respect cultural differences are more apt to believe that students from non-dominant groups are capable learners even when these students enter school with ways of thinking, talking, and behaving that differ from the dominant cultural norms. This in turn will convey the confidence to the students to deal with an intellectually rigorous curriculum, setting high performance standards and consistently holding students accountable to those standards. These administrators will insist that teachers build on the individual and cultural resources that students bring to school.
My core, my core belief, in terms of student learning is that all kids can learn given the right time, the right resources, um, and the right level of support. All kids … all kids can learn. So it’s sending that message out in the things that we do each and every day that clearly … sends out the message that we are taking time to speak with kids, its taking time to read with kids, to write with kids. It’s taking time to be engaged with kids.

There is a moral imperative to provide an education which will support all children to become contributing members of society. To meet this obligation teachers and administrators need to serve as advocates for their students, especially those who have been traditionally marginalized in schools.

We are responsible for every single one of our kids and it’s not these are the strong kids and those are the ESL kids and these are the Special Education kids. They are all our kids and you know we have to teach all of them and we are responsible and accountable to do that. I think that this is an increasingly strong belief that I have; that it is not someone else’s responsibility. We are a team, the teachers here together with the administration at this school and we are here to look after everybody… And we are the ones who create those conditions for learning.

Well to me, public education is the great leveller … But in order to do that, we have to teach all children to read and we have to teach all children to numerate otherwise they have no opportunity to contribute to society.
The Mandate of the Principal Is to Improve Student Learning

All respondents felt this was their prime purpose.

(Interview #2, p. 6 line 77-80)

My role as an administrator, is as a catalyst, a supporter, to be there and ultimately, I think my role is to support every single kid in this building.

(Interview #7, p.8, line 137-144)

The focus definitely has to be on student learning. That’s our business, that’s the business we’re in. … and it’s remembering that everything we do is to support student learning. Lots of times, administrators get hung up on the operational things, they get snowed under with paper work and they forget or they have to come to the realization that it’s all about student learning.

Fullan (2003) would suggest that this is the moral imperative of public education and public school leaders. Publicly funded schools must serve the needs of all learners and not just those children with the loudest or most powerful advocates. Fullan (2003) goes on to say that this means addressing the cognitive and social needs of all children. With an increasingly diverse society, there must be an emphasis on including those who may not have been well served in the past. There must be academic achievement and personal and social development as core purposes in the public education system in order to sustain a democratic society.

Some agreed that in order to improve student learning, they examine teachers’ practice.
Well, I think that I am a transformational leader. I am very conscious of being here to make a difference with the staff which in turn makes the difference for the kids.

I think that yes, it is our role to support improved student learning and improved achievement through, ah, whatever means necessary. Through looking at teacher practice, through looking at, ah, what our students are bringing everyday from their real lives.

There is also the social responsibility of the principal in supporting improved student learning to build community capacity.

That is absolutely what we get paid for, you know. We have the responsibility to ensure that children are improving in their learning and that they are at a stage or state in which we believe they are ready or prepared to go on to the next level of their learning… and ultimately, prepared to contribute to society.

So, I keep thinking about the Quest Conference and community and how do we build communities and how do we develop partnerships. So the bottom line is that I am here for every kid, to improve their learning… and what we’re really looking at when we talk about improved learning, we are really talking about literacy. So we have a major focus on literacy… I think what we’re doing is that we are looking at each situation and saying are our safety nets catching all the students who come in.
In a Diverse Community, the Principal Must Work to Build Capacity

These administrators felt strongly that in leading their diverse communities, they worked hard to build capacity in the total school community.

(Interview #8, p. 10, line 179-189)

If you look at some raw data and …, it says that the ELL kids are really failing at a much higher rate than non-ELL kids, then you have to say okay what we’re doing is not good enough. We have to do something differently and that’s when I’d have a scrum and sitting down and saying okay if this is what we’re doing and it’s not working as well as we’d like, what are all the ideas that we can come up with. And one part would be parents involved in the child’s learning. But those parents have to have tools and skills. So what I’ll do is build partnerships in order to do that.

(Interview #4, p. 30, line 601-605)

Yes, definitely, the work is different with respect to the community. Specifically, it’s working with the parents. It’s a different kind of work in a multicultural community, you are constantly having to anticipate things or arrange things that are different or additional opportunities for parents to build community capacity.

All spoke of putting programs in place to support the needs of the families and build community capacity.

(Interview #7, p. 17, line 316-333)

I mean it’s part of knowing your students and what you need to do in reaching out to them. And also reaching out to their families. So for instance, this year we’ve brought the FAST program in, Families and Schools Together. We run it every Wednesday night for 6 weeks. We bring in 7-10 families, we eat with them and then we have a series of activities that we do. We also have
Literacy Night in October. Our kindergarten teachers put that together on how parents can support their kids at home through reading. We are also in the process of bringing in next week, Healthy Schools, Healthy Kids programs which is a snack program that talks about healthy snack alternatives… We’re also starting a breakfast program.

(Interview #6, p. 3, line 43-53)

We have also started a grandparents or outreach programs for our East Indian women. We found that a lot of the women were not allowed out of their homes so we offered them school assistant positions. We also started training a number of ladies to work in the office. We had them come in as volunteers and we have managed, at this point in time, to move almost three ladies back into their careers. One is a doctor, one is a teacher, and a couple are now working as secretaries.

(Interview #5, p. 9, line 174-178)

We had 24 kids who came to Early Years last year at the school. Those 24 kids and more did School is Cool and Stay and Play last summer. This had never had any summer school. Last summer we had summer school programs, ESL, and pre-kindergarten.

Respondents believe that all aspects of the school and all school personnel should be supportive of new Canadians and help them to feel welcome.

(Interview #2, p. 7, line 94-97)

I think that there will be challenges; there has to be a sensitivity to them [parents] and … appreciation of who they are because they are your partners and we’re trying to build relationships with them… Always remember that your community has a lot to share. Be welcoming to them when they come in. Have a smile on your face. And know that when you welcome them, you welcome their children. Multilingual or bilingual school personnel help.
As well, our secretary speaks Cantonese and Mandarin. She is a wonderful asset because if we need to support them, and we have parents who don’t understand then the secretary is able to get on the phone and invite the parents in, and she'll sit in on parent interviews as well.

One administrator summed it up by warning:

The fact is that we are not dispensable and we are not going to be with that child for the rest of their lives. So we have to build support systems for when we are gone. It can't just be you and it can't just be the classroom, it has to be the whole community.

Summary

The principals who participated in the research held common shared beliefs. These core beliefs of seeing diversity as a strength, of believing that all children can learn given the time and right support, and the mandate of the principal is to improve student learning seemed to cross through the sample population and was not dependent on gender, years of experience, or size of the school.
Distributed Leadership

All the principals interviewed described their style of leadership as distributive. They used different words to reference this style but their examples illustrated a sharing of leadership responsibilities and building capacity in their school community.

(Interview #1, p. 25, line 335-343)

My style … is distributive. There is just no doubt about that. You just can’t do it all by yourself. Absolutely not. And having said that… you need to look and find people with strength. You need to value people and the teachers, and value them for their different strengths. I find that, you know, they will give back a hundred percent.

(Interview #3, p. 8, line 149-155)

What might normally be the administrative piece has been broken down into different teams and has really filtered down throughout the school so that there is buy in at every level and people know the struggles and difficulties of doing things like timetabling, for instance… so definitely, a team and very collaborative approach.

(Interview #5, p. 11, line 222-230)

My style is definitely shared leadership… But I truly, honestly, seek out people who have strength instead of battling with others … and those people take on responsibility and then they make up their own committee, they will then involve those other teachers. And as you know, it goes a long way when the teachers say “I want to do this”.

Chapter Six:
Leadership Practices

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I would say that my style is definitely in the shared leadership role. … I don’t know it all and no one ever will. And the needs in our school are so great that I think it would be impossible for any one person to do it all. Hence, my leadership style is to engage the leadership team in doing what they can and as much as they can to move the school forward. … hence the better they work as a team, the better I, … the better I am able to move the school forward.

In a recent article, Alma Harris (2005) defines distributed leadership as engaging many people in leadership activities. This idea of leadership highlights the interdependence of the individual and the environment. Distributed leadership implies that the practice of leadership is one that is shared, and realized within extended groupings and networks. Harris (2005) goes on to say that some of these groupings will be formal, while others will be informal. Where teachers, parents, students, and administration work together to solve problems, they are engaged in leadership practice.

Principals spoke about how teachers in the school shared the leadership responsibilities and helped to build capacity. Harris (2005) speaks specifically about this. She maintains that a distributed perspective on leadership moves away from concentrating on those in formal leadership positions to consider those leadership practices that occur daily through informal interactions and collaboration in order to build capacity within the school.

I would say that one of our key teachers would be our literacy teacher… there’s no doubt about that because she does a lot of modelling, coaching,
and mentoring and the demonstrations. She takes classes or covers classes for teachers who are doing ... planning together and those kinds of things. This has probably been the most powerful influence in terms of changing our strategies and methods because of her involvement.

(Interview #7, p. 9, line 174-176)

Our ESL teacher supports classroom teachers by sharing instructional strategies.

(Interview #3, p. 15, line 307-312)

The literacy teacher, as well as, all the ESL teachers, are sitting on the literacy team, and they meet as a learning community on their own but they also work with the learning communities established within their division. So their voice is heard in regards to the ‘at-risk’ children.

Principals also spoke of how they include the community in the distributed leadership model, although this was not common to all the principals.

(Interview #5, p. 6, line 111-118)

We made two parents our community ambassadors so when these twenty parents come, most of the time it’s our two ambassadors who are talking to these parents and taking them around the school and telling them about our fire regulations and fire drill procedures and the safe schools policy and volunteer screening and all that which, at first, our teachers were doing. Now, our parent ambassadors are doing it. So, in my opinion, this is like distributed leadership.

(Interview #3, p. 21, line 438-442)

In this regard, I make sure, as much as possible, to touch base with key people in the community. One of the things that we have done this year, is to
identify, through a questionnaire, people who would see themselves as Friends of [school]. And we get feedback and advice from these key people.

Ryan (2003) feels that in order for schools to significantly impact on student learning, they must draw in the community in order for their voice to be heard. He advocates that schools must go further than just distributing leadership, but actually orchestrating conditions to alter unjust practices. This is best addressed through critical approaches to leadership which generally emphasize inclusion. Emancipatory leadership includes those who would not normally be included. Corson (2002) acknowledges the complexity of leadership in diverse sociocultural situations and the need to seek out and utilize the expertise of the community and include marginalized groups in the decision-making circle since the dominant group may not adequately represent their interests. Corson also cites the importance for leaders to restrict their own power and allow for debates and democratic decision making.

**Strategic Leadership**

The other common theme from principals was that they were very strategic in decisions that they made so as to improve the learning of all students but also addressing the needs of the ELL students. These strategic decisions took many forms.

**Principals articulate a clear vision.**

All the principals felt strongly that they needed to continually articulate a clear vision for the school and infuse it into all aspects of school life.
(Interview #1, p. 24, line 328-334)

So you have to start by having people going in the same direction. If you don’t have a vision, then, um, you’re not going to have people follow. You have to be clear and you have to talk about it and you have to train the lead teachers to talk about it. You see it’s a cycle. It’s over and over.

(Interview #8, p.6, line 105-109)

So I guess what I do in essence is like the steady rain, similar to parenting. It’s the same message over and over and over again. And when you think that people are tired of hearing it, then you present it in a different way.

(Interview # 4, p. 16, line 36-325)

I tend to be naturally very focused. So if I have in my mind that I want something to happen, then I am very clear about what I want to have happen and how I am going to get there, the steps I mean. And I think that I am reasonably good at translating that to other people. So, I think that that is a strength because what the literature clearly indicates is that that is one of the things that has to happen for school improvement. You have to be clear about where it is that you are going and the steps to get there. And then you have to keep communicating that.

Principals went on to say that through the articulation of the vision, it enabled them to help move staff members forward in their professional practice.

(Interview #4, p. 7, line 141-145)

I think that professional learning communities put a certain kind of pressure on teachers who for years have been recalcitrant not moving forward because now they are not part of a group any longer. They stand out even more because they are not part of the PLT [professional learning team] and supporting the school vision.
(Interview #1, p.3, line 46-51)

So it’s that whole Fullan change management, support and yet nudging people forward. Ah, I think when I can, when I can move people to a sense of disturbance, that’s when I think that I am doing a really good job. That means that they are becoming more reflective in their practice.

(Interview #8, p. 5, line 74-83)

I feel my greatest strength as a leader is my ability to simplify things, to make things reachable and attainable. So that every teacher, every educator in this school building, basically has a strong understanding of where we’re going and what we stand for as a school community, as an educational community. I think that is really important because that’s not on a bulletin board, it’s not on a piece of paper, it’s not in a school plan. It’s basically in the minds of the teachers and educators to know exactly what we’re doing and how they are supporting that in their classroom practice. So there is no mystery.

**Principals use the school plan to guide decision-making based on data analysis.**

Principals spoke of how they use the school plan to guide their work and to give the school direction. The school plan is informed by the leadership team looking at the data and making decisions based on that data in order to improve student learning.

(Interview #4, p. 19, line 373-391)

Well, we did… a kind of data analysis and found out what the gaps were, what the areas of need were and for us it was word knowledge, vocabulary knowledge, and comprehension, and of the three EQAO subjects that were tapped, reading was the one that was taking the biggest dive. And so we decided to focus on reading as part of the school plan; not language in general but reading in particular and focusing more specifically on comprehension and word knowledge. And so, the way we went about that
was school-wide at staff meetings, um, making sure that everyone knew what balanced language programming looked like. Then we kept narrowing the focus. So then we looked at reading; then we looked at reading comprehension specifically. Then we looked at what were the nine comprehension strategies and now are twelve. And so every staff meeting, we introduced a new one what it looks like, um, then get people using them [strategies] in their classrooms and then we demonstrate.

(Interview #1, p. 13, line 211-217)

Well… I have hired all new lead teachers that have strong literacy backgrounds and that was a criteria. Then it goes back to the school plan, everything flows back to the government, the board, the school plan and that way you put people in positions that will support working on what your priorities are.

**Principals work to build an inclusive school culture.**

Principals felt strongly that their schools were working to become inclusive so that all members felt a sense of belonging.

(Interview #8, p. 2, line 24-32)

Well, we do some very basic things like… that I think are very important like ensure that our curriculum and our teaching strategies are inclusive in terms of ensuring that there is representation of all backgrounds and heritages, as well as the history of Canada and the importance of knowing the country that they are living in and the cultural values of that country. At the same time we also do things that are fun to do and that is celebrate the backgrounds of other people and other countries within the world.
Well, we are a Tribes-trained school. And I like teachers to be using instructional intelligence because kids can not all learn in the same way. And all these kids have come from varied backgrounds and varied experiences. Some of them have had some schooling, some of them have had no schooling. If you don’t put them altogether with other students to discuss things, how are they going to learn? When are they going to get a chance?

Principals hire strong teachers.

One of the main areas in which administrators felt that they could affect the greatest change and impact positively on student achievement was through hiring strong teachers. Principals were clear about their criteria for what constituted a strong teacher in a diverse community.

I am looking for someone first and foremost who understands what balanced literacy is all about. They can describe to me what a classroom looks like where that is happening. Then, I also have through experience certain look-fors that I am looking for. What do they say about guided reading? Can they differentiate the curriculum i.e. do they know that guided reading need to happen everyday for the kids who are ‘at-risk’ and less often for kids who are capable? Do they know that guided reading is different from round –robin reading? Do they know what kinds of questions to put in kids minds for them to reflect about a particular book? So, I’m looking for what they know about literacy.

A few of the principals also spoke about hiring candidates that were reflective of the school community. However, the first priority was hiring the strongest candidate.
Well, I feel hiring well means hiring the best possible candidate for the position. And to me, the best possible candidate means somebody who has the skills that are valued, have been proven to effect improvement. If that person is also representative of the school population, the diversity in the school than that is a huge bonus.

**Principals support professional growth of staff.**

Some administrators involved in the research articulated the connection between improved teacher practice and increased student learning.

I mean that’s why we are here… certainly when you put everything together with what we’ve done here … we’ve definitely improved student learning but we’ve done it because of improved teacher performance.

My role as an administrator is to keep that team engaged … and to keep those conversations going. So when we meet as a leadership team, the focus is… the focus remains on what we can do to support teachers, so that they in turn can support kids learning.

As a result, all principals spent considerable time and energy organizing professional development opportunities for the staff. This support for professional development was evident in many different forms i.e. purchasing of professional resources; in-servicing of teachers through modeling and demonstrations of effective practices in classrooms.
(Interview #6, p. 14, line 259-267)

Every teacher on staff, I convince school council to pay 50% for any type of professional book… like Gay Su Pinnell, any book that can help them. I pay for First Steps Writing and Second Steps training. I will pay 50% for Tribes training. I will do what it takes to train the staff… So every teacher here is an ESL teacher. I have taught ESL myself. Every teacher here should be able to teach every child that is put in front of them.

(Interview #1, p. 19, line 232-238)

So I bought the books for them, so I will support them and meet them half way… sort of on a 50/50 basis… I will do that for each teacher over a period of time in the school… and it will all be tied in with our school plan.

(Interview #2, p. 6, line 112-120)

So I said yes, that I would buy the books. I think that will be an incentive for them as well. So we’re saying that this leads into teacher practice. How do we make sure that we are doing the best possible job. I believe, um, the literacy teacher talked about the book *Strategies That Work* and said how wonderful it is. It really is something that every teacher can use. So people are getting excited about it.

Principals spoke of in-servicing opportunities for teachers.

(Interview #4, p. 6, line 120-122)

Teachers have lots of opportunities to attend PD sessions, lots of opportunities to practice new things that they have learned.
We use division meetings for planning, for disseminating information… they’re used for doing book studies, and getting the latest information out there to people.

The other thing is that we have done a lot of inservice with classroom teachers about language development. So now the classroom teachers are becoming ELL teachers. I would say that that is having the greatest impact.

Principals used various methods to support teacher learning such as modeling and demonstration.

Our lead teachers do modelling for the teachers. ESL is the same… and the same thing for Special Education.

And so they [teachers] are doing demonstrations for their peers around that and because they would be looking through some literature or something they might find, um, they might say, oh hey, here’s a way of doing this and then they would share it.

**Principals support the school staff.**

Principals spoke of supporting the staff in other ways, other than through professional development. Examples given were around creating a positive and supportive school climate which fostered staff motivation. This was achieved through direct interaction with the staff or supporting through the purchase of materials and resources.
So if you do your celebrations, you do your positives and you do all these different things as well as supporting them in the PD… so you go into classrooms and you take an interest. When I say that they are valued, you go into classrooms whether you’re evaluating or not and you make comments about the really good things that they do… and you comment on the right things. And the staff feels good.

I visit the classrooms, the kids know who I am. So I am very visible and I think that is very important. Staff know that they can come and talk to me. I will support them.

It’s important as an administrator to engage with teachers in ongoing conversations about how kids are learning. And what we can do together to help them learn more and learn better. …what has made us successful here is that a lot of these types of supportive conversations happen throughout the day. … and this has become part of our school culture.

Principals also supported staff through the purchase of teaching materials.

Part of my vision is to spend money in those areas where we need it. So for example, investing money in literacy resources in the book room that target kids with high needs.

Principals also mentioned supporting teachers by developing programs that support students and therefore translate into improved student learning.
We have a lot of really good, ah, programs here. We do the family reading program, like you know, when you look at it, yes it is focused on student learning… absolutely, ah, all the different programs, the readiness programs for the kindergartens, the School’s Cool program to get ready for kindergarten; by the family groupings that we do in grade one and two… all the special education support, the reading recovery program…it’s all important.

Principals all mentioned how they cultivated a culture of respect in their schools.

Part of our school culture is that people are valued and their knowledge is valued and they are given credit.

I think when you know who your players are then it is easier to know how far you can push them and what to say to motivate them but not in a manoeuvring way but in a very respectful way because there is not one teacher in this building that I would not stand behind as a really solid educator.

And as one administrator sums it up,

So definitely we are here to improve student learning… that is our main purpose. But we need all these other components, we need that. You need people to feel valued and to feel good. If you don’t have that, you can just forget the other.
Principals strategically place people to support student learning.

The principals spoke of how they place key people strategically in the school in order to support student learning.

(Interview #1, p. 36, line 564-569)

Well, as I said, you can’t do it all by yourself. So you have to have very knowledgeable people in those key areas that have good people skills. All of those key positions require people skills as well as organizational skills and all of them are language specialists in that area.

(Interview #7, p. 9, line 169-176)

So our SERT [Special Education Resource Teacher] team, our ESL team, our Reading Recovery team supported students but also supported staff by sharing strategies. And, ah, our ESL teacher is strategically positioned location-wise to be next to the reading recovery teacher, ah, and literacy lead. Our ESL teacher is also halftime reading recovery, so we have even married those two areas to form one.

We strategically position our key teachers in certain parts of the building so that they are accessible by other teachers.

(Interview # 5, p. 21, line 431-434)

These key teachers are my eyes and my ears in promoting literacy and promoting ESL programs and promoting all the other stuff that goes on in the school.

Principals also shared how these key people support teachers by sharing strategies in order to improve teaching practice.
The support team, the special education resource teacher, the ESL teacher, the reading recovery teachers, the divisional leads, they are seen as curriculum leaders. They are seen in terms of their segregated role but as curriculum leaders, what can we do to help kids learn better.

The primary ESL teacher is part of the grade one fluid guided reading groups when all the children are divided amongst all of the teachers. So she is really a key piece in that because she will pull the identified and those who are peripheral ESL students and helps out with that with regards to the guided reading and other strategies.

**Principals use school organization to support student learning.**

Principals not only used key people to support student learning, but also used school infrastructures such as timetables, planning time, and teacher evaluations to enhance student achievement.

I also timetable so we have common planning time with grade groups.

Yes, exactly, through the timetable. So that’s another piece. Out of the four SERTs, there were two in intermediate but the bulk of our at-risk students are between Grades 3-6 and therefore that was inequitable. So this year when we did the timetable what we did was have just one SERT with the intermediate students. The bulk of the SERT and ESL timetabling was given to the Grades 4-6 because between these grades we have 37% that are failing.
We’ve given each of them lots of time in the timetable and I know that we’re hearing nothing but positive results coming out of that.

Principals spoke of innovative ways in which they use the timetable to support student learning.

Every other week, there is a PLT [professional learning team] meeting of either primary or the junior because we do reading buddies and when the reading buddies are taking place, um, one week the junior teachers would be supervising the kids and the next week, ah, and the primary teachers would be meeting and then the next week, it reverses so that there is professional learning going on with the teachers. Well, what does that look like, well it looks like the teachers meeting and talking about the kids at-risk, looking at the data, looking at what strategies they will use with the kids at-risk, looking at the literacy board, seeing how many kids they can move forward, what strategies have been successful.

Another thing that we have done is that we have started to give planning time outside the regular prep time. So we build it into… we do this within the bells, so we’ve set up grade planning times where each week we’ll meet with one grade team and the literacy teacher and the ESL and special education teachers and we have one of our SERTs cover off the other classes so that the teachers can come out.

Principals also shared that all teachers are responsible for the progress of all students.
We divide all the kids into the different groups which makes a huge
difference. Then we can actually teach them as a group... the ESL would
probably be in the lower group for language to begin with but we have gotten
really good success and we are able to cover groups of ten or twelve all at
one time. So you get a larger number that you are servicing.

Other principals spoke of how they use the structure of the teacher performance
appraisal to address the needs of the English language learners.

I also ask them when I’m doing the TPA [Teacher Performance Appraisal], it’s
difficult to keep your hands with everybody but I’m doing it with the TPA. My
first question is how are you accommodating your students? Are you handing
the same test to your whole class, your special education and your ESL
students? What are you doing differently for these kids?

**Principals communicate with all stakeholders.**

Principals in diverse communities spoke of the need to communicate with all
stakeholders even if language was a barrier.

They [teachers] have to be able to communicate, ah, use the agendas... we
have agendas from Grade one up. They write notes in the agendas; they do
monthly newsletters; they do team planning; they send out the same letters
so that everybody is on the same page. ... a lot of that comes from the people
I’ve hired. ... it’s driven by a lot of the teachers but really it’s good practice to
do this.
I demand that the staff makes sunshine calls and do interim report cards and contact parents, regardless of whether they speak English or not. They’re [teachers are] going to have to find a way to connect.

Through questionnaires we asked the parents what have been your experiences of the school system; what do you want to know from us; and try and build that sort of thing.

One administrator mentioned an innovative approach to communicating with the family.

We have them [teachers] going into the homes of the junior kindergarten students and the others who are not at level one in reading yet and they model for the parents and they give them books for the children to read. It’s really huge… it’s made a huge, huge difference.

**Principals remain current in their professional knowledge.**

It has been well-documented in most areas of leadership, that the most effective leaders, whether in education or business, remain current in their knowledge through professional dialogue, reading, or participating in professional learning through conferences. The principals in this research all mentioned that they engage in similar activities.

I listen a lot… and I ask questions. I go to workshops but I don’t go to every workshop. I take a focus and I go to those because that’s the focus.
(Interview #2, p. 20, line 413-416)

I certainly try to find any material that is going to help me, so for instance in our administrator’s group we’re getting articles to read and that helps me to stay current.

(Interview #4, p. 3, line 616-624)

I’ve always read professional books. So right now I have four going. I read journals when I have an opportunity, educational journals… I also attend PD sessions that I feel will meet my needs. And I have always taken courses up until recently. The other thing I find very exciting is the advent of PLTs [professional learning teams] and being in PLTs with other administrators is very exciting.

Without exception, principals participating in the research mentioned that they remain current in their professional knowledge in a variety of ways, whether through work with their staff, other administrators in professional learning teams, professional reading and book studies or through attendance at workshops and conferences.

**Challenges in leadership in a diverse school community.**

Even though the principals involved in the study were very positive about leading a diverse school community, there were some challenges that were particular to this setting. Some of the areas mentioned were amount of time and support needed to ensure that families understood various aspects of the school system; differences in discipline practices; and lastly, cultural differences i.e. roles of men and women.
Time and support needed.

Every year thousands of people immigrate to Canada from many different countries. Most often, the countries of origin speak another language other than English. As a result, the children from the newly arrived families may need some level of English language support. Most English language learners need a program of language instruction as well as support in adjusting to a new cultural environment and school system (Coelho, 2004). However, the support does not stop there. Families are also entering a new linguistic and cultural community when they arrive.

Principals involved in the research spoke about this very concern and challenge. They mentioned that much time and support is needed to help new families adjust to the Ontario school system. Support is needed for translation services both written and oral because forms may need to be signed and documents shared. Depending on the age of the child when entering the school, transition to high school may need to be supported by a community worker. Often times, the principals mentioned that additional time is needed to help new families fully understand the high school course selection process. On the other end of the school spectrum, sometimes youngsters enter kindergarten with special needs that have not been identified. Again, time and support is needed to help families understand the process of getting their youngster help and proper care. Principals mentioned that often times this becomes their responsibility due to the time involved.

As mentioned earlier in the thesis, often immigrant communities struggle with poverty issues having accepted entry level positions in order to establish themselves in their new communities (United Way, Poverty by Postal Code, 2002). As a result, many schools offer support programs for new families i.e. FAST program. This is an after hours
evening program to help build capacity within a given community. Once a week twenty families meet to share a meal and an activity to help build a sense of community. The expectation is that the principal is part of the evening celebration. Once again, this requires additional time on the part of the principal outside the regular school day.

**Differences in discipline practices.**

Some of the principals mentioned challenges in dealing with different discipline styles of new families. At times, there was conflict between the school and the home as a result of these different discipline styles and an outside agency needed to be called to help resolve the issue. This created some tension between the home and school and at times, resulted in a mistrust of the school.

**Cultural differences.**

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of working in a diverse community, according to the principals, is negotiating the cultural differences of each group. Often times, they explain, the roles of men and women differ and responsibility of schooling may rest with one. Sometimes, they point out, it is actually the grandfathers who are making the decisions about schooling but they themselves may not be fully informed about the choices. The principals go on to explain that there are subtle differences within the family with regards to the education of boys and girls and this sometimes creates difficulties with the school.

Ryan (2003) mentions this very issue in his research. He speaks about how many principals in diverse communities were “flying by the seat of their pants”. The principals often knew little about some of the groups that they encountered and had to scramble to
acquire information that they needed to make good decisions. Principals often knew little about gender-related values or privacy concerns of certain groups. Unfortunately, Ryan found that there were few places that principals could turn for support and inspiration. This appears to be similar for the principals involved in the current research.

The principals spoke about the fact that they could have been better prepared for their diverse school community by participating in some in-service or cultural training prior to being placed in the school.

**Summary**

Principals within the research exhibited a distributed leadership style which translated as a sharing of leadership responsibilities and building capacity in their school community. Coupled with this was the very strategic way in which the principal made decisions in order to impact positively on student achievement. The first and foremost decision was articulating a clear vision. From this vision, the principal made decisions about hiring of teachers; placement of teachers; and the professional growth of the staff. Principals also used the school plan to guide their actions in order to improve student learning. Principals spoke about their own professional learning in order to remain current and knowledgeable.

However, principals also spoke of the challenges in leading a diverse school community. These included supporting families in acclimatizing to the Ontario school system; managing differences in discipline; and understanding cultural differences of the many families within the community.
Within Chapter Seven, principals speak more about the challenges of working within a diverse community from a professional point of view.
Chapter Seven:
Principals’ Focus Group Feedback

This chapter shares the feedback from the principals’ focus groups that met to discuss the findings of the research. Two different meetings were held so as to accommodate the participants’ schedules but feedback from each group was shared with the other participants.

An emerging data-base suggests that the school principal is critical in ensuring academic achievement for all students but especially for students from ethnically diverse backgrounds. During the principals’ focus group sessions, participants identified areas that were seen as problematic to their commonly held mandate of improving student achievement with respect to ELL student achievement.

Need for Clear Direction Regarding ELL Students

The principals agreed that there is some direction, both from the school district and the Ministry of Education regarding the needs of the ELL in the school. However, they felt quite strongly that the direction was not clear. Both the Ministry and the school district offered no concrete framework within which to work. The principals felt that this ambiguity heightened anxiety and frustration in dealing with the ELL student.

Principals felt that the best direction came from the curriculum department of the school district who interpreted the Ministry direction and in turn recommended appropriate resources and programming suggestions/ideas. Principals felt continued frustration as they struggled to meet the complex needs of the ELL student. One principal said during the focus group session,
“The more I hear, the more I realize that we are not doing enough. I feel more uncomfortable than ever in dealing with ELL students. The issues are so complex and complicated. I feel I only have a superficial knowledge.”

Principals spoke of heightened anxiety in trying to address these complex needs and not being able to move the students along at the pace suggested by the Ministry. The Ministry only provides funding for three years of ESL support.

Principals also experienced frustration with other unrealistic expectations from the Ministry. Implementation of curriculum documents was mentioned. Principals felt that there was very little turn around time to review and implement newly released documents. This sentiment is supported by a recent survey of Ontario administrators by the Ontario Principals’ Council in which the number one frustration which contributed to job dissatisfaction was the inadequacy of time to plan and implement provincially -mandated changes. Also, timelines for the application of grant money were unrealistically short and principals felt that the very communities that needed the monetary support were unable to meet the deadlines for various reasons. This was of particular note in the School Council’s Reaching Out Grant initiative by the Ministry.

Generally, principals felt that there were many additional considerations in dealing with a diverse community. Language posed a significant challenge and was often a barrier to full communication with a family or community. Translation services added another layer to an already full plate of principal responsibilities. Unseen poverty is also a reality in a high immigrant community and with this comes issues of nutrition and child welfare. Many schools involved in the research were addressing these concerns through breakfast/snack programs; clothing exchanges; drop-in centres; parenting programs/supports; and working
closely with community support agencies such as child mental health services. However, nowhere does the school district or the Ministry mention these concerns and possible solutions to support families and communities. Again, these frustrations were mentioned in the recent survey of Ontario principals as contributing to job dissatisfaction and frustration.

**Parental Engagement**

Educators around the globe are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of building community capacity as a means of enhancing student learning. Building family and community capacity in support of improved and sustained student achievement is grounded first in the belief that meaningful and purposeful relationships will promote a shared understanding and commitment to common goals and priorities and secondly in the belief that giving families the tools and skills to support their children’s academic development, they will work with the school to support such activities as homework, projects, home reading, and test preparation.

This is an area of considerable frustration for principals in diverse communities. Although the principals had mentioned that a mandate for leading a diverse community was to build capacity, the principals felt that much of this work was beyond their scope of expertise. The school district and the Ministry of Education are encouraging principals to engage their community so as to build community capacity and a sense of ownership and investment in their children’s education. According to the principals, however, this often falls onto the shoulders of school personnel, either the principal or teachers. In very few of the diverse communities were the parents taking the responsibility or ownership of the various community projects. A number of reasons may be suggested i.e. possible lack of
commitment on the part of the families/communities because they do not see the relevance to their children’s academic development; a cultural view that it is the school's job to educate children and therefore the school knows best and families should not interfere; or a lack of consultation and by-in on the part of the community for the particular project. Another source of frustration is the lack of clear understanding of what meaningful parental engagement looks like. Many of the diverse communities had a wide array of programs running to support the parents but it was difficult to say whether or not these programs were impacting positively on student achievement. Principals spoke of being unprepared for doing this type of work. As one principal said,

“We must now support the whole family with issues such as poverty, mental health, nutrition. That is a totally different job. It is more of a social work focus and I am not trained or skilled in that area.”

The principals felt that their role was becoming more and more ambiguous and broad. They heard very clearly that the Ministry and the school district wanted improved results in literacy as evidenced by the target-setting, data monitoring and data collecting throughout the school year. Now they were also hearing that schools were to engage parent communities and build community capacity. As one principal said,

“Does the school district and the Ministry want us to focus on student achievement and do a really good job of that or do a totally different job in the broadest educational sense and engage parents? I don’t know that we have time to do both. There are just not enough hours in the day.”

Principals shared that the working environment has become much more unionized and they could not necessarily ask or expect that teachers were going to pick up the extra
workload necessitated by evening or after hours sessions for parents/community engagement activities.

**Qualifications of Teachers**

Often ELL students come to the school with great challenges ahead of them. Not only are they learning a new language but also trying to cope with the rigors of the Ontario curriculum. There were three aspects to this concern.

**Professional development of classroom teachers.**

Principals spoke of the need for teachers to be highly skilled in order to address the needs of these learners. Teachers need intensive training in what appropriate accommodations look like in the classroom. There is a particular need in the higher grades when ELL students struggle with the social integration aspect of schooling as well as the academic requirements and high school preparation.

Differentiated instruction was often lacking in the classrooms where ELL students were placed. The principals felt that teachers needed very intensive training in what differentiation of planning, instruction, and assessment looked like for the ELL student in the regular classroom.

**Fair and equitable assessment practices.**

Principals mentioned the need for further training around fair and equitable assessment practices. Most principals mentioned that this was an area for growth in their schools. Furthermore, the increasingly restrictive aspects of the teachers’ collective
agreement made it difficult to find appropriate time for this learning to occur. This created tension and frustration on both sides.

**Lack of qualified ESL teachers.**

Principals spoke of the lack of qualified teachers to take ESL assignments. Often unqualified teachers – those without additional qualifications in ESL - were placed in these challenging roles because qualified teachers could not be found. This was often the case when a qualified teacher went on a leave during the school year.

**Social Workers / Support Personnel in the Schools**

In the principals’ focus group feedback, participants spoke of educating the whole family in a diverse elementary school community and that at times, the children were supporting the parents. The principals mentioned that there were many additional considerations when leading a multicultural school community. Some of these concerns were the unseen poverty; the multi-faceted and complicated needs such as parents being out of the country or working long hours and so children are left unsupervised by a responsible adult; interrupted or lack of schooling for new Canadians from war torn countries due to being displaced and spending time in refugee camps; addressing the needs of the whole child which often include trauma counselling and/or social/emotional concerns; and the need for women’s support services for abuse, isolation, or trauma/mental health issues. The needs of the child and family were very weighty at times and principals felt that they had to work to connect the family with outside support services which often had long waiting lists. At times, language was a barrier because the agency didn’t have multi-lingual support workers causing further frustration.
In a recent article, Fife (2006) speaks to this very issue and supports the principals’ call for social workers in diverse communities to support the complex needs of some families. “Children’s readiness to engage in classroom learning is linked to their mental, emotional, and social well-being. Offering social work services through the education system is an ethical and moral responsibility of school boards and programs should be funded at appropriate levels.” (p.24) Principals go on to make the point that schools have become so focused on academic accountability, tracking and collecting data on student achievement that they have lost sight of the well-being of the whole child. Fife (2006) supports this claim and goes on to ask if the primary mandate of the school system is to deliver academic programs to children and youth then what else is being put at-risk? Fife (2006) goes on to say that educators are failing to recognize their collective work in moulding healthy individuals and good citizens. There is more to schooling than academic achievement.

Principals in the research suggested that a social worker be placed in a cluster of schools to help co-ordinate services for a child/family at-risk. The social worker would bring expertise that educators do not have and act to co-ordinate planning and integration of service delivery which could result in early identification, appropriate assessment and prompt action which would in turn support the child’s full participation in school.

The Waterloo Region District School Board has piloted the FAST Program, which forges connections among families, agencies, and schools on a number of levels (Fife, 2006). In Huron and Renfrew Counties, the Centre for Research and Education in Human Services conducted a comprehensive study which evaluated the School-Based Child Welfare Social Worker Program. Results confirmed that child welfare agencies increased
their effectiveness by working closely with schools, especially when the partnerships focused on collective advocacy for children. In the study, at-risk children and families were identified earlier and were offered more comprehensive services (Fife, 2006). Most importantly, schools were not reacting to crisis scenarios; they were working with community partners proactively towards safer and more successful schools.

**Need for More Support**

Through the focus group sessions, principals mentioned that they needed more support when working with the ELL students. The need expressed took two forms – materials and personnel.

**Materials.**

Principals felt that both the Board and the Ministry needed to provide more materials with which to support the work of the ESL teachers. In particular, the Ministry provided very little in the way of curriculum support for ELL students. Just recently, the Ministry has provided documents to support Kindergarten ELL students.

Principals felt that the school district was doing a fairly good job developing support materials for the ELL student. They felt that the district was supporting teachers and administrators with in-service and networking through meetings, newsletters and the ELL Sharepoint. However, schools felt that they were still struggling at the school level with appropriate materials for ELL students in the content areas, with dual language reading materials, modified curriculum units and appropriate reading materials.
**Personnel.**

Human support was another of the areas that principals mentioned. They felt that they needed more community support personnel to assist with various situations. A suggestion was made that in high needs areas, a group of schools share a community worker who would help with translation and family support matters, parent interviews, and parental/community engagement work.

Much of the work with the community was done by the principal with the help of one or two teachers. In a diverse community, families must be offered many varied opportunities to meet the children’s needs. These activities included such things as preschool programs/services; parenting classes; adult ESL classes; computer technology classes; breakfast clubs; homework clubs; Kindergarten preparation in-services; transition to high school meetings; and women’s support groups. This was all on top of the regular duties of the elementary school principal and the added dimension of translation services when needed.

**Continued Work Regarding Appropriate Assessment Practices**

All the principals involved in the study mentioned that fair and equitable assessment practices would be an area of focus for their schools. In addition to adapting instruction and providing additional support for language acquisition, teachers often need to adapt learning outcomes or expectations. Alternative assessment strategies and evaluation procedures may also be required to enable English language learners to demonstrate their learning. Principals felt that this was an area in which their staff needed further development and in-service and may in fact be disabling ELL students from achieving more positive results.
Accessibility of the Reception Centre

In the GTA school district, there was only one reception centre for a geographically large board. A reception centre is a receiving area at which new comers documents are verified and students are given a language proficiency test to determine their level of English language development. According to principals, often newcomer families could not access the reception due to lack of public transit, lack of familiarity with the area, lack of support for preschool childcare and many other reasons.

The school principals mentioned that there should be satellite centres to support newcomer families in other locations throughout the board. This would alleviate the stress for some families in trying to make their way to the centre. Another suggestion was that funds be made available to the schools to pay for taxi services for needy families.

Flexibility of Principal's Working Day

All the principals mentioned the heavy workload associated with leading a diverse school community. Often the work takes place in the evenings. However, there is an expectation that principals are still in their schools the following day.

The suggestion was made that principals need to have flexibility in their working day to accommodate these concerns. However, many principals were ambivalent because they felt that the parent community still wanted access to the principal throughout the day.

Summary

The principals involved in the research identified areas for further focus in order to improve their work in leading diverse communities. First, all principals felt that there needed
to be clearer direction from the Ministry of Education regarding programming and support for ELL students. Also, principals identified the area of parental engagement as unclear and ambiguous. This was an area of considerable frustration for principals leading diverse school communities because they felt that much of this work was beyond their scope of expertise.

And finally, principals felt that the lack of qualified teachers to address the needs of ELL students was an area of concern and was impacting negatively on student achievement as was the lack of appropriate resources and learning materials.
In the large cities of Canada, public schools now serve a more heterogeneous population than ever before and are under increasing pressure in this climate of accountability to educate a student body that is diverse in terms of race, ethnicity, social class, gender, national origin, mother tongue, sexual orientation, and physical and intellectual ability. Public schools have educated “foreign” students successfully in the past but then numbers were fewer. However, most of the “foreigners” were of European origin where the major difference was one of language. This condition was changing by the mid twentieth century and the change has accelerated in the past twenty years. Thus challenges posed by population diversity are growing. Moreover, while it still is the majority opinion, consensus around the goal of assimilation to a common school experience and core culture has been challenged. In part, the challenge is based on the conviction that race and gender are not inherent or ascribed characteristics but are social constructions; the product of an intricate web of personal and situational factors (Giroux, 1997). Personal identity appears to have much less to do with personal attributes that can easily be counted and categorized and much more to do with the tasks, social relationships, and contexts within which an individual learns, develops, and applies knowledge (Hall, 1990).

In this new environment, the idea that all students should be acculturated to a single way of knowing or behaving is being contested by interest groups and the concept of cultural pluralism is receiving more serious attention as an educational ideal (Appleton, 1983; Baptiste, 1999). Much recent research has focused on educational leadership (Gronn, 1996; Leithwood, 1999) as a means to helping diverse students achieve their
potential. But current research offers no answers as to the culture in which that potential is to be realized. Central to this largely academic controversy is language because language is the vehicle both for teaching and learning.

In the 1970s, a line of inquiry known as “effective schools research” sought to explore the school conditions under which students performed better than their socio-economic background might have predicted. Through this research, guidelines were developed for school improvement. One of the factors identified as contributing to school effectiveness was strong instructional leadership. However, opponents of the effective school movement (Dantley, 1990; Dillard, 1995) have criticized this model for school improvement that does not probe school conditions or leadership qualities which specifically make a difference for today’s schools. Critics of the effective schools research further argue that it actually had the effect of promoting an assimilationist approach to diverse education since it left important dimensions of multicultural contexts unexplored.

The research of Kathleen Cotton (2003) provides a framework which takes into account the contextual considerations of diverse communities. The Ontario Principals’ Council supports the work of Cotton. Leithwood organizes the same parameters in a slightly different way using the measures of setting the direction; developing people; and developing the organization. Cummins’ (1996; 2003, 2007) work has focused on the ELL learner in particular, helping to frame the discussion of leadership strategies that support English language literacy learning of students. Although the findings of this thesis support much of the work by Cotton (2003); the Ontario Principals’ Council (2004); Leithwood (2005); Cummins (1996; 2003; 2007), it also points up major problem areas when dealing with diverse communities and the ELL learner. The research then goes on to suggest future
directions to address the improved academic achievement of these learners at the school level, the Board level, and the Ministry level.

A review of the findings of this research in terms of the improvement measures suggested by the literature is seen in Table 4. This table lists the constructs developed by Cotton (2003); Leithwood (2005); and the Ontario Principals’ Council (2006) and then adds the findings of the research. The research findings add further detail and elaboration for possible future directions for leading a diverse school community.

All the principals involved in the study clearly articulated that they felt the diversity of the school was a strength. Each voiced this opinion for various reasons captured in the data. With this as one of the core beliefs, the principals were committed to supporting the families in their respective communities despite challenges and possible obstacles such as language barriers.

**A Clear Focus on Student Learning**

All the principals involved in the research spoke of setting high expectations for student achievement. They articulated a vision that all students can learn given appropriate time and support. They felt that this would be the same whether they worked in a diverse school community or not. However, the principals had a particular commitment to the ELL learners in supporting their literacy achievement.
### Table 4

**Framework of Findings**

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<td>1. Identifying and articulating a vision: a. embody the best thinking about teaching and learning b. inspire others to reach ambitious goals c. create high performance expectations for all</td>
<td>1. Building a common vision: a. create a sense of moral purpose</td>
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<td>Principals articulate a clear vision for the direction of the school Diversity is seen as a strength: a. students learn from each other b. promotes global awareness c. builds character d. promotes comfort between people e. community values education All students can learn given time and support The mandate of the principal is to improve student learning Future Directions: - raise achievement for all students - close the achievement gap - refine assessment practices - develop a plan for language learning of ELL students</td>
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<td>c. visibility / accessibility</td>
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<td>d. parent / community outreach</td>
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<td>- principal develops culturally sensitive practices</td>
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<td>- increased number of social workers</td>
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<td>- and community liaison workers by school board</td>
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<td>- increased and expanded partnerships with outside agencies to support families</td>
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<td>- principals are visible within the community</td>
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<td>3. School Culture:</td>
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<td>Sources of leadership:</td>
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<td>a. shared leadership and decision-making</td>
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<td>b. collaboration</td>
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<td>3. Empowering others to make significant decisions</td>
<td>3. Build learning Communities:</td>
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<td>Future Directions:</td>
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<td>- community is part of the decision-making process</td>
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<td>Common planning time</td>
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<td>Mentoring/coaching of classroom teachers with ESL teachers</td>
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<td>- involvement/engagement of parents and community</td>
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<td>High expectations for all students</td>
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<td>Professional development</td>
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<td>Monitoring the school plan for continuous improvement</td>
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<td>- validating and honouring many and varied perspectives</td>
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<td>- continued professional development for principals regarding ELL issues</td>
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<td>- clear direction from the Ministry</td>
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<td>4. Instruction / classroom practice:</td>
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<td>Principals strategically place teachers</td>
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<td>a. discussing instructional issues</td>
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<td>Principals use coaching / mentoring model to improve practice</td>
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<td>b. observing classrooms</td>
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<td>Principals place an emphasis on professional development</td>
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<td>c. giving feedback</td>
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<td>Principals use the performance appraisal process to improve practice</td>
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<td>d. protecting instructional time</td>
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<td>- use of varied and appropriate assessment practices</td>
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<td>- use of dual language instruction</td>
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<td>- focus on oral language</td>
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<td>- enhancing principals’ understanding of ELL</td>
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<td>- enhancing teacher knowledge of ELL</td>
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<td>5. Accountability:</td>
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<td>Principals use the school plan for continuous improvement to guide decision making</td>
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<td>a. monitoring student progress</td>
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<td>Principals use organizational structure to support ELL, i.e., timetables, literacy blocks</td>
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<td>b. using data to improve achievement for all students</td>
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<td>Future Directions:</td>
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<td>- develop a language plan for ELL</td>
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<td>6. Aligning with the policy and regulatory environment</td>
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In his research, Leithwood (2006) found some common variables that are associated with positive student outcomes: active instruction; time on-task; and a school culture which acknowledges the importance of the academic program and focuses teachers, students, and parents on that as the priority. This was highly supported by the leadership practices exhibited by the principals involved in the research. The principals spoke of safeguarding instructional time by minimizing disruptions/interruptions during literacy teaching, such as assemblies, announcements, and/or special presentations. Principals also demonstrated a commitment to student learning by requiring teachers to use the literacy teaching time effectively. The principals monitored this by walking about and maintaining visibility during instructional time by visiting classrooms.

Leithwood (2003) in a Literacy and Numeracy webcast, states that there are common conditions in schools with high academic achievement that help sustain student learning. One of these is what he calls ‘academic press’ which is a culture within the school that acknowledges the importance of the academic program and focuses students, parents, and teachers on that as a school priority.

In their research, Hallinger, Bickman, and Davis (1996) looked at the influence of principal leadership on student reading achievement. They found that the articulation of a strong mission statement by the principal was one of the factors that influenced the students’ opportunities to learn and the teachers’ expectations for student achievement.

A report commissioned by the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (2006) found that leadership – among both principals and teachers, has a substantial impact on the effectiveness of urban and suburban schools. When principals view their schools
favourably, they are more likely to work hard to continue to improve results for students. This is supported by the feedback from the principals; they felt a moral imperative to improve student learning.

As mentioned by the principals involved in the research, diversity in all its forms strengthens learning. Diversity brings depth and perspective to collaborative learning, dialogue, and decision-making. This was attributed to a variety of reasons. The principals felt that the school community was more reflective of the changing demographics in society. Many schools are experiencing rapid growth in the number of students of colour, culturally and linguistically diverse students, and students from low-income families. Many of these families are new to Canada. In these diversity-enhanced schools, the global community shows up in the classroom everyday. Principals saw this as an exciting opportunity for learning and promoting global awareness. They also captured this diversity as a chance to build character amongst the student and teacher population. It helped to promote real opportunities for empathy and caring. The diversity helped to enhance respect and understanding. In general, the principals leading these diverse elementary school communities felt that the very diversity of the school population helped to enrich the education of all staff and students.

The GTA School District has had a long-standing involvement with Michael Fullan, former Dean of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education and now a special advisor to Ontario Premier Dalton McGinty. Fullan’s (2003, 2008) expertise lies in system reform. His work has informed the district by increasing the efficiency and speed of change. With twice yearly visits from Fullan, the principals within the GTA School District have been exposed to his system thinking and it is reflected in the principals’ beliefs.
However, now the literacy achievement for the GTA School District is beginning to plateau, as evidenced by the Grade 3 and Grade 6 EQAO results. With Fullan’s approach to change and improvement, the GTA School District has achieved efficient change but not perhaps the deep change that is necessary for continued improvement that impacts on all learners; specifically, greater attention to English language learners and the performance of lower achieving students who may be marginalized. This focus has not been central to the focus of the district.

Although the work of Ryan has not been prominent in the district, perhaps now is the time to infuse some of his thinking into the district work. Ryan (2003) maintains that a critical approach to inclusive leadership is the most consistent with the type of change needed here. This is because it acknowledges the deeper and more subtle issues that accompany diversity. He goes on to say that solutions to challenges of diversity must acknowledge the wider social, cultural, and institutional mechanisms that shape what counts as difference. According to Young and Liable (2000), racism is the main cause of the underachievement of students from differing backgrounds. They go on to point out that it is vital that principals understand how it works so that they can do something about it.

If principals now move to challenging the school structures/organization that limit or restrict the full academic development of the diverse school population and marginalize some groups, this may move the schools deeper into more fully realizing a true antiracist framework, with truly inclusive education and the full potential of all students.
Relationships and Parental Engagement

Relationships may be the one variable of principal leadership that permeated all other aspects of the school. From the principals’ collective belief that all children can learn given the time and support, to their positive and supportive relationships with staff, and finally right into their interactions with parents and community members, the principals in the research cultivated a personalized and supportive relationship with the people with whom they worked. All the principals mentioned that this was very important but extremely time-consuming. Aside from the positive relationship the principals maintained with their respective staffs, a priority was to build positive relationships with the families and the diverse community of the school. The general feeling amongst the principals involved in the research was that they needed support in building their understanding of a diverse school community. Epstein (1995) supports this dilemma of principals leading diverse communities. She points out that developing partnerships with the community would be made easier if principals came to their schools prepared with the necessary skills to work productively with families and communities. She goes on to say that courses or in-services are needed to help principals define their professional work with communities. This would entail building some understanding of family backgrounds, a framework for partnerships, and suggestions for involvement. Epstein (1995) feels that most principals are not prepared to guide and lead their staff in strong school practices that inform and involve families. This observation was certainly articulated by the principals involved in the research.

This would have implications for in-service during Principals’ Qualification courses and for on-going professional development and support for principals already in the role. This also
speaks to the need for inclusive education for school leaders and more work in cultural proficiency.

In a recent report by Portelli, Shields, and Vibert (2007) the authors state that schools that worked best in challenging circumstances had highly proactive school principals. These individuals worked hard at building connections to their school communities, often consulting other agencies for support.

Within all the schools involved in the research, the principals placed a strong emphasis on communication both within the building but also within the school community. This was another way that the principal built relationships with the various stakeholders involved in the school. Epstein (1995) in her work on parental/community engagement speaks of this communication. She claims that with frequent interactions between schools, families, and communities, more students are likely to receive the common message about the importance of school, of working hard, of helping one another, and of staying in school. She also acknowledges that affluent communities have more positive family involvement unless the schools and teachers in economically distressed and/or diverse communities work hard to build positive partnerships with families. This was borne out by the research in the diverse elementary school communities involved in the study. Principals spoke about the amount of time and personal effort they put into communicating with the families. This was both at an individual level (e.g., parent meeting) and a school level (e.g., newsletters).

Colombo (2006) speaks specifically about the challenges of establishing partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse families. Colombo notes that parent/teacher relationships are formed with relative ease when groups share a common
culture, language, and background. Relationships that must bridge cultures and languages, however, require more effort to create and sustain. Many new Canadians come from a different educational tradition from the one they encounter in Ontario. They trust teachers to be the experts in their child’s education and feel that it is disrespectful to question classroom or school practice. Other parents do not feel comfortable going into the school because they lack English proficiency. Many families are uncomfortable with the idea of being partners in the education of their children. These were the very real challenges faced by the principals involved in the research. The principals knew from their daily interactions that families valued education and they understood the importance of English literacy and academic achievement. Many parents spoke limited English and worked many hours at low-paying jobs to provide for their families. Principals knew that these parents tried to help their children with homework, but their schedules or limited English often stood in the way. Schools dealt with these issues in a variety of ways i.e. homework club; peer tutoring; extra help.

Parhar (2006) argues in her work on minority parent involvement in schools that deficit ideologies, those beliefs that minority communities need to be taught how to engage in the school system, are still held by teachers today and this continues to have harmful effects on teacher-parent-school relations. She goes on to say that often the school considers the problem of involvement as situated within a language deficient minority parent community. Instead of seeing the school as failing to support the parents, the parents themselves are blamed for the problem.

The principals also felt they needed support for language translation and cultural understanding from support personnel such as social workers and/or community liaison
teachers in order to be truly effective in dealing with the issues that arise on a day-to-day basis. None of the schools felt that they had achieved a vibrant or robust two-way communication with the families in which the communities’ voices were heard. This was an area for further development in most schools.

As the Ministry of Education calls for increased parental involvement, schools must exercise caution in understanding what this means. Whether it is labelled ‘parental involvement’, ‘parental engagement’, or ‘community connections’ government and school board policies have sought to increase schools’ and administrators’ contact with parents. As Flessa (2008) points out there is very little agreement on what counts as parental engagement; what its’ purpose is; and how do schools evaluate effective parental engagement. According to Pushor (2008) when schools ask parents to serve as audience, spectators, fund raisers, and organizers, it maintains the hierarchical structure of the school where school personnel maintain power and authority. It also asks parents to support the school’s agenda. Taylor and Whittaker (2003) support this notion. They found that conventional activities such as open houses; parent-teacher conferences require parents to have specific culturally-based knowledge about the operation of a school and school system. Cummins (2001) adds that even community involvement/engagement through institutionalized structures such as school councils can be exclusionary. Dei (2000) found that the basic structure of roles and relationships are bureaucratic. School is considered the authority and power resides with the professionals.

Approaches to improving / increasing minority parent involvement / engagement in schools range from benevolent (teachers gaining cultural sensitivity) to critical (school-wide reform). Benevolent approaches fail to recognize structural barriers that impede the
participation of minority parents in school. Dei (2000) argues that school-wide reform is needed to interrogate and eliminate inequitable practices and structures.

In a research study into parental engagement and leadership, Pushor (2008) examined how a school can move along the continuum from parental involvement to parental engagement and leadership. She states that it is not about teachers and administrators inviting parents and others into their place but about creating a space that is owned by students, parents, and community as well as staff and administrators. She goes on to say that it is about developing trust in relationships. Schools must begin to broaden their understanding of parental involvement/engagement to include the *intangible ways* that parents support their children’s education. By acknowledging that parents are involved in their children’s education in non-school-directed ways, minority parents would finally be given recognition for their involvement / engagement. This is reflected in the feedback from the principals involved in the study when they stated that in a diverse community, parents value education. Lopez (2001) found that many minority parents constantly talk to their children about their high expectations and emphasize the importance of hard work.

Pushor (2008) makes the point that although parental involvement can take many forms, from attending functions and meeting school obligations i.e. parent/teacher interviews, to helping improve their child’s school work i.e. monitoring homework to actively tutoring their child, to becoming an advocate for the school within the community i.e. helping plan, develop, and deliver educational opportunities for the community’s children, educators need to cultivate those opportunities that will help support student achievement.
A review of the research into the effects of parent involvement/engagement on student achievement (Cotton & Reed Wikelund, 2007) represents a synthesis of information from forty-one documents reviewed on different aspects of parent involvement. This review indicates that the most effective forms of parent involvement/engagement are those which engage parents in working directly with their children in learning activities at home. The research goes on to say that the earlier in a child’s educational process parental involvement begins, the more powerful the effects will be. Early childhood programs with strong parental involvement/engagement demonstrate this effect. The effectiveness of parental involvement is enhanced with orientation and training. This helps to maximize the effectiveness. Examples may include ‘send-home’ instructional packages within written directions for parents; make-and-take workshops where parents construct activities or materials for use at home; and demonstrations and practice using instructional games.

The research review finds that low-income and minority language parents are often underrepresented among parents involved in schools. This finding was certainly supported by the principals involved in this study. A most important finding in reviewing the research is that parents of disadvantaged and/or minority language students can and do make a positive contribution to their child’s achievement in school if they receive adequate training and encouragement. Research (Cotton & Reed Wikelund, 2007) dispels the myth by revealing that these parents can make a difference regardless of their own levels of education.

However, care must be taken to emphasize the concept of parents as partners with the school. Too often, school personnel tend to view parents and the community as needing change and having little to offer. According to a recent report from the Kentucky
Department of Education (2007) schools that succeed in engaging families from diverse backgrounds share these key practices (p. 4):

- focus on building trusting, collaborative relationships and two-way communications among teachers, families, and community members despite language differences;

- recognize, respect, and address families’ needs, as well as bridge class and cultural differences;

- embrace a philosophy of partnership where power and responsibility are shared and where families are effective advocates for their children.

Parental involvement / engagement was an area of working in a diverse community that consumed considerable time and energy on the part of the principals involved in the research. There may be a number of reasons for this. First, there is no clear direction from the Ministry of Education as to what counts as parental involvement / engagement. As mentioned, there are many aspects to parental involvement / engagement from attending concerts to advocating for school reform.

Secondly, parental involvement / engagement has a different manifestation at various levels of schooling. Once again, the Ministry of Education has not clearly defined what may be appropriate as children progress through the system. Research on parental involvement/engagement has included children from kindergarten through to high school without adequate regard for what constitutes developmentally appropriate practice (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000). Differences in how a model or theory of
parental/engagement applies to the very young child, through the middle years, and finally to the student in secondary school are not well articulated.

Thirdly, and relevant to this study is the research on parental involvement/engagement in diverse school communities. Although literature on minority parental involvement speak of partnerships or collaborative relations, this area of the literature is less developed. The simple recommendation of collaborative practice does not take into account the hierarchical relations between home and school. True collaboration can only occur when these relations are altered from the present situation in schools because equality is an important feature of a collaborative relationship. And finally, Parhar (2006) and Pushor (2008) both make the point that schools must recognize the difference between schooling and education. Schooling refers specifically to parental involvement in school-directed activities whereas involvement in education is broader and more inclusive to encompass beliefs, values, and competencies.

School is one place where divergent understandings of education converge on a daily basis. It seems reasonable to think that schools would be places where differing aims, values, ideas, and concerns would be collectively discussed and a reasonable understanding/compromise reached. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. The reasons for this are many and beyond the scope of this research. Equality of opportunity and the equity of outcomes promised by public education has not been fulfilled. The questions and concerns of diverse communities have not been addressed.
Building Community Capacity

All the principals involved in the research felt a strong sense of responsibility to help develop the capacity of the diverse community. Many felt that not only were they educating the student in a diverse community but also helping to educate the whole family. Building capacity is defined as the planned development of knowledge, skills, or ability to accomplish work by acquiring/sharing resources, funding, and/or people. Immigrant children enter Ontario classrooms from all over the world: from desperate flights of freedom or on pampered first-class flights; from shacks in a refugee holding camp or from expensive homes in modern cities; from their country of birth or from their fourth country of transit. Students may come with both parents or with a sole parent. Students may come from a strong educational background and know how to read and write fluently in the home language or may have missed years of schooling. New students may speak three or four languages fluently or may be born in Canada and not speak English well. For many families, this may be their first experience with the Ontario school system and the principals felt a strong obligation to help guide the families through the transitions such as entering Kindergarten and transitioning into high school. This has been supported in much of the literature regarding leading diverse communities (Harris, 2002). The overarching message about leadership in diverse communities, many of which also wrestle with issues of poverty, is one of building the community of the school in the widest sense through developing and involving others.

Some of the programs included parent development in the form of adult classes, parenting programs, job/employment training; outreach to the larger community by way of community agencies; and preparing and supporting children entering school and supporting
children while in school with programs such as kindergarten readiness, nutrition programs, homework clubs.

**Adult classes.**

Many of the principals involved in the research had initiated an adult ELL program within the school. This had a twofold benefit: it helped the parents learn English and become more confident in their interactions with the school and in general; but it also had the unanticipated effect of making the parents feel more comfortable within the school. The parents became familiar with staff; they were more aware of the routines within the school and of upcoming events; and in some cases, lead to parents volunteering within the classroom/school. The added benefit for the parents was the improvement of their English language skills helping to make them more employable in the Ontario context.

All schools involved in the research had established parenting programs. Principals articulated various reasons why they felt this aspect of community outreach was important. Most spoke of building parent capacity in helping their children get ready for school and be successful in the school system. The parenting programs also helped parents make connections to other parents within the school community; thus decreasing the sense of isolation for some families. This further fostered a sense of community. Principals also mentioned that parenting programs helped to introduce new people and new ideas to the community as parents shared their thoughts with each other. It also strengthened the relationship between the school and home because both developed a common understanding of the other.
Often times in diverse communities, parents are struggling to reconcile maintaining their cultural traditions and values and negotiating a new way of life. Through the parenting programs, families felt supported and that they had a place to turn to discuss these issues.

Successful programs that change the odds for children reach beyond traditional boundaries helping to coordinate health, social services, and education for families who often must deal with tremendous obstacles. Principals involved in the research shared that they spent a great deal of time liaising with support / community agencies in order to try to support the families and children in their diverse communities. The programs they brought to the school treated families with dignity and respect and were sensitive to their cultural and socio-economic needs. This in turn encouraged families to trust the school and take part in the programs. In a recent discussion paper, People for Education (2008) state that for schools to play an effective role in their communities, the programs offered in them must be responsive to local needs. All the schools had some form of nutrition programs whether it was a full breakfast program or a limited snack program. Unfortunately, demographic information shows that highly diverse school communities also are accompanied by high levels of poverty. As a result, many families are struggling to make ends meet. This increases the challenge of parental engagement.

Recent Statistics Canada (2006) census data indicates that there is unprecedented growth, mostly in the greater Toronto area, and that the majority of newcomers to Canada settle in Ontario’s urban/suburban areas. This rapid growth has created many thriving communities, but it has also put strains on public services such as transit, recreation programs, social services, child care, and housing and increasingly on the public education system. Sixty-three percent of Ontario’s students attend urban/suburban schools. Over
100,000 people have moved into the GTA each and every year over the past 15 years (StatsCan, 2006). At the same time as Ontario’s population has shifted to urban areas, responsibility for many programs and services has been downloaded to municipal governments. As a result of immigration, economic, and other factors, GTA boards have a high percentage of students whose socio-economic status puts their success in school at risk. Between 1991 and 2001, Statistics Canada (2006) indicates that there was a 100% increase in the number of children being raised in higher poverty neighbourhoods (Figure 7.2 ). Thirty percent of the total immigrant family population now live in higher poverty neighbourhoods (United Way, 2001).

![Percentage of young people in low-income families](image)

*Figure 12. Percentage of young people in low-income families (United Way, Poverty by Postal Code, 2002).*

This points to the need for schools to support children from these families with such services as nutrition programs. By supporting a nutrition program, principals felt that would alleviate one of the negative impacts to student learning. Academic achievement gaps for children entering school not speaking English exist already at the beginning of Kindergarten according to the assessment results of the schools involved in the research. Knowing this,
the principals initiated preschool programs to help support children before they entered formal schooling. According to the principals, the preschool programs emphasized language rich environments and allowed children many opportunities to express themselves and hear English spoken to them. Research indicates (Cummins, 2002) that when young children are learning more than one language, academic skills are much more likely to develop and transfer between languages when environments provide access to knowledge through both languages in culturally relevant ways. Children in these preschool programs not only were exposed to high-quality English and school-related activities i.e. painting, cutting, sensory play but also school-related routines i.e. sitting and listening, turn-taking, sharing, following routines. This secondary learning also helped prepare the students for entry into Kindergarten.

A secondary positive effect of these programs was also to facilitate important parent-school associations. The parents / caregivers were more likely to involve themselves in the school and classroom when their child entered school. Parents / caregivers who were isolated, also found the drop-in centre an opportunity to form friendships and make connections with other families / caregivers which in turn helped strengthen the school’s sense of community. This was observed by the principals involved in the research.

**Supporting children.**

As a result of the school’s concern for kindergarten preparation of preschool children, all the school’s involved in the research initiated a kindergarten readiness program. For some school’s this was a series of workshops i.e. School’s Cool for parents
and children to expose them to school-related activities. These workshops were presented by community agencies/partners.

For other schools, the principal and the kindergarten teachers prepared evening sessions to help families become acquainted with the kindergarten program. One school even had kindergarten teachers make home visits to registered preschoolers.

In an effort to support families whose parents may work long hours or who may not have the English skills to support their children’s homework, many of the principals involved in the research initiated homework programs. In some schools, these were run by parent volunteers in the library after school hours; in other schools, the homework programs were supported by organizations such as the YMCA or another community group. Although there was not clear data indicating whether or not these programs actually addressed issues of homework completion, principals felt that they offered children a safe and supportive environment to complete assignments and access help if they needed.

As the principals leading diverse schools understand, there are certain significant transition points in the life of an elementary school student. For families who do not speak English, these transitions can be complicated and confusing. As a result, all the principals involved in the study organized transition to high school meetings for their diverse community. Many of the meetings were language-specific; some were supported by translators; others saw non-English-speaking families supported by friends or relatives. This transition planning began in Grade 6 to help prepare both students and families for move to secondary school.
School Culture

All the principals involved in the research placed a strong emphasis on developing positive and productive staff relationships with teachers as well as support staff and other school-related personnel i.e. lunch assistants. By establishing these positive relationships, school principals felt that they were able to better influence the direction of the school and in turn impact on student achievement.
Figure 13. Revised conceptual framework: Leadership practices in diverse school communities incorporating research findings*. 

*Note: The diagram illustrates the integration of leadership practices with the school community, culture, and instructional practices to improve student learning. The framework emphasizes increased support roles like translators, social workers, and community liaisons, alongside diversity, parental engagement, and community capacity approaches. Formal and informal learning environments, such as breakfast programs, parent programs, and adult ELL programs, are highlighted as key components of this holistic approach to leadership in diverse school communities.
First and foremost, the principals expressed the importance of having a welcoming atmosphere in the school. This meant right from the staff in the main office through to the teachers in the classroom. Some principals had office staff whom were reflective of the community and they felt that this was helpful in many ways – from translation of office materials such as registration packages for new parents through to helping with translation of phone conversations or interviews. Principals felt that staff reflective of the community helped them understand the community better. In turn, the staff contributed in their own unique way to making the school welcoming to newcomer families.

The leadership style of all the principals was distributed – they shared decision-making and power structures with others in the school. Alma Harris (2005) defines distributed leadership as engaging many people in leadership activities. Distributed leadership implies that the practice of leadership is one that is shared and realized within extended groupings and networks. One principal in the research is quoted as saying, “You can’t do everything alone.” One area in which all the schools struggled was sharing decision-making and leadership with the community. This would take the form of social inclusion – the process of closing the distance between people. It is not about bringing outsiders into the existing mainstream but about creating new and negotiated ways of being. This would help include previously marginalized voices. As Pushor (2008) points out, schools need to get better at co-creating space with parents to cultivate parental engagement and leadership.

Principals in diverse communities worked hard to emphasize inclusivity and an antiracist framework within their school community. Many of the classrooms within the
schools involved in the research were based on the Tribes philosophy which promotes group norms and group problem solving.

Children need to feel valued for who they are, both as individuals and members of a particular group. Whether a student’s group identity stems from race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, gender or sexual orientation, that identity must be affirmed both in the formal and informal curriculum i.e. those enrichment activities, sports events, and manners in which people are treated, that send powerful messages to the students. As Fullan (2003) points out, teaching is an ethical and moral activity and teachers have an ethical obligation to help all students learn.

This means that principals and teachers in diverse school communities must challenge hegemonic practices, those practices which maintain and promote the values and beliefs of the dominant culture, and begin to ask tough questions about the cultural proficiency of their school. Cultural proficiency is a framework within which individuals can shift their perspectives. In an educational setting, perspectives would shift from reforming structures, policies, and rules in schools to transforming relationships and behaviours of the people within the schools (Lindsey, 2005). Lindsey goes on to say that the school leader who holds this transformational perspective focuses on leadership and school practices to meet the generative opportunities and needs of diverse communities. Leaders involved in transformational activities build on the experiences of students, and they direct their own leadership activities in ways that involve all members of the school community in becoming culturally proficient and able to meet the challenging problems they encounter together. This opens up opportunities to build culturally proficient and functionally diverse educational communities in which people interact with one another in respectful and culturally
responsive ways. Villegas and Lucas (2007) point out that many practices embedded in the fabric of everyday schooling put students from non-mainstream groups at a disadvantage. These may include low expectations for ethnically diverse students, inadequate multicultural/culturally sensitive learning material, inexperience/non-qualification of teachers, insensitivity toward cultural differences, and poor teaching practice. The principals involved in the research recognized these dilemmas and had made a strong commitment to address the concerns. By their own admission, however, they were only at the beginning of addressing these tough questions. Cultural proficiency is an inside-out perspective on change in which school principals transform approaches to their personal leadership behaviours and to their school practices. Principals who manifest cultural proficiency guide their colleagues to examine personal value and behaviours in such a way that the members of the school realize that they must adjust their practice to meet the needs of the students and the community they serve. Likewise, these leaders support their colleagues and members of the community in aligning the school’s policies, practices, and procedures to achieve cultural proficiency (Lindsey, NuriRobbins, & Terrell, 2003).

Push-in programs place students in regular classrooms. This exposes students to the mainstream curriculum and helps them integrate into the student body. This model is most successful when an ESL teacher works closely with the teacher and students in the regular class. With the large numbers of ELL students in many schools, this model would address the needs of many more students.

In this type of model, second-language specialists serve as consultants and aids to teachers in the classroom to support ELL students. They have extensive training in second-language acquisition and in multicultural education. Having a language specialist in the
classroom will help teachers make links and support ELL learning. However, in order for these approaches to be successful, there must be support from the administration.

The principals involved in the research utilized this model of support for ELL students; some principals used this model for all stages of ELL learners whereas other principals used this model only for stage 2, 3, and 4 ELL students. The stage 1 ELL students were supported by a pull-out model of language support.

Utilizing ESL teachers in supporting students in the regular class has a two-fold advantage: one, it supports students within the mainstream where ELL learners benefit from the rich dialogue and language modelling of the English language students; two, having the ESL teachers working with the regular education teachers helps to broaden the knowledge base of the classroom teacher with regards to language learning. Although the Ministry of Education has always maintained that every teacher is an ESL teacher, the truth is that this trivializes the expertise and background knowledge of language development and learning needed to address the complex needs of ELL students.

Documentary review supports the principals’ general impression that the Ministry of Education is not providing the curriculum guidance and support for ELL students. Over the course of the last 8 years, the Ministry of Education has produced a number of language-related documents (see Chapter 4). While it is evident that over this time frame there has been a slight increase in the references to ELL students, this slight level of curriculum support is still inadequate to inform classroom practice in a satisfactory way. Much more direction is needed from the Ministry in this regard.
Another way in which the principals supported the literacy development of the ELL learner was through the alignment of the timetable. The principals ensured that the ELL students were receiving their language instruction during the ‘literacy block’ i.e. a dedicated time for literacy instruction across a division or whole school. Principals expressed concern that often support programs such as ESL or special education are misaligned and this results in students receiving inappropriate instruction i.e. sitting in regular education classrooms during literacy instruction that is not appropriate for their stage of development or receiving double servicing and missing other subject areas.

By aligning the timetable, the principals allowed for the most effective use of support personnel such as the ESL teacher. This in turn, allowed for the most effective use of instructional time both for the teachers and the students.

From a different perspective, by aligning the timetable, principals were able to orchestrate common planning time. This was done through common prep time or through internal coverage by other teachers during school hours. This allowed team teaching partners to not only plan together but also discuss students’ progress and look at assessment data.

Belchetz (2004) in her work regarding the accountability of the school principal, states that there is a heightened sense of accountability by the principal for improved student outcomes. This ties in with the feedback from principals indicating that they felt their mandate was to improve student achievement. This accountability pertains to all students, regular education, special education, and English language learners. However, she goes on to state that merely applying more pressure on schools to improve is unlikely
to yield positive results. Principals and teachers must now base their actions and decisions on data. It is not enough to merely introduce new programs. These decisions must use student achievement results, parent surveys, and other forms of information to make informed and strategic decisions to move the school forward in a variety of ways i.e. raising student achievement, closing the gender gap, delivering professional development, and addressing community involvement. However, often in concentrating in such a focused way on data, educators often lose sight of other aspects of the child’s total education – social development, integration into the community, and well-being and mental health.

Principals involved in the research used the school plan for continuous improvement to direct their planning. However, the principals involved in the research shared a common concern regarding data. They felt that they did not have the background or expertise of ‘data crunch’. When talking about disaggregating the data, looking for trends, finding possible variables and causes, the principals felt that this was beyond their level of expertise. They also felt that these activities were time-consuming and added yet another layer to an already busy work load. As an example, Coelho (2007) points out that the most recent data on ELL achievement is complex. The 2005 and 2006 EQAO disaggregated data indicates that approximately 20% of Ontario’s students in English-language elementary schools are English language learners. Of these, 58% were born in Canada. These learners need careful attention and particular consideration of their learning needs. She goes on to point out that a recent study indicated that students from certain language backgrounds and certain regions of the world experience significantly more difficulty in the Ontario system. These are complicated issues that are beyond the scope of the elementary school principal.
Similar to the alignment of the timetable, principals used the organization of the school to support the literacy development of the ELL students in a variety of ways. First, the principals made strategic decisions about the organization of the staff to support ELL students. They placed the most effective language teachers into the roles of support for the ELL students. They ensured that the ESL teachers were qualified and as mentioned, in some cases, also required that the ESL teachers had additional qualifications in reading. This supports the issue raised earlier of the level of expertise and professional knowledge necessary to address the complex learning needs of ELL students. In some cases, principals made the difficult decisions to move teachers out of the role of ESL teacher because the principal felt that strong pull-out or push-in programs were not being delivered to the ELL students. The principals shared that this was difficult in some cases because the teacher had occupied that role for a number of years but the principal felt it was necessary for the literacy learning of the students.

Second, the principal used the physical placement of the ESL teacher and his/her classroom to support the literacy learning of the students. As an example, some principals placed the ESL teacher’s classroom close to a group of resistant or stuck classroom teachers in order to support change in teaching practice and access to resources. The principals shared that this facilitated dialogue and exposure to teaching strategies / practices and helped to move the ‘stuck’ teachers’ classroom practice. Third, the principal used the organization of the school to combine certain teachers’ assignments i.e. combining the role of Reading Recovery and ESL in the primary division in order to enhance the literacy development of the ELL students. Principals used key staff members to help support the learning of the ELL students. This speaks to the principals’ commitment
to this group of students but also to the principals’ intuitive recognition that language learning is extremely complex. This is supported in the literature review.

As in the case of student-based decisions, principals based the direction for staff professional development on the data as well. This was done through informal observation in the classrooms, feedback from the leadership team, and analysis of the student achievement data. Principals felt that to continually move closer to the vision of high achievement for all students, teachers and staff needed collective and continual professional development to improve classroom practice.

Most principals involved in the research and in elementary schools in general work hard to ensure a safe and supportive learning environment for all students. As Belchetz (2004) points out, such an environment develops when expectations for student behaviour are set and progress is monitored against a standard that the school has identified. Leithwood (2003) goes on to say that the disciplinary climate of the school affects student learning. The most positive disciplinary climate is created when everyone in the school accepts a collective responsibility for the behaviour of all students.

Instruction and Teaching Practice

This was perhaps the most significant area of the study for impacting directly on the literacy achievement of ELL students. It was through the curriculum expertise of the principals and their support staff that ELL students showed the significant gains in their literacy development according to the principals. This was evident in the literacy data that the principals kept at the school level. All the schools involved in the study were working as learning communities which meant that teams of teachers were working together to
improve their practice and in turn impact positively on student learning. As became clear in the research, good second-language teaching practices benefit all students in the classroom. It is very important, however, that principals know what those effective practices are and can identify them in the classroom so as to ensure that teachers are using them in the classroom to impact on the literacy learning of ELL students. This is particularly important for informal classroom visits by the principals but also for more formal performance appraisal visits. In relation to the ELL student, ESL teachers were working collaboratively with regular education classroom teachers in a peer mentoring/coaching model to improve instruction through team planning and joint classroom delivery.

However, the principals involved in the research shared the concern that their role is becoming increasingly bogged down with other tasks that it does not necessarily focus on educational/instructional matters. In reality, principals are not engaged in the hands-on, curriculum-expert style of instructional leadership envisioned in the literature (Ontario Principals’ Council, 2004). More than ever, tasks other than curriculum supervision are demanding increasing prominence. As the role of the principal becomes ever-more demanding, schools will need to ensure that the vital role of curriculum leadership is protected so that principals can make a difference for the students in their schools.

Principals involved in the research were insistent on differentiated instruction so that students received the most relevant instruction for their needs. This was particularly true for ELL students. Elementary classroom teachers are still primarily responsible for teaching the grade-level Ontario curriculum, but as principals in the research point out, they need to do it in ways that make the content accessible for ELL students. This is done through differentiated instruction and integrating language into all subject areas. Principals go on to
say, when teachers recognize the language that is already embedded in their subject areas, they can use English to provide access to the mainstream curriculum and help students develop academic English.

Carol Ann Tomlinson (2004) defines differentiated instruction at the basic level as the efforts of teachers to respond to the variance among learners in the classroom. Tomlinson goes on to say that differentiating instruction means providing an environment where students have multiple options for taking in information, making sense of ideas, and expressing what they have learned. In order for differentiation to be effective, it must be proactive and purposeful.

As educators know, language, in all its forms, is how children make meaning of the world. The primary function of language is communication with others. It is also a means by which children learn and clarify thinking. Principals involved in the research understood that oral language or languages serve as building blocks for reading and writing by allowing students to develop their understanding of concepts and the related academic language through talk. By providing frequent opportunities for students to interact with each other around important concepts, teachers were helping to ensure that ELL students were attaining proficiency in English as well as acquiring grade level content.

In order for classrooms to provide opportunities for talk, students were often grouped around a variety of configurations. This was evident in the schools involved in the research by their focus on the Tribes philosophy and group norms and a cooperative learning strategy. Principals mentioned that students had opportunities to work collaboratively in pairs, small groups, and large group settings to complete a task. As Rothenberg and Fisher
Rothenberg & Fisher, 2007) point out that when students work in groups they receive more language input, hear a wider variety of language, and the language used within a group is contextualized and directed towards a meaningful purpose. They go on to say that group work provides the redundancy of language that supports the ELL student by presenting ideas in different ways. ELL students have more time to process the language and understand the concepts (Rothenberg & Fisher, 2007).

Cooperative learning is a useful strategy for promoting interaction and increasing the amount of student-initiated talk in the classroom. It creates situations where students must exchange useful information and communicate with each other thus supporting language learning for ELL students but also content knowledge. Principals encouraged classroom teachers to use this strategy to support ELL students.

Teaching and leading in a diverse school community requires a knowledge base which includes cultural knowledge – an understanding of the importance of culture in affecting students’ perceptions, values, and learning; linguistic knowledge – understanding of students’ patterns of communication and various dialects/languages and how it affects their classroom learning; and culturally informed teaching knowledge – understanding of culturally sensitive classroom practices and strategies, student participation and engagement, and interactions. Principals involved in the research mentioned that these many and varied areas of teaching in a diverse community would be topics for further professional development.

In order to integrate language and content, ESL and regular education teachers are working together in more collaborative ways. Principals in the research have recognized
the benefits of this collaborative model and in some cases have orchestrated this mentoring/coaching approach. Once the teachers have built a professional relationship, they can collaborate to support ELL students in a number of ways. This was evident in the variety of models shared at the schools involved in the research. In some schools, the teachers developed units and lessons that included appropriate language and content objectives for both ELL and regular education students. Principals shared that they needed to support this by supplying common planning time.

In other schools, teachers used a co-teaching model where the ESL teacher may demonstrate certain instructional strategies such as a vocabulary mini-lesson or the introduction of a graphic organizer. This demonstration helped the regular classroom teacher in turn transfer this practice into their own instructional repertoire.

This may be the beginning of a move towards a professional learning community. The professional learning community flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but rather to ensure that students learn. With this simple shift in focus, profound changes can occur for all students (DuFour, 2005). DuFour goes on the say that educators who are building a professional learning community recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they create structures to promote a collaborative culture. The powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice (DuFour, 2005).
School leadership in a professional learning community is socially constructed and culturally sensitive (Harris, 2003). The key component is a principal who believes in the potential of the organization (Senge, 2002). Senge goes on to say that principals in these schools replace ‘control over’ with ‘support for’ teachers and present opportunities for growth and development. This resonates with the interview findings with the principals involved in the study who believe in the organization and provide opportunities for all staff to grow and develop. This also ties in with the direction from the Ministry of Education that has established that professional learning communities are a provincial strategy for school reform.

Belchetz (2004) in her work regarding leadership practices in an accountability context, points out that there is a heightened sense of accountability for principals to improve student results. The principals involved in this study expressed this same pressure. In this age of accountability, there is a growing concern regarding the progress or lack thereof, of English language learners. All the principals articulated that one of their mandates was to improve student learning and achievement, including the achievement of English language learners. They accomplished this in a variety of ways.

As Richard Allington (2002) points out in his research, good effective teachers manage to produce better achievement in their students than any curriculum materials, pedagogical approach, or prescribed program. In order for these teachers to be effective in literacy development, they had to have an extensive knowledge of the learners and a deep understanding of literacy. Principals involved in the research selected strong teachers to deliver the ESL programs but these same teachers also supported the regular classroom teachers. One principal mentioned that she required the ESL teachers to have additional
qualifications in reading. In this way, principals helped to create conditions which made it more likely that ELL students were receiving strong programs to support their learning.

Principals also needed to have a good understanding of the components of a strong ESL program and of the regular classroom language program in order to know whether appropriate teaching was happening. Principals mentioned that in order to remain current and knowledgeable, they read journals and articles, attended workshops and conferences, were part of learning networks, and they learned alongside their staff. All the principals involved in the research felt that they needed to learn more about strong ESL programs and felt that this may be an area for continued professional development.

The majority of ELL students find themselves in mainstream or regular classrooms taught by teachers with little or no formal professional development in teaching such students. Only certain stages of ELL development qualify for ESL programming. Even though the Ministry of Education mentions that all teachers are ESL teachers, regular classroom educators find that addressing the learning needs of ELL students very challenging. Teachers find themselves having to accommodate for the one thing that they took for granted – language. Teachers working with linguistically diverse students need support. ESL teachers can collaborate and work closely with regular classroom teachers to offer classroom support, instructional advice, and general feedback about ELL learning.

Principals supported regular education teachers by offering professional development particularly in the area of reading and writing for ELL students. This had a two-fold benefit. It ensured that teachers had the necessary skills to support student learning; but also served to build teacher competency and confidence and in turn positively
affect student learning. Principals, themselves, felt that they needed continued professional
development regarding appropriate programming for ELL students.

All principals mentioned fair and equitable assessment practices as an area of
growth for their respective staffs. Often times, more traditional pencil/paper forms of
assessment are used and this may inadvertently disadvantage the ELL student. The ELL
students may not have the facility with written language or the script system itself to
demonstrate their understanding. Principals felt that teachers needed to become more
familiar with a wider variety of assessment techniques so as to better address the needs of
the ELL students in the class.

One of the ways that principals involved in the research monitored teaching
practices was through the formal teacher performance appraisals. By insisting on
differentiating instruction and addressing the needs of all learners, principals ensured that
the needs of the ELL learner were addressed. Principals also used this formal appraisal
process to push forward the school improvement agenda for increased student
achievement.

Principals also used informal visits to classrooms to help support programming and
instructional methods. All the principals involved in the research mentioned that they make
a point to visit classrooms on a daily basis. They felt that their presence demonstrated first,
an importance on classroom practice; second, a level of interest in the activities that went
on in the classroom; and third a commitment to and interest in the students and their
development.
In order to be effective in the classroom, teachers need the resources to support the program. Many of the schools involved in the research made an effort to support teachers with both instructional materials i.e. dual language books; dictionaries; and books on tape, and professional materials such as journals, books, and videos / dvds. The principals shared that this was important to demonstrate a commitment to the important work of supporting the ELL student in the classroom. Many of the materials were ordered by the ESL team in order to support regular classroom teachers and ELL students.

One of the most significant and effective ways that the schools improved the literacy learning of English language learners was to track their progress. Principals shared that they met once a month with the ESL teachers to monitor and track the language development of ELL students. At this time, the team suggested possible interventions/strategies for students who were not progressing and continued monitoring for those who were making good progress. This allowed the principals to have a first hand knowledge of the progress or lack thereof for particular students.

The schools had also developed an intake system in order to gather relevant family history and previous school data from new ELL students. This also included a language assessment and other relevant academic data. This was useful in providing a baseline from which to work. It also served to locate the data for a particular ELL student in one central location. This made the information accessible to the regular classroom teacher as well.

In recent years, the Ministry of Education has begun to require schools to apply for grant funding for various initiatives through submission of proposals. This requires that the school with the involvement of the parent community, write and submit proposals for
innovative ways of using funding to encourage parental involvement; build community capacity; improve school council participation; enhance literacy achievement; or program enhancement. When and if the proposal is approved by the Ministry of Education, the money is dropped into the school’s operating budget and funds must be accounted for by the deadline allotted. Usually the turn around time for the submission of proposals is quite short as is the time frame for using the money. A final report is also required with data to support the accomplishment of the proposed goals.

The idea of making funding available to schools for special projects which will enhance the program, support the achievement of the students, and build the capacity of the community, is a good one. However, principals in diverse communities have found that this new method of accountability by the Ministry of Education has proven very onerous and is some cases prohibitive for the very communities that need the financial support. Principals shared that often a diverse community does not have an active and vibrant school council or parent body for various reasons. As a result, the task of writing the proposals and developing and monitoring funding, falls onto the shoulders of the school staff namely the principal. Principals felt that due to the short turn around times and their hectic schedules, they would often forfeit the additional funding from the Ministry. However, the principals realized that in doing so, they had missed an opportunity to support their community and this created added feelings of guilt.

The other strong concern expressed by the principals about the grant application process through the Ministry of Education was the sustainability of the programs that were initiated. Principals expressed serious concerns about establishing expectations within the community and then not being able to continue once the grant money had run out.
Board Level Support

Schools operate within the context of the Board within which they are located. The boards of education in turn operate within the parameters of the Ontario Ministry of Education. As a result, in order to improve the achievement of students, the school must be supported by the board and the Ministry of Education. Throughout the research and subsequent focus group feedback sessions, principals shared their ideas of how to better support the work they do in the schools to support diverse communities.

Additional community liaison teachers.

The most common suggestion from the principals to support the work in diverse communities was for the board to increase the number of community liaison teachers. The principals felt that these support personnel should be clustered in areas of greatest demand and as such shared by a limited number of schools.

Social workers.

Similarly, the principals shared that as a result of the complicated and complex needs of many families in diverse communities, the board should support the work of the principals by hiring social workers. Again, the principals felt that the social workers could be clustered in areas of high demand and shared by schools. This would address the feelings of the principals working in diverse communities that much of their work was supporting family needs and issues.
Continued professional development at the board level.

Principals voiced that at times they felt overwhelmed with the needs of a diverse community; they often did not understand the cultural factors that impacted on family decisions, teaching practice, and student achievement. In a focused interview, the GTA support team shared that often parents feel that the school does not understand the family. This directly supports the feelings shared by the principal. The team suggested that the school and the principal must go beyond what is happening with the child in the classroom and make an effort to know what is going on in the child’s life. The team urged that the school and teachers get to know the families in order better understand and support one another.

Flexibility of principal’s working day.

Much of the work that principals did in diverse communities took place outside regular school hours. This usually involved work with the community. Principals spoke of going to community meetings, attending places of worship, participating in various cultural activities, all in an effort to better understand the diverse community but also to build a sense of trust and support.

However, the principals also felt a strong commitment to being in the building everyday. This was a dilemma that did not have an easy resolution. It was important for principals to do the daily work to improve student achievement but it was also important to build relationships with the community. Principals felt that the community had an expectation that the principal would be in the building each day. One of the suggestions
was the use of flex time; principals would come later in the morning if they needed to stay later into the evening.

**Additional support materials.**

Another way that the school Board can support the work of the schools to address the literacy learning of diverse school communities was through the access to appropriate resource and support materials. Principals mentioned that right now teachers are creating massive amounts of original material to support ELL students’ learning. This was particularly true in the content areas. Principals shared that teachers are re-creating and re-writing textbook chapters in order to make them more readable for stage 1 & 2 ELL learners in the regular classroom. This obviously added to the workload of these teachers.

Principals suggested that perhaps there could be some central materials/resources made accessible for ELL learners which addressed the curriculum expectations in the content areas.

**Careful selection of principals for diverse communities.**

In today’s world of ever changing external influences, school principals are expected to be a combination of bureaucrat, educational leader, community pillar, surrogate parent, and moral agent as they respond to all stakeholders. Research has documented that the role of principal as instructional leader and curriculum expert is being continually eroded by added accountability demands (Ontario Principals’ Council, 2004; Belchetz, 2004). School boards must be careful to protect this vital aspect of the elementary school principal’s role in order to continue to address the achievement of all students. This research supports the findings of other research that indicates that the school principal is vital in improving
student learning. This is particularly true in diverse and challenging schools. However, school principals can only focus on this important work if they are not overwhelmed with other accountability demands.

School boards also need to ensure that they give careful consideration to the placement of principals in diverse communities. This will become increasingly challenging as the shortage of principals rises. There is disturbing evidence that shows that principals are leaving the system at an alarming rate and soon the province will face a crisis in educational leadership (Ontario Principals’ Council, 2004).

Principals placed in diverse communities must see diversity as a strength and be able to work collectively with the community to build capacity and foster new and empowering relationships. In these challenging communities, principals need to have a deep understanding of curriculum and instructional strategies in order to make a difference for ELL students.

**Accessibility of reception centre.**

In the GTA School District involved in the study, there is a reception centre centrally located within the Board. All newcomer families from outside the Board must be processed through this central facility where documents are checked and children undergo an ESL assessment of skills.

However, principals involved in the study mentioned that very often it is difficult for new families to make their way to the reception centre due to transit concerns, lack of familiarity with the region, and language barriers. They suggested that there be accessibility
in many different locations throughout the Board; even locating the facility within a cluster of schools.

**Ministry of Education Support**

Schools and school boards do not work in isolation. They work under the policies and direction of the Ontario Ministry of Education. Therefore the Ministry must work as a partner to support the work in schools to support ELL learners. The Ministry must develop supportive policies and informed directions to help ELL learners achieve and guide school boards and principals in the challenging work they do with diverse populations.

This can be achieved in a number of ways as suggested by the principals involved in the research as delineated below.

**Clearer direction from the Ministry regarding ELL**

One of the biggest areas of frustration for the principals involved in the research came from the lack of direction from the Ministry of Education regarding ELL students. The document analysis of Ministry of Education publications supported this concern. Only the most recent documents gave specific direction regarding the teaching of ELL students yet the phenomenon of ELL students in regular classrooms is not new. Educators in multi-ethnic schools struggle everyday to teach a standard curriculum to a non-standard student body, diverse in language proficiencies, literacy levels, cultural knowledge, beliefs and traditions (Meyers, 2008). Up until now, there has been a lack of expertise and guidance with the instruction on ELL learners. The burden of responsibility has been relegated to principals and teachers to meet the challenges of this diverse group of learners. Only
recently, has the Ministry of Education developed clear policy directives for dealing with ELL students.

The second area of frustration related to working in a diverse community was the lack of direction from the Ministry regarding parental involvement/community engagement. Principals were responding to the needs of their communities but did not have a clear indication whether the efforts were impacting positively on student achievement.

**Clearer direction from Ministry concerning parental involvement.**

One area of administering in a diverse community was the parental involvement piece. Principals felt that this area was very time consuming and intensive. There was anxiety expressed by principals as to whether they were doing enough to support the community. Many principals were doing many commendable things to support and involve the community but they did not know if it was making difference. Principals wanted clearer direction from the Ministry of Education about what constitutes effective parental involvement in schools and how does it relate to and improve student achievement in diverse communities.

**Increased funding for ELL.**

All census data indicates that diversity is a fact in urban classrooms. Yet, troubling statistics from the Parents for Education (2007) indicate that funding for ELL has not kept pace to reflect Ontario’s growing diversity.

Over the last two years, even with the huge influx of ELL students into Toronto and the GTA, funding for ESL programs has only increased slightly. The province has not
changed its ESL funding practices to ensure that the funding for ELL reaches the students who need it. School boards receive funding for ESL based on two factors: the number of students born in a country where English is not the first or standard language and who have been in Canada for four years or less; and also based on StatsCan data, the number of children in the area whose language spoken most often in the home is neither English or French. Funding does not include those students who are born in Canada but cannot speak English upon entering the school system. Principals in diverse communities expressed the concern that many children, even though born in Canada, have not been exposed to English due to the fact that their family maintains close contact within its own community.

Additionally, Boards are not required to spend their ESL funding on ESL programs. At times, Boards may use ESL funding to cover costs in other areas.

**Diversity training in principals’ qualification programs.**

In reviewing the offerings of a number of different universities and the Ontario Principals’ Council in the Principal’s Qualification program, there was very little, if any, focus on leadership in diverse school communities. Change management strategies were presented in all programs with an emphasis on moving the organization forward. There was limited exposure to topics dealing with diversity and cultural sensitivity. As such, there is little emphasis in principal preparation courses on the knowledge and skills necessary to lead a diverse school community. Principals in the focus group mentioned that this is an area of concern and needs to be addressed by the Ministry in order to prepare future leaders for the diversity present in Ontario schools.
The Immigration Experience

Apart from physicians and lawyers, the GTA support team shared that many families come to Canada on the strength of the man’s credentials, though, in some instances, the women are just as qualified as their husbands. However, traditionally, immigration paperwork is completed on the qualifications of the male, and, when the family is told that the male will have to start over, the male will not accept the prospect of a survival job. There may be many reasons for such a response, not the least of which is the loss of face and damage to his pride. Another serious problem commonly faced is basic economics. The cost of living in the GTA is very high; daily expenses for a family of four create stress. So as one of the team commented,

They have come with such high qualifications. They have spent 15 years of their life in medical school getting to where they are and what happens then is that the men will hold out, continue to hold out while sending out resumes. In the meantime, the women will take the survival jobs because money has to come into the house. What makes this so difficult is that now there is a power shift. The power shift is not in the dollar amount but it is the fact that the man is left in the house and may end up doing household chores. So in his eyes, and coming from a community, any immigrant community, generally, those are chores that men don’t do. It is seen as women’s work. Many may even come from communities where they have servants or someone to do that work. So this is creating tremendous tension in the family. So this is why we see high incidence of verbal abuse, some physical abuse, and so on.

The team reported that, because of the stress, there are huge mental health issues in the new Canadian population. Unfortunately, no one is willing to recognize and address this partly because the families, culturally, do not want to talk about it outside the home but,
also because agency support is limited. In such situations, schools become caught in the middle because of the impact on the child.

These stresses are exacerbated in an immigrant community because they are intertwined with loss of identity. The team explained that often immigrants describe this as a loss of identity in the community, a loss of face. The males have lost their identity, not only within their family, but also in their extended family. It is a huge loss of self esteem when they lose the status they enjoyed in the country of origin.

Another common issue that surfaces in a diverse population is the feeling of isolation. To offset this, many families of the same ethnic background tend to live within the same geographic area. This creates a sense of community but results in the children only being exposed to English when they are at school. Since time is an important variable with learning, this amounts to only 5 hours out of the day for a portion of the year. Members of the team drew attention to the fact that children are not exposed to much English outside the school and hypothesized that this may contribute to students’ academic difficulties.

The team insisted that when principals are working within a diverse community, it is important that they must go beyond what is happening with the child in the classroom. Principals must make an effort to know what is going on in the child’s life. In a recent article published in the Toronto newspaper, the Globe and Mail (Lewington, 2007), Jennifer Lewington reported that parents from diverse backgrounds are often frustrated when dealing with the school system. Despite websites in multiple languages, special English support classes, and religious accommodations, parents become angry when they find out that their children are being left behind the mainstream students academically. The article
concludes by saying that schools must build a more trusting and collaborative relationship with the communities they serve.

Mehrunnisa Ali, a Ryerson University professor, when interviewed by the Toronto Star newspaper (Rushowy, 2007), stated that she consistently hears one frustration from the immigrant population – teachers and recent immigrants do not really understand one another. Teachers and recent immigrants usually have been brought up in different cultures, and as a result they do not necessarily know how to talk to each other. Parents do not know what is expected of their children, and of themselves, from the school system. Professor Ali urges schools and teachers to get to know one or two families in depth – their family history, socio-economic status, parenting beliefs, in order to understand what it is like to walk a mile in their shoes.

Summary

Many of the practices of the principals involved in the research mirrored practices of principals leading less diverse schools (Cotton, 2003; Leithwood, 2005; Ontario Principals’ Council, 2006) such as establishing a clear focus on student learning; communicating with all stakeholders. However, principals involved in leading diverse communities also placed an additional emphasis on engaging and reaching out to parents. This took many forms such as additional programs in the evenings. The principals also felt a strong moral imperative to help build capacity within the community such as adult classes and programs for children.

Additionally, principals mentioned that they work hard to develop positive school cultures which were inclusive and supportive of all community members. Principals took
time and care to strategically organize the school to best support the literacy learning of ELL students i.e. placement of teachers; timetabling; and team teaching/coaching. Principals mentioned that they continue to learn and develop themselves professionally in order to better serve the diverse community.

In summary, principals mentioned a number of further supports that would assist them in doing their job more effectively. These were additional support personnel such as community liaison workers, social workers; flexibility in the working day; accessibility of a reception centre; and professional support in diversity. At the Ministry level, principals spoke about a clearer direction about ELL that would facilitate their work at the school; clearer direction about parental involvement; and increased funding for ELL students. Principals also mentioned that diversity training in Principal Qualification courses would assist in preparing candidates for leading diverse communities.
This research attempts to deepen the understanding of what is needed to administer to diverse school communities. The findings have implications for principals’ preparation courses, professional development of those administrators already in the field and possible criteria when looking for administrators suited for leading multicultural communities. The research also sheds light on the restructuring in schools necessary in order to support minority language communities and help all students, but particularly ELL students, be successful. With ELL students at great risk of dropping out, the loss of so many academically competent learners needs to be understood as a loss of human and educational capital. There is a moral imperative for educational leaders to address the learning of this struggling group.

The actions of the principal become that much more crucial in the multicultural school, not only in the area of student academic achievement but also in relationships with the community and with respect to the school environment and school programs, particularly as they pertain to the literacy development of the ELL learner. This may be even more serious in light of the fact that most principals are of Euro-Western and Anglo-Celt heritage. Consequently, many principals may experience difficulties not only attempting to understand minority students’ cultural proclivities, but also in devising solutions to the seemingly myriad of problems and challenges that may arise.

This thesis points to broad areas that must be addressed when administering to a diverse community in order to respond to a pluralistic society. The categories are fostering
new meanings about diversity; promoting inclusive practices within schools; and building connections between schools and the communities they serve (Riehl, 2000). The overarching umbrella in all this work must be dialogue (Ryan, 2003); dialogue between educators and students; dialogue amongst educators themselves; and dialogue between educators and the community. Culturally proficient leaders are intentional in the use of their school's formal and informal communication networks (Lindsey, 2005). These leaders are aware of the power of person-to-person communication. They see that relationship building through conversation is important in developing the school's responsiveness to the needs of diverse and ever-changing communities.

**Fostering New Beliefs and Understandings About Diversity**

Fostering new understandings and beliefs about diversity and inclusive practice involves more than simply communicating particular understandings so that they become diffused throughout an educational context; it also means supporting the generation of new meanings within the context. Groups and individuals are not simply recipients of new meanings, but they are co-creators.

Based on an antiracist, inclusive education framework, multi-centric education acknowledges multiple ways of knowing and making sense of the world, represented by different centres of knowledge based on diverse ethno-cultural and spiritual traditions. Despite the fact that there are many different centres of knowledge, only one has been overwhelmingly privileged in the school.

As an alternative to this dominant approach, school principals can promote a ‘critical integrative approach’ (Zine, 2002) to schooling based on a multi-centric framework that
works to de-centre Euro-centric knowledge so that indigenous knowledge and spiritual ways of knowing may share centre stage. A critical integrative approach uses diversity as a starting point for knowledge integration, in which historical achievements of all societies are examined, validated, and respected. This approach does not necessarily require educators to do more but to do things differently and begin to challenge the status quo.

In diverse schools, endless ‘problems’ are opportunities for vital learning. In multicultural schools that address issues of diversity, ‘problems’ are not viewed as occasions for more rules and tighter management but these difficult events become the heart of the curriculum. Schooling is viewed as living, not a preparation for living (Haberman, 2003). As Haberman (2003) says, as students proceed through school, they should be developing ever greater understanding for human differences. Differences in race, culture, religion, and ethnicity are issues that youth need to constantly reconsider in an effort to make sense of the world and its relationships and their place in it. More than ever before, the growing diversity and increasing pluralism of schools require educational leaders to be socially competent in ways that demonstrate respect, mutual understanding, justice, and concern for students who are culturally and linguistically unlike them – students who differ racially and ethnically. It is not possible for an educational leader to know every important aspect of each diverse culture represented in public schools. It is, however, important for the principal to demonstrate openness and authentic responsiveness to the heritage, values, and expressions of each cultural group represented in the school. Leaders must consistently model socially competent attitudes, values, and dispositions by demonstrating interactions that are shaped by understanding.
With strong principal leadership in multicultural communities, diverse schools can become places where students can apply great ideals to their everyday lives. By determining what should be done about particular matters and defending their ideals, students develop principles to live by. Character is built by students who have had practice at comparing ideals with reality in their own lives and in the lives of those around them.

**Promoting Inclusive Practices Within Schools**

Research has illustrated how frequently and easily educational administrators accept the status quo with its problems and conflicts without noticing the extent to which problems actually exist or the extent to which schools make invisible those things which ought to be carefully examined (Dei 2000; Solomon, 2002). It is incumbent on educational leaders to help all members of the school community to critique the very structures and stories that have been constructed, to educate others about perceived problems and inequities, and lead the movement for transformation which will empower all members of the community, particularly the conditions for ELL learners.

Starratt (1991) suggests that in order to implement this ethic, discussions about curriculum, about textbooks, about visiting speakers and so on must be carried on, not simply to raise levels on standardized tests but for the moral questions they raise about public life in the community. Starratt goes on to suggest that the deep culture of the school is an important area to address. The relationships among instructional strategies, student empowerment, and approaches to assessment which focus on advocacy rather than legitimization are of the utmost importance in a diverse community.
At times, working in diverse communities can be unrewarding and difficult. Based on the challenges mentioned by the principals involved in this study, this has been substantiated. However, one of the most important contributions principals can make would be to increase teacher competencies about literacy learning for ELL students and how to reach those goals.

The movement towards a professional learning community is one way to address this need. The development of schools as professional learning communities helps to improve teaching quality and in turn raise student achievement. In this environment, teachers support one another to develop best practices and share effective methods and pedagogy. This may be an important strategy in all schools but it is particularly pressing in diverse communities where other resources may be limited. Principals have an important role in the development of professional learning communities in at least two ways: through their attention to teacher development around issues of inclusiveness, language development in the ELL learner and also by creating and sustaining networks of conversation in their schools around issues of teaching and learning with particular focus on the needs of diverse language learners.

Principals have the task of creating conditions and practices within the school that address the needs of diverse students. One of the critical factors identified as contributing to school effectiveness is the principal’s instructional leadership (Leithwood, 2003). This challenge necessitates building classrooms and schools in which community is genuine, work is meaningful for all students, diversity is appreciated and respected, and change is empowering. Principals have a role to play in working towards classroom practice that is experiential; students must explore their own experience as a source of learning about
equality. Since competition maintains inequality and cooperation fosters equity, principals must work towards classroom norms, and in turn school norms, that are cooperative. Leaders in diverse communities must cultivate cooperation, communication, and interpersonal understanding in all aspects of school life.

Research shows (George, 2002) that student participation in co-curricular activities is reflected in improved academic achievement. George goes on to say that students who maintain their cultural identity as they become acculturated to Canadian schools are more successful academically. When the school atmosphere is one of acceptance and inclusion, and when students and staff celebrate each other’s diversity as well as commonalities, students are more likely to become involved in all aspects of the school’s life. Principals even have a role to play in encouraging co-curricular activities that are reflective of a diverse community. The goal of student activities in a multicultural school, as in all other aspects of school life, is to capitalize on each student’s unique abilities and perspectives.

**Building Connections Between Schools and Communities**

Principals who serve in diverse school communities must have an understanding of the communities in which the schools are embedded, both within neighbourhoods and within the network of organizations and institutions through which the students move. In diverse communities it is important to expand the understanding of models of parental involvement.

The school principal can play an important role in developing and supporting the parents’ role in the diverse community. There is now extensive evidence on the positive impact of parental involvement on children’s educational outcomes (Epstein, 1995). Studies
have documented that meaningful school/family relations are even more critical when parents and teachers come from different cultural and racial backgrounds because these two stakeholder groups are likely to differ in their approaches to child rearing (Holloway et al., 1998). Other studies have demonstrated the positive impact of parental involvement on minority children's educational outcomes.

Many parents new to Canada have not learned the meaning of participating in a school system which requires different sociocultural knowledge and practices from the school system they knew. At times, the ways in which parents participate may not be considered as the proper type of involvement by the school. The school may inadvertently discourage parents by requiring a particular educational level for participation; prescribing the type of involvement required by parents; or requiring proficient English skills. It is not surprising then, that in diverse communities, the levels of parent participation may be seen as 'low'. Even when immigrant parents are fluent in English or have attended Ontario schools, cultural barriers to traditional involvement often remain.

Lack of comfort and familiarity with the school system may foster a sense of isolation and helplessness for many parents who may not have the skills to communicate with the school as the school may expect. The school principal can play an important role by opening the dialogue between the school and the home and in so doing, help parents to realize that they have something to offer. Through this dialogue, the school principal can help parents become more engaged in the process of their child’s education.

In order to address the need for future school leaders to understand diversity, the Ontario Ministry of Education needs to look at including a diversity component into the
Principals’ Qualification courses offered through the various universities. As well, for those principals already in the field, Boards of Education can support these leaders by continually offering professional learning opportunities around cultural sensitivity, equity/diversity issues, and creating inclusive schools.
Epilogue

The findings of the research have confirmed my thoughts about working in a diverse community and will definitely impact my work within the school and within the learning network.

Within the school, I will continue to work to help parents engage within the school and school community in culturally sensitive ways in order to impact positively on their children’s education. Sometimes this is a challenge and will need careful thought, consideration, and input from the community.

It will be necessary to continue monitoring and tracking the progress of the ELL students to ensure that they are making appropriate progress and achieving high academic standards.

And lastly, at the school level, we will continue to work in the area of fair and equitable assessment practices to ensure that ELL students are able to demonstrate their learning and academic skills.

At the learning network level, in conjunction with colleagues, I would like to share the findings of the research and discuss how we, as a network, can work together to implement or build on some of the practices captured; for instance, teachers working collaboratively to support ELL students.

Also, perhaps as principals, we can develop some common understandings of what a rich and effective ESL program might look like. Secondly, as a network, we may delve deeper into culturally sensitive practices in order to make our schools more welcoming and
supportive of new Canadians. We can explore ways to foster parental engagement to help parents feel empowered and enabled.

At the district level, I would like to share the research with senior administration and carefully examine the ways in which our district supports the ELL student and his/her family, i.e., access to social workers, additional support personnel, or newcomer programs. Perhaps there could be further professional support for principals who work in diverse communities to help foster vibrant parental and community engagement. And lastly, the research indicates that the principals in diverse were highly committed to their communities and this seems a result of the core beliefs they reported in the study. The school district can build on this by carefully selecting principals to lead diverse communities.

Taking all of these possibilities into account, as I look to the future for ELL students and their families, I see many exciting and new opportunities to positively and significantly increase the levels of achievement for these students.
References


Education Quality and Accountability Office. wwweqao.com


Appendix A
Script for Telephone Invitation to Participate

Hello,

My name is Veronica St. Pierre. I’m a doctoral student at OISE and I am working on a study that you might find interesting. The study addresses how the principal in a multicultural school setting addresses the learning needs of second language learners.

Using the results of E.Q.A.O. testing in a diverse school population, your school represented the type of community that I would be interested in having participated in my research study. The study would involve a semi-structured interview that would last approximately one to one and a half hours during which time we would discuss how your school addresses the learning needs of second language students.

Would you be interested in participating?

Thank you.
Appendix B
Informed Letter of Consent to Participants

Letterhead

Veronica St. Pierre  
Doctoral Candidate  
Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning  
OISE/UT

Date

Written Consent Form for the Study  
Successful leadership practices in diverse elementary schools to address the literacy learning of English Language Learning (ELL) students: Reflections of Ten Principals

Dear (principal),

Please consider this opportunity for (name of school) to participate in a study that I am conducting about the ways in which elementary school principals support the language learning of second language students. (name of school) P.S. of the (name of school board) School Board, was recommended to participate because of your strong E.Q.A.O. results and your commitment to student achievement. As well, your school has a multicultural population with a variety of languages represented in the student population.

This study is being conducted in fulfillment of the thesis requirement for my doctorate at OISE/UT. The study will be conducted under the supervision of Professor Jim Cummins.
In this study, I wish to examine successful practices of schools who address the needs of second language learners and the principal’s role in establishing and/or cultivating these practices. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. discuss how the principal, as the pivotal player in the school, supports the learning of all students but in particular the learning needs of second language learners;
2. discuss the leadership style of the principal;
3. discuss the use of key people in the school;
4. discuss the innovative practices established in the school.

I would like to invite school leaders to participate in an interview. The interview will be approximately one to one and a half hours in length and will focus on the above mentioned areas. The interviews will take place in the late winter/early spring. I will use an interview guide to outline the topics but expect the conversation will flow naturally according to the participants’ interest and experiences. The interviews will be audio-taped with your permission and later transcribed by me. I would like the participant to choose the time and location on the school site to conduct the interviews. After the interviews have been transcribed, I will send you a copy of your interview for your feedback.

There will also be an opportunity for interested participants to contribute to a focus group session after some preliminary results are analysed. At this time a draft summary of the results will be provided. This would take place in the winter of 2006.

All the information collected will be used to understand the nature of the principal’s role in supporting the language learning of second language students in the Ontario context. This would be an opportunity to gather best practices in order to support our ELL students. This will be very helpful to principals as they strive to address the challenge of increased numbers of students entering Ontario schools with little or no English.

I will be using pseudonyms for you, your school, and your Board. I will not use any information that would reveal your identity. Furthermore, the interview materials, notes, audio-tapes will be kept in a locked file for no more than five years. Only my supervisor and I will have access to this data. After that time, they will be destroyed.
Participating in this study is completely voluntary. You and any participant may withdraw from the process at any time at which time all your transcripts and data will be destroyed. At no time will you or any participant be judged or evaluated or be at risk of any harm. There will be no value judgements placed on your responses.

However, due to the small nature of the study and the participation in a focus group there may be a loss of anonymity for the participants.

I can be reached at veronica.stpierre@yrdsb.edu.on.ca or at home at (416) 264-3895. My supervisor, Jim Cummins can also be reached at jcummins@oise.utoronto.ca

Your signature below indicates your consent to be involved in the study.

Please keep this written consent form.

Thank you for your interest. I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,
Veronica St. Pierre
Informed Consent for participation in doctoral research study:

“Successful leadership practices in diverse elementary schools to address the literacy learning of English Language Learning (ELL) students: Reflections of Ten Principals.”

I have read and understand the information and the conditions of the study. I agree to participate in the research and understand that I may withdraw at any time.

___________________________________  ___________________
signature of the participant      date

___________________________________  ___________________
signature of the interviewer     date
Appendix C
Individual Interview Questionnaire for Principals

Guiding Interview Questions

What is the cultural mix of students at your school?

Some would see cultural diversity as a potential area of difficulty; others would see it as a strength. How do you view cultural diversity? Please explain using specific examples.

Talk a little bit about your core beliefs as an administrator.
   a) regarding student learning;
   b) teacher practice;
   c) your role as an administrator

How would you describe your leadership style? What do you see as your strengths? What weaknesses/areas for growth?

Many would say that the primary purpose of the school leader’s role is to support improved student learning. What would you say about this statement? Please explain.

Your school has been identified for this study because there is evidence that the leadership practices you employ are having success in improving student learning, particularly the learning of ELL students. What do you see as the critical factors in your practice that make a difference for student learning at your school? Please give specific examples.

How does your school serve the needs of minority language learners at all grade levels and developmental levels? Please illustrate using specific examples.

Talk a little bit about how you use key people on your staff. Lead teachers; SERT; Literacy teacher; ELL teacher(s).

What are your expectations around assessment practices? How do teachers adjust their practices to accommodate minority language students?

Would you say that your current practices are different from those that you might have employed in the past given your particular context and community? Please give specific examples.

How do you remain current and knowledgeable in your professional practice?

Is there any professional opportunity that you would have sought before being placed in such a diverse community?
What suggestions could you offer to help prepare administrators for leading diverse communities?

What future plans do you have to further address the learning needs of second language students in your school?

Is there anything else that you would like to add that we have not touched on?
Appendix D

Focus Group Questions

1. Do you feel that there is a clear direction from the Ministry of Education and the school Board in addressing the needs of ELL students?

2. How is this or how has this been communicated?

3. What do you need as an administrator in a diverse community to address the needs of the ELL students?

4. How could these supports role out to your community/school?