Education and the Unschooled Student: Teachers’ Discourses on Teaching Elementary School English Literacy Development Students

by

Katherine Brubacher

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto

© Copyright by Katherine Brubacher (2011)
Based on empirical qualitative data collected by interviewing eight elementary school teachers from across four different school boards in Ontario and analyzing new Ontario Ministry of Education policy and guidelines for supporting and programming for English Literacy Development (ELD) students, this research seeks to better understand how teachers’ discourses influence their perception of ELD students’ experiences in elementary schools. In particular, I look at how they view their roles as teachers, the purpose of education and schooling, their personal views on diversity, and how they program literacy for ELD students. The participants’ discourses reveal that although they prioritize having positive relationships with their students, they often struggled to relate positively with their ELD students. Reassessing how the formal school is structured and providing directed professional development on teaching ELD students could work towards creating more positive learning experiences for ELD students in Ontario elementary schools.
Acknowledgments

I would like to begin by thanking all of the teachers who participated in my study. For teachers, it is not always easy to find time for anything, and I appreciate the hours of personal reflection and discussion you gave to my study. Your words have kept me grounded in reality in the months I have spent analyzing my data and writing my thesis.

I wish to express my thanks to all those people who have supported me through the process of researching and writing my thesis. I would like to acknowledge my thesis supervisor Dr. Diane Gérin-Lajoie for guiding me through all the challenges of the research process. Without her insightful guidance and advice, I would have been lost. I would also like to thank my second reader, Dr. Jim Cummins, for his thoughtful input and suggestions. Finally, I would like to thank all of the wonderful women who I have met at OISE. You have not only supported me in many ways throughout my thesis process, but have also reminded me that to be a critical teacher concerned with social justice is something to be admired.
Contents

Abstract ............................................................................................................................... ii
Acknowledgments .............................................................................................................. iii
Chapter 1: Introduction ...................................................................................................... 1
  1.1 Context of the Study ................................................................................................. 1
  1.2 Definitions of Different Language Learners ............................................................. 5
  1.3 The Empirical Study ................................................................................................. 7
  1.4 Structure of the Thesis ............................................................................................ 12
Chapter 2 Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review .............................................. 13
  2.1 Theoretical Foundations .......................................................................................... 13
    2.1.1 Literacy and multilingual students ................................................................... 16
    2.1.2 Philosophy of teaching ..................................................................................... 19
  2.2 Literature Review .................................................................................................... 20
    2.2.1 Schooling and research on ELD students’ educational experiences in North America .................................................................................................................................. 21
    2.2.2 Teachers’ Discourses ....................................................................................... 35
    2.2.3 Evolving notions of literacy ............................................................................. 49
  2.3 Conclusion .............................................................................................................. 57
Chapter 3: Methodology of Study ..................................................................................... 59
  3.1 Framework .............................................................................................................. 59
  3.2 Techniques .............................................................................................................. 62
    3.2.1 Document analysis ........................................................................................... 62
    3.2.2 Interviews ......................................................................................................... 63
  3.3 Empirical Study ...................................................................................................... 64
    3.3.1 Participants ....................................................................................................... 64
    3.3.2 Interviews ......................................................................................................... 65
    3.3.3 Document Analysis .......................................................................................... 66
  3.4 Analysis ................................................................................................................... 67
Chapter 4: Ontario Ministry Documents on Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling .................................................................................................... 70
  4.1 Framing an understanding of ELLs ........................................................................ 71
  4.2 The use of prior knowledge in the classroom .......................................................... 76
  4.3 Schooling vs. education ......................................................................................... 79
  4.4 Assimilation to formal schooling norms .................................................................. 81
4.5 Transforming school structures – non-formal education and informal education/learning................................................................. 85
4.6 Summary ......................................................................................................................... 91

Chapter 5 Philosophies of Teaching, Education and ELD Students ......................... 93
5.1 Sheila .......................................................... 93
  5.1.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching .............................................................. 94
  5.1.2 ELD Students and Their Programming ............................................................ 96
5.2 Lisa .......................................................................................................................... 98
  5.2.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching .............................................................. 98
  5.2.2 ELD Students and Their Programming .......................................................... 101
5.3 Sara ....................................................................................................................... 103
  5.3.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching ............................................................ 103
  5.3.2 ELD Students and Their Programming .......................................................... 106
5.4 Jenny ..................................................................................................................... 108
  5.4.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching ............................................................ 109
  5.4.2 ELD Students and Their Programming .......................................................... 111
5.5 Melissa .................................................................................................................. 113
  5.5.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching ............................................................ 114
  5.5.2 ELD Students and Their Programming .......................................................... 116
5.6 Theresa .................................................................................................................. 118
  5.6.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching ............................................................ 119
  5.6.2 ELD Students and Their Programming .......................................................... 121
5.7 Sean ....................................................................................................................... 123
  5.7.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching ............................................................ 124
  5.7.2 ELD Students and Their Programming .......................................................... 126
5.8 Denise ................................................................................................................... 128
  5.8.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching ............................................................ 128
  5.8.2 ELD Students and Their Programming .......................................................... 130
5.9 Summary ............................................................................................................... 132

Chapter 6 Understanding Teachers’ Philosophies of Teaching ............................... 133
6.1 The role of the teacher ......................................................................................... 133
6.2 Views on Diversity ............................................................................................... 137
6.3 Redefining schooling .......................................................................................... 141
6.4 Transformative Pedagogy .................................................................................. 145
6.5 Inclusion of parents ............................................................................................ 148
Chapter 7 Multiliteracies - authentic literacy programs for ELD students .......... 153
7.1 Authentic literacy practices ......................................................................... 153
7.2 Textbooks and phonics based learning ......................................................... 157
7.3 Prior learning experiences ............................................................................. 161
7.4 Home languages in the school ..................................................................... 165
7.5 Home language not a written language ......................................................... 170
7.6 Conclusion ..................................................................................................... 173
Chapter 8 Conclusions ......................................................................................... 175
8.1 Making sense of the study’s findings ............................................................. 175
8.2 Reflections on collaborative and coercive relationships ............................... 179
8.3 The contribution of the present study ........................................................... 181
8.4 Avenues for further research .......................................................................... 183
References ........................................................................................................... 187
Appendix: Interview Protocol .............................................................................. 196
Chapter 1:  
Introduction

1.1 Context of the Study

Some of the most vulnerable students in Ontario elementary schools are new immigrants. Students arrive in Ontario with a variety of different languages and highly diverse experiences with formal schooling. Some of these children will have experienced success with consistent schooling in either their first language (L1) or in English medium schools in their home countries, while others will have had only limited access to formal schooling due to war, violence, isolation, poverty or, even, choice. All students who are in the process of learning English are labelled as English Language Learners (ELLs) in the Ontario education system (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007); however, there is a sub-group of ELLs who are not only learning English, but may not have had access to consistent schooling in their home countries. These students are supported under the English Literacy Development (ELD) program (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). The Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling (2008) defines an ELD student as

most often from countries in which their access to education has been limited, and they have had limited opportunities to develop language and literacy skills in any language. Schooling in their countries of origin has been inconsistent, disrupted, or even completely unavailable throughout the years that these children would otherwise have been in school. As a result, they arrive in Ontario schools with significant gaps in their education. (pp. 7)
Students with limited prior schooling come to Ontario schools having had fewer opportunities to develop their literacy skills in formal school settings than other English Language Learners.

Since becoming a support teacher for new immigrants in elementary schools, I have been interested in how teachers’ discourses on their purposes as educators reflect how they perceive new immigrants especially ELD students. Ontario schools may be places where ELD students have their first consistent experiences with teachers. How their teachers view their roles as educators can greatly colour the students’ impressions of and success with the elementary education system in Ontario. Teachers’ perceptions of and relationships with these students who are being mainstreamed into a system of learning that may be completely foreign to their previous life experiences play a central role in new immigrant children’s educational experiences. Teachers’ views of themselves as educators become key to these students’ success as learners within formal schooling. Cummins (2001) finds that students’ relationships with their teachers “are more central to student success than any method for teaching literacy, or science or math” (p.1). Hence, a strong commitment from teachers to support students in their schooling needs to exist.

The elementary school years are an important time in the development of students’ construction of themselves as learners. Students’ early experiences with teachers can influence how students perceive schooling for the rest of their educational careers. ELD students may have little or no previous experience in a formal classroom setting. Many of ELD students’ previous classroom experiences, especially if they have been inconsistent or interrupted, may have already negatively impacted how they view themselves as learners. English (2009) finds that how teachers define their roles as
teachers can constrain all ELLs’ experiences in the classroom. Teachers may be delivering negative messages to students even if unintentionally. For ELD students, being in a classroom may be a new experience and teachers risk pushing students towards unhealthy constructions of themselves as learners, by defining their roles as teachers of content only and not teachers of all students.

ELD students have an even greater challenge in positioning themselves within the hierarchy of formal schooling. How to interact with teachers in a way that is expected by the formal school system may be a strange and mysterious, and at times, overwhelming, situation for the ELD student. In the United States, Fry (2005) claims that nearly one-quarter of all ELLs and that 70% of all ELD students who arrive as teenagers drop-out of school (p. ii). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) also finds that some ELLs drop-out at higher rates:

- students from the English-speaking Caribbean, students from East Africa, and students from Latin America, as well as Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking students (immigrant and Canadian-born) have a dropout rate of 30-40% or more compared with about 20% for Canadian-born English-speaking students and about 10% for students from Eastern Europe and East Asia.

Although not differentiating between ELD students and other ELLs, it is clear that in Ontario the drop-out rates are twice as high for students immigrating to Canada from specific regions as opposed to Canadian-born English speaking students and East Asians and Eastern Europeans. Therefore, teachers must be careful not to deliver negative messages that will further marginalize their ELD students’ educational experiences.

Over the past five years, I have worked with all types of ELLs in middle schools as both a mainstream teacher and ESL/ELD support teacher. Most teachers working in the Greater Toronto Area will have at some point taught an ELL, if not an ELD student.
In the Toronto District School Board, for example, 47% of students in Grade 3 speak a language other than English at home (Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2011a). Also, in the Peel District School Board 32% of students in Grade 3 are defined as ELLs and 53% have a language other than English as their L1 (Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2011b). The Ontario Ministry of Education (2010) finds that through information gathered in 2005/2006 from standardized testing 20% of students in English-language elementary schools in Ontario are ELLs. Although school boards outside of Toronto may not have the same number of ELLs, the number of newcomers to smaller cities and rural areas continues to grow. For example, in the Waterloo District School Board 12% of Grade 3 students are labelled ELLs and 20% speak a language other than English at home (Education Quality and Accountability Office, 2011c).

Children from a variety of different linguistic, cultural and ethnic backgrounds are a part of my and many others’ teaching experiences in the Toronto area and throughout Ontario. However, it is teachers’ perspectives on the ELLs who receive support within the English Literacy Development (ELD) program that I wish to critically examine at this time. ELD students make up a small part of students speaking the international languages listed above. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) states that “very little Canadian research exists about a small subgroup of English language learners (ELLs) with limited prior schooling, yet these students are in Canadian classrooms and will continue to arrive on an ongoing basis.” (p.3) Very little is known about the way ELD students are being viewed, supported and mainstreamed into schools in Ontario. The Toronto Board of Education (1995) completed a report on the experiences of refugee students in Toronto. This report describes some of these refugee students as having limited prior schooling.
However, not all ELD students are refugees and not all refugees are ELD students. Therefore, despite having been a part of the Ontario education system for a number of years, ELD students are often forgotten in research into new immigrants’ educational experiences in Ontario elementary schools.

1.2 Definitions of Different Language Learners

First, I have chosen to use the term English Language Learner (ELL) to describe students who are in the process of learning the English language. Historically, this type of learner has been referred to as an English as a Second Language (ESL) student. Currently, however, the term ESL is used to refer to the program through which ELLs receive support (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007). Moreover, the term ESL negates the fact that many language learners are fluent in a plethora of languages, not just one, or English may be a student’s first language, but the student may speak another vernacular form of English than is predominantly used in Canadian schools. Cummins (2001) states that “children who speak a non-standard variety of English (or their L1) are frequently thought of as handicapped educationally and less capable of logical thinking” (p. 60). Instead of framing students who speak a non-standard form of English as not having a language under the term ESL, students will be thought of instead as being in the process of learning English, which, in this case, is Standardized Canadian English. ELL has become a commonly used term in Ontario and is used in formal documents. The Ontario Ministry of Education document (2007) defines ELLs as

students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English, or is a variety of English that is significantly different from the variety used for instruction in Ontario’s schools, and who may require focused educational supports to assist them
in attaining proficiency in English. These students may be Canadian born or recently arrived from other countries. They come from diverse backgrounds and school experiences, and have a wide variety of strengths and needs. (pp. 8)

However, this thesis sets out to examine only one type of ELL - those that are some of the most disenfranchised students in the Ontario elementary education system: those arriving in Ontario with limited prior schooling (ELD students).

Many terms have been used to describe the ELD student. Hamayan (1994) describes ELD students as nonliterate, low-literacy backgrounds and lower than-expected levels of literacy in both their native language and second language. Freeman and Freeman (2001) write that “they have been labelled as overage, preliterate, or low literacy” (p. 203). All of these labels marginalize the ELD student as the outsider - someone who does not belong in the mainstream. Another term that is used by researchers Decapua, Smathers and Tang (2009) is students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). They prefer the use of this term because they believe it is important to emphasize both the limited as well as interrupted nature of students’ previous education (p. 2). They find that the term SIFE, which does not include the word limited, that the National Association of Bilingual Educators and New York State have adopted does not include students who have never been enrolled in formal schooling or students who come from schools where requirements are vastly different. However, I find that these terms continue to label students in terms of what they are missing or lacking instead of what they are in the process of learning or developing. Therefore, throughout my thesis I will refer to these students as ELD students: students who are in the process of developing their literacy skills in the English language.
Who is the ELD student? What criteria are necessary in being labelled as a low-literacy, over-age student. Hamayan (1994) defines the ELD student as “likely to come from one of the following environments: isolated rural communities with one-room schools, refugee camps, war-torn countries, and families with persistent migration patterns” (p. 281). Many complex situations can place students in a position where they have limited access to schooling. Regardless of their level of schooling, these students arrive at school with a rich array of previous experiences and their own unique interactions with literacy.

These current definitions of ELLs and ELD students have only been in place in Ontario since 2008. I will briefly review previous conceptions of the programs, as they may influence teachers’ discourses on ELD students. Previous Ontario Ministry of Education documents (2001) definitions of ELD students include students “who come from communities where Standard English is the official language but where other varieties of English are in common use” (p. 6). Vernacular English speaking students were placed in the ELD program under the definition put in place between 2001 and 2008; whereas, they are currently supported as part of the ESL program unless they have significant gaps in their education.

1.3 The Empirical Study

The main purpose of this study is to understand teachers’ discourses on teaching ELD students. Specifically, I examine the discourses teachers use to describe students coming from different ethnic, cultural, schooling and educational backgrounds by answering the following questions:
• How do teachers’ underlying philosophies about schooling and teaching influence their perceptions of ELD students in mainstream classrooms?
• What role do discourses on literacy and diversity play in shaping teachers’ perceptions of ELD students?
• How do teachers’ discourses reflect how they perceive the success or failure of ELD students in their classrooms?

I examine how teachers understand themselves as educators, how they relate to their ELD students, how teachers make sense of the diverse group of students with whom they work, and teachers’ views on and use of multiliteracies.

To answer these questions, I conducted an empirical study with a small number of elementary school teachers and examined the following Ontario Ministry of Education documents on ELD students: *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling: A Practical guide for Ontario educators Grade 3 to 12* (2008) and *Supporting English Language Learners - ESL and ELD Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (2007). I also met with eight participants to conduct individual semi-structured interviews. During these interviews, I asked them to speak about their perspectives on ELD students in their classrooms including questions on their philosophy of teaching, literacy and diversity.

Literacy is framed through a multi-literacies lens in that literacy is understood to be a form of critical literacy that asks teachers to incorporate the cultural and linguistic aspects of students’ lives and critically examine pervasive discourses present in a range of different text forms (New London Group, 1996). Teachers’ philosophies of teaching will
be understood as a position a teacher takes that is based on a set of beliefs about teaching, education, society and how young people learn (Oliva, 2005).

Teachers’ philosophies of teaching are one way to examine teachers’ discourses on teaching and the role of education in general. What are the values and beliefs that influence their teaching? By looking at teachers’ discourses on teaching, I hope to gain greater insight into what it is that motivates them as teachers. A philosophy of teaching is a way of examining teachers’ discourses through their reflective practice. Campoy (2005) finds that a philosophy of teaching is reflective of a teacher’s “deep-rooted beliefs, values and attitudes about children and learning” (p. 53). When developing a philosophy of teaching, she asks that teachers first reflect on their own values and beliefs about teaching, then connect those ideas to actual classroom experience and, finally, add in knowledge about pedagogy. For Campoy (2005), a philosophy of teaching is the interaction of experience, knowledge and pedagogy. Tompkins (2008) writes about the differences between a philosophy of teaching and education finding that a “philosophy of teaching places the accent on the process of teaching, while a philosophy of education emphasizes the system of principles” (p. i). However, I believe that the process of teaching and a teacher’s system of principles are deeply entwined and reflective of each other. While not aiming to prove the connection between theory and practice, this thesis aims to look at teachers’ thoughts on teaching as both a process and a principle and how this reflects their perceptions of ELD students.

In my study of teachers’ perspectives on new immigrants arriving in Ontario with limited prior schooling, I include teachers’ discourses on all ELD students in elementary schools. Many of the ELD students I have worked with come from Caribbean countries.
Most of these students will have had access to formal schooling but for some of them that access will have been inconsistent. However, I have also worked with students from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Honduras and Pakistan who have arrived in Ontario having missed years of formal schooling. Much of the research completed in the United States on students with limited prior schooling has been done within the Hispanic population as well as a number of studies on Pacific South Asian students (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Mace-Matluck, B., R. Alexander-Kasparik & R. Queen, 1998). Teachers working in other communities may have had more experiences with students from a different array of ethnicities. Therefore, examining teachers’ discourses on one particular ethnicity may be too restrictive.

Previous empirical and theoretical studies have been conducted on teachers’ discourses for educating new immigrants (Yokota-Adachi, 1999; Cummins, 2000; Lugo Colon, 2007; Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; Yoon, 2008; English, 2009; Cummins, 2009). For example, Yokota-Adachi (1999) compares the educational values of Japanese parents and Canadian teachers through the use of qualitative interviews. Similarly, Gérin-Lajoie (2008a) compares Anglophone and Francophone teachers’ and principals’ discourses on race, ethnicity and language in Metropolitan Toronto. English (2009) examines ideological assumptions within local discourses on the roles of teachers and labelling of ELLs, and, finally, Cummins (2000) looks at how teachers’ beliefs about literacy, cultural knowledge and language development influence how they perceive ELLs and work towards creating coercive or collaborative relationships with these students.

This research differs from those studies in that it focuses on teachers’ discourses on a subset of English Language Learners, those with limited prior schooling: ELD
students. I chose to study teachers’ perceptions on this group of learners because they offer a complex study that incorporates culture, language, race, ethnicity, literacy, schooling and class. ELD students are some of the most vulnerable students in our education system – not only due to issues surrounding literacy and schooling but because they often come from racially, linguistically, culturally and financially disenfranchised groups. Freire (2003) states

The truth is, however, that the oppressed are not “marginals,” are not people living “outside” society. They have always been “inside” — inside the structure which made them “beings for others.” The solution is not to “integrate” them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become “beings for themselves”. (pp. 74)

Educators must look at their own perceptions that view these students as the “other” that needs to change to meet the needs of schools. Marx (2006) writes about how teachers’ discourses are often masked in a politically correct, color-blind language that constructs ELLs and children of color as being at a deficit. Again, the system does not transform to include students’ experiences, but forces them into an oppressive structure that sees them as lacking the necessary qualities of a correct or proper student: English, wealth, white and previous schooling. Therefore, by looking closely at teachers’ perceptions of ELD students and how they pertain to their own beliefs, I hope to better understand how teachers can best support and educate ELD learners.

I have also chosen to work with elementary school teachers who teach and support ELD students. This is because at the elementary school level ELD students are often mainstreamed into regular classrooms (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Therefore, ELD students are often educated by classroom teachers not language and
literacy specialist teachers. Researchers find that there is little training for inclusion, diversity and language teaching in pre-service programs (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008b; Cummins, 2001; Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002). Teachers are unprepared to deal with teaching new immigrants let alone a student arriving in the classroom with very little prior schooling or exposure to reading and writing in their first language.

1.4 Structure of the Thesis

The next chapter is concerned with the conceptual framework of the study. I present ideas and theories by looking at research that has already been conducted in the area of my research topic. Chapter 3 is a summary of my qualitative methodology. Here, I outline how I went about my study including the use of semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Next, I analyse the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007, 2008) documents presenting my thoughts on how these documents influence teachers’ discourses on teaching ELD students in elementary schools. Chapter 5 is a set of profiles of my eight participants. I give a brief summary of their teaching experiences and professional qualifications followed by a description of their philosophies of teaching and views on literacy with ELD students in particular. The next two chapters are an analysis of the participants’ views on teaching ELD students. I begin by examining how they view their roles as teachers and the role of the school. I then analyse how they incorporate diversity and critical thinking into their pedagogy. I also examine their discourses on literacy from a multiliteracies perspective. The final chapter is a summary of my findings and suggestions for further research.
Chapter 2
Theoretical Foundations and Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations

Within the field of qualitative research, my study takes a critical point of view that examines teachers’ discourses on teaching ELD students. As the experiences of ELD students are complex and understudied, for my framework I will combine the areas of multiliteracies and philosophies of teaching to better understand the macro-level forces informing the choices teachers make in the classroom. Cummins (2000, 2001, 2009) has produced similar work by studying how educators and educational structures can use collaborative or coercive forms of power when educating ELLs. I am using Jim Cummins' work on teachers’ choices in creating collaborative or coercive relationships with ELLs to structure my own conceptual framework. Through an examination of teachers’ philosophies of teaching and multiliteracies practices, my study seeks to understand teachers’ discourses or underlying ideas about diversity, literacy and education and how those ideas influence the educational experiences of ELD students.

In his research, Cummins (2000) (see Figure 1) asks researchers to first examine the larger discourses and interactions that exist between subordinated and dominant communities before looking at the educational structures and choices teachers make that determine whether students have a positive, collaborative schooling experience where their identity is affirmed or whether coercive relations of power continue to subordinate their learning experiences. By using this orientation, he looks at “how power relations in the broader society get translated into educational failure within the schools” (p. 43).
Some of his themes include teachers’ incorporation of students’ cultural and linguistic knowledge, community participation, pedagogy and assessment. He compares programs that lead to academically and personally empowered students to those that create academically disempowered and resistant students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COERCIVE RELATIONS OF POWER MANIFESTED IN THE MACRO-INTERACTIONS BETWEEN DOMINANT GROUP INSTITUTIONS AND SUBORDINATED COMMUNITIES</th>
<th>AMBIVALENT/INSECURE OR RESISTANT SUBORDINATED GROUP IDENTITY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EDUCATOR ROLE DEFINITIONS ↔ EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICRO-INTERACTIONS BETWEEN EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS reflecting a TRANSFORMATIVE/INTERCULTURAL ORIENTATION</td>
<td>EXCUSIONARY/ASSIMILATIONIST ORIENTATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural/Linguistic Incorporation Additive Subtractive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community Participation Collaborative Exclusionary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedagogy Transformative ‘Banking’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Advocacy Legitimation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓ Academically And Personally Disabled or Empowered Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>↓ Resistant Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 Cummins (2000, p. 45)
In his findings, teachers’ choices and role definitions as well as educational structures are central to ELLs’ success in school. Cummins uses the terms *Exclusionary/Assimilationist* orientations to refer to when “the goal of education was either to exclude certain groups from the mainstream of society or assimilate them completely” (p. 45). In this case, teachers and educational structures create disabled and resistant students. On the other hand, Cummins (2000) defines *Transformative/Intercultural* as “the orientation required to challenge the operation of coercive relations of power in the school and wider society” (p. 45). He finds this form of pedagogy to be democratic and empowering in that it works towards racial and cultural equality. This way of teaching should include critical literacy, which is literacy that asks students to not only decode a text but to read between the lines in order to understand how power is exercised through texts. In general, Cummins research examines how teachers’ choices and role definitions as well as educational structures support ELLs’ learning.

My conceptual framework seeks to analyse teachers’ discourses on ELD students by examining how teachers’ discourses reveal relationships and interactions with their students that further marginalize them within the classroom or work towards creating positive learning environments. My research is different from Cummins in that I will begin by examining teachers’ philosophies of teaching in order to understand their thoughts on education and teaching in general. Moreover, philosophies of teaching is a terminology that is common in the discourses of Ontario educators when reflecting on

---

1 It should be noted that within a Canadian context, the term *Intercultural* takes on different meanings. Gérin-Lajoie (2008a) writes that *Intercultural education* is a term used in Quebec to describe the integration of newcomers into Quebec society through open dialogue. However, she finds that in practice it is used as a way to assimilate newcomers into the majority society.
their role definitions and their thoughts about schooling in general. In this way, questioning and reflections around philosophies of teaching should be familiar to the teacher participants in this study. Similar to Cummins’ work, teachers, in their philosophies of teaching, also discuss pedagogy and the involvement of the community. In these ways, the philosophies of teaching are similar to Cummins’ analysis of educators’ role definitions. Moreover, when discussing teachers’ views on literacy, I will do so from a multiliteracies perspective that incorporates the use of students’ linguistic and cultural experiences, which Cummins highlights in his research. My research will also seek to understand teachers’ discourses on literacy that discusses their authentic and critical literacy practices. Finally, in order to understand the educational structures Cummins suggest influence the choices teachers make, I will analyse Ontario Ministry of Education policy and guidelines documents on supporting and programming for ELD students.

2.1.1 Literacy and multilingual students

Teachers’ discourses on literacy are an important aspect of students’ success in schools. Literacy is not a static concept but is understood differently in a variety of contexts. Cummins, Brown & Sayers (2007) discuss varying definitions of reading in their examination of literacy practices in the United States. They find that often documents will discuss reading, but in very different ways. Some documents describe reading as decoding, while others incorporate comprehension in their definition, while still others see reading as a process of connecting meanings to lived experiences and using inferencing skills in order to understand what is not written down. However, despite a changing society where students grapple with many different forms of literacy
outside of the school, within schools literacy often does not include technology, home languages and critical thinking and instead falls on traditional notions of literacy that focus on decoding and reading to comprehend.

For the purposes of my study, I have surveyed key literature in the area of multiliteracies. Multiliteracies is a form of critical literacy that asks teachers to incorporate the cultural and linguistic contexts in which their students live. The New London Group (1996) created the term multiliteracies to refer to the growing complexity of globalized societies where a number of cultures and languages as well as different text forms and technologies need to be considered when creating an effective literacy program. Literacy must reflect the multilingual knowledge that students bring to school. Language learning needs to be understood within social and cultural contexts. Lau (2010) finds that with multiliteracies

Students are immersed in a community of learners engaged in authentic literacy practices (situated practice) and are provided with an overt instruction of the metalanguage to describe how meaning is made through available designs. Theoretical analysis of how a design fits in with local meanings and more global meanings (critical framing) is also carried out so that students can eventually transfer and apply design to a different context (transformed practice) where their voices and expressions can be validated (pp. 19 – 20).

With multiliteracies, authentic texts are analyzed and understood as meaning makers influenced by world and local discourses. Students are asked to analyze different texts or designs and how those texts construct meaning before transferring that knowledge to new texts that validate their experiences.

If students are to understand a text deeply, lessons must focus on students’ prior knowledge and learning that validate their experiences. The inclusion of students’ prior experiences with and knowledge of literacy are central to a literacy that includes
multilingual students. In this case, Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leoni, Sandhu, & Sastri (2005) find that “prior knowledge refers not only to information or skills previously acquired in formal instruction but also to the totality of the experiences that have shaped the learner's identity and cognitive functioning” (p. 38). Knowledge is not just information or skills attained through schooling. Hence, literacy becomes a social and political act that is learned through our daily activities and experiences. It is how we choose and learn to read the world.

The languages used in the home become an essential aspect of an effective literacy program for ELLs. Taylor, Bernhard, Garg & Cummins (2008) find that despite many new ways of understanding literacy, a euro/English-centric understanding on literacy, even when pertaining to ELLs, still remains: “Teachers in schools tend to ignore these rich forms of students’ cultural and linguistic capital, focusing rather on a narrow range of monolingual, monocultural text-based literacies” (p. 274). The school becomes a graveyard of lost literacies and identities. The literacies of the home continue to be ignored. Moreover, students’ literacy experiences outside of the classroom – in the home and in the community – need to be viewed as an integral part of students’ literacy experiences in the school. English, text-based, European forms of literacy continue to dominate literacy instruction in schools today. Taylor et al. (2008) write in the Eurocentric and Anglocentric discourses dominating even culturally tolerant or celebratory schools, knowledge of languages other than English and non-western, racialized cultural forms are positioned beyond the curricular pale, marked as occasional imports from out of-school spaces but irrelevant to core learning. (pp. 272)
Even when a school views itself as tolerant and diverse, formal schooling marginalizes the use of non-official languages and cultures that are racialized in literacy programming.

### 2.1.2 Philosophy of teaching

As well as understanding teachers’ discourses on literacy, I will use teachers’ philosophies of teaching to frame my understanding of teachers’ discourses on teaching ELD students. Donnelly (2009) suggests “using a teaching philosophy to provide evidence of a teacher’s sincerely-held beliefs, codify pedagogical thinking at a particular time, examine teaching practices and monitoring one’s development as a teacher” (p. 39).

In general, a philosophy of teaching is a teacher’s vision of the purpose and process of education. However, at its essence it reflects teachers’ values and beliefs. Many elements influence how teachers view teaching. Teachers’ discourses are influenced by discourses in society in general. Donnelly (2009) finds that teachers’ philosophies can be influenced by many different things including their own experiences, readings and dialogues with colleagues. However, Oliva (2005) suggests that teachers’ beliefs need to be re-examined at times to reflect changes in society. Reflection on values and beliefs about teaching as well as an examination of theory about teaching are central to philosophies of teaching.

An important part of philosophies of teaching is a discussion of the purposes or aims of education. Oliva (2005) writes that “statements of aims of education are positions taken that are based on a set of beliefs – a philosophy of education” (p. 160). Integral to this notion are teachers’ thoughts on society in general. Oliva (2005) finds that philosophies stem from teachers’ philosophies of life. Reflections on education come from fundamental thinking about values and knowledge. Therefore, teachers must use critical reflection in order to understand the ideologies behind their teaching. Farrell
(2004) finds that researchers who emphasize critical reflection ask teachers to assess whether their professional activities are just, equitable and respectful of all students. In this case, teachers must look at the broader historical, socio-political and moral context of schooling. Student performance is placed in the wider context of school culture and socio-historical and politico-cultural contexts.

Teachers need to be critically aware of their role in the classroom. If teachers do not understand why they are teaching, then they risk using survival teaching methods. Campoy (2005) suggests that when new teachers struggle with classroom management, if they do not have a firm understanding of why they are teaching and the larger philosophy behind their teaching, they may resort to handing out candy and using reward systems. These survival techniques do not address the pervasive issues behind problems in the classroom and are only temporary solutions. Farrell (2004) also finds that reflective practice frees teachers from making impulsive decisions. Teachers must develop a philosophy through reflection and over time. The more self-aware teachers are of themselves as educators, the greater the possibility of making their beliefs a reality for students.

2.2 Literature Review

Within the context of my study, the following areas will be examined: formal schooling and the mainstreaming of ELD students, discourses on diversity and teaching, and the concept of literacy.
2.2.1 Schooling and research on ELD students’ educational experiences in North America

How teachers view schooling and their roles as educators are central to this study. First, children learn in many different and empowering ways outside of the classroom. This is especially true of ELD students who may have had many rich and varied experiences even though they attended formal schools sporadically. Researchers such as Farrell (2008) outline the norms of formal schooling which include a formal curriculum, same-age groups and a building with desks, amongst others. Formal schooling, as we know it today, has had a powerful impact on education throughout the world. Farrell (2008) finds that there is a standard set of practices for formal schooling that were created in the West and have spread throughout the world in the forms of colonization and modernization. He lists a number of criteria for formal schooling which he calls the “forms of schooling”. The following are a sample of that list:

- One hundred to several hundred children/youth assembled (often compulsory) for at least a period of time in a building called a school
- To work with a single adult, a “certified” teacher, in a single room
- With young people of roughly the same age
- With supporting learning materials, e.g. books, chalkboards, notebooks, workbooks and worksheets all of which is organized by a standard curriculum, set by an authority level much beyond the individual school
- “Students” are expected to “repeat back” to the adults what they have been taught if they are to go any higher in the educational system
Most of all of the financial support comes from national or regional
governments, or other kinds of authority levels (e.g. religion-related
schools) well above the local community level. (pp. 372)

Due to forces such as colonization and modernization, these characteristics of formal
schooling are deeply engrained in discourses on schooling throughout much of the world.

However, not all of these characteristics of formal schooling may be conducive to
the needs of ELD students. For example, Dooley (2009), an Australian researcher, found
that parents, students and educators all agreed that aged-based placement was a source of
problems. It did not give students the ability to develop their literacy skills to the level
necessary to participate in critical thinking and intensive academic areas. In this way, the
qualities of formal schooling do not work to support ELD students’ education. Other
researchers such as Rogers (2004a) undercut this notion that formal schooling is the only
way to learn. He discusses schooling and learning under the following labels: formal
schooling; non-formal education, which is a form of education that is flexible to the local
community; and informal education or learning, where children learn in everyday
situations.

This study will examine teachers’ discourses on ELD students’ adjustment from
that of a learner outside the classroom - in the home and in the community through non-
formal education and informal learning structures- to a student learning in a formal
school setting. How non-formal education is defined and understood varies across the
field but, in general, can be thought of as any type of structured education that happens
outside of the formal schooling system (Rogers, 2005b, p. 78). Rogers finds that informal
education then becomes the incidental learning that happens at work or in the home.
However, all these forms of education and schooling are interconnected. Rogers (2004b) writes that many formal schools include non-formal education such as extra-curricular activities and informal education like peer interactions and cooperative learning. Many non-formal education experiences like swimming lessons or religious training end with a certificate, which is generally used in formal schooling. Moreover, workplace training, which is often thought of as informal education, can become formalized with texts and curriculum. Therefore, the categories of schooling and education are not static. Teachers can choose to use non-formal and informal education within the structure of formal schooling or at least recognize that many rich learning experiences may occur outside of the classroom.

Students arrive in North America with a vast array of previous experiences both inside and outside of schools. Some students may have had little exposure to schooling and, therefore, little exposure to literacy in schools. Freeman & Freeman (2002) write that “many students who enter upper-elementary, middle, and high schools have little or no prior formal schooling” (p. 50). Understanding students’ prior experiences with language and how they use language outside of the school is an important part of understanding all students. This is even more so with students who have not been exposed to literacy practices in school. In particular, the ELD student who Hamayan (2004) writes “may not have a clear understanding of the various functions, purposes, or uses of written language” (p. 286) would benefit from an understanding of education that does not just include that which is learned in formal schools. Freeman & Freeman (1998) also find that when the content draws on students’ background and they can make sense of it, students are more engaged and thus their experiences lead to success. Classroom
programming must focus on ELD students’ life experiences not just their limited formal schooling experiences.

In general, little research exists about the educational experiences of students with limited prior schooling (Mace-Matluck, B., R. Alexander-Kasparik & R. Queen, 1998, p. 11). Most of that research has been completed within schools in the United States and more recently in Australia with only a few studies completed in Ontario on refugee students’ experiences with education. For example, Kaprielian-Churchill & Churchill (1994) completed an in-depth analysis of the experiences of refugee students in Ontario – some of whom had limited prior schooling or were described as coming from poor, rural areas. They found that it was difficult to find consistent census data on the number of refugees living in Ontario because of the high transiency rate. However, Kaprielian-Churchill et al. believed, at that time, that almost half of Canada’s refugees settled in Ontario. Moreover, Freeman and Freeman (2001) write

As the number of immigrant students in U.S. public schools has grown, so has the number of English learners who arrive with little previous schooling. These are often the same students whose limited education has been interrupted. In 1993 an estimated 20% of those identified as limited English proficient (LEP) in high schools and 12% of those in middle school had missed two or more years of schooling. (pp. 203)

According to this study, statistically, in the United States a little over 2% of students are defined as having limited prior schooling. Decapua et al. (2009) find that there is a growing number of ELLs in the United States particularly in rural areas in the Southeastern and Midwestern states where South Carolina’s ELL population increased by more than 700 percent and Alabama, Kentucky, Nebraska and Tennessee by more than 300 percent in ten years (p. 1-2). They write that “as the number of ELLs increases, so
too does the subpopulation of ELLs who have limited or interrupted formal schooling” (p. 2). Therefore, the number of ELD students in the United States will have increased. One study completed in Toronto found that refugee students made up almost 10% (7% at elementary and 13% at secondary) of all students in Toronto schools (Toronto Board of Education, 1995). Not all of these refugee students had gaps in their formal schooling, however. Across the research, there is inconsistency as to how many ELD students exist in schools.

*Through the Golden Door – Educational Approaches for Immigrant Adolescents with Limited Schooling* (Mace-Matluck, B., R. Alexander-Kasparik & R. Queen, 1998) outlines a research project completed in the United States on ELD students. This research project is referenced in new education documents in Ontario (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). The research was done across many different states with students from diverse backgrounds and was done with a variety of program administrators. Specifically, Mack-Matluck et al. (1998) “profile four programs (in Illinois, Texas and Virginia) with innovative structures and instructional strategies designed to meet the needs of these students” (p. xvi). The research closely examines the philosophies, successes and materials behind each program. In general, the researchers concluded that although the educators acknowledged that students with limited schooling presented many challenges, the teachers were dedicated to helping students succeed and believed that these students could succeed (p. 4). However, clear definitions and labels for ELD students tend to be lacking, which is also reflected in the research of Decapua et al. (2009), Brown, Miller, & Mitchell (2006) and Freeman & Freeman (2001). In particular, Brown et al. found that determining if a student had limited or interrupted schooling in their home countries was
difficult, and they guessed that there were many ELD students in Australian schools who were not being identified for proper support.

Students arriving in North America with limited schooling often have needs beyond learning classroom content and developing English proficiency skills. Mace-Matluck et al. (1998) outline three areas of need: language, schooling and socialization. They find that students’ literacy development in their first language strongly correlates with their success in the second language. Moreover, if students are presented with work at their level, they can advance at ‘break-neck’ speeds (p. 24). Mace-Matluck et al. (1998) and Freeman & Freeman (1998) suggest that ELD students should be provided with a strong oral program in their L1 that helps to reduce anxiety about schooling and literacy development. Freeman and Freeman find that an oral program organized around themes seems to be the most successful way to teach ELD students. Graphic texts which include photographs or illustrations of older students, not primary texts, are suggested. Brown, Miller & Mitchell (2006) found that many teachers of ELD students in Australia did not use textbooks but instead used a range of worksheets and simplified print material. In general, ELD students need much more time to study a theme or topic than other learners including ELLs. Successful teachers of ELD students choose topics that are connected to students’ backgrounds and texts that are at students’ reading levels.

ELD students may be confronted with a new set of behavioural and social expectations upon entering formal schooling in North America. Conforming to what is expected of them, socially, while in school may be a difficult adjustment. Mace-Matluck et al. (1998) find that teachers should not make assumptions about the classroom behaviour of ELD students. Some of these new social expectations might include sitting
at a desk, concentrating for long periods of time, holding a pen or pencil, raising hands to speak, asking permission to leave the classroom, and interacting with students from a diverse background (Mace-Matluck et al., 1998, p. 28). Teachers should not assume that students have prior knowledge of these schooling skills or behaviours. ELD students, especially older students, may become frustrated if teachers assume that they have mastered these skills. Similarly, the Toronto Board of Education’s (1995) study found that those refugees with limited prior schooling struggle the most with school discipline. Students may not be used to being in-doors for more than two to three hours and have short attention spans. Despite these concerns, Mace-Matluck et al. find that few behaviour models exist for supporting ELD students through this transition to formal schooling even though their discussions with program directors reveal that behaviour models are crucial. To conclude, not only are ELD students learning English and learning about subject content, but they are also learning a new model for behaving and interacting with peers, teachers, and administrators.

In general the Mace-Matluck et al. (1998) study found the following characteristics of successful programs for students with limited prior schooling:

- High expectations of students that are publicly recognized.
- A range of courses that does not trap students in lower level courses.
- Teachers who are trained in bilingual and ESL teaching strategies.
- Staff who are interested in parent involvement in schooling.
- Strong leadership and professional development for teachers.

(pp. 99 – 100)
They suggest that teachers of students with limited prior schooling must be sensitive and compassionate as well as knowledgeable of students’ backgrounds, languages and personal experiences.

Other researchers have looked into the experiences of ELD students in British, Canadian and Australian schools. According to the Toronto Board of Education (1995) refugee students in Toronto described feeling satisfied with their schools. However, socially they did not feel accepted in the mainstream setting. Students felt alienated, discriminated against and sometimes, even, rejected. They felt targeted by bullies and racists. Kaprielian-Churchill et al. (1994) who examined refugee experiences in Ontario schools as well found that some of the students criticized teachers for their uncaring attitudes and racial prejudice. They described the classmates of the refugees as ridiculing them because of their food, clothes, behaviour and skin colour. In her study, Hamayan (2004) examines ELD students’ interactions with writing in formal classroom settings in Britain. Her findings suggest that ELD students only write for the purpose of writing and, often, do not see any relevance to what they were learning in school to their own lives. Hamayan writes that ELD students only associate literacy with schooling. Reading and writing may be new concepts to them. She suggests a holistic approach to language development in combination with a phonics based program be used in order to meet the needs of ELD students’ emergent literacy skills. However, the core of teaching should focus on themes that are of interest to students and incorporate oral language. Furthermore, Dooley’s (2009) research in an Australian middle school found that ELD students have gaps in content knowledge. They may not have previous knowledge of certain subject areas like History, Geography, Science, Mathematics or even Art.
Inclusion in mainstream classroom is a model that many schools use in the education of both ELLs and ELD students. Carrasquillo & Rodriguez (2002), whose research is on ELLs, define the mainstream classroom as being when “the instruction delivered in these classrooms is primarily planned for native English speaking students” (p. xii). They problematize mainstreaming finding that most teachers do not plan and design lessons that meet the instructional needs of ELLs. Despite this, in their research, they find that most ELLs are not supported by specialized ESL programs, but are taught by teachers in mainstream classrooms who do not understand their linguistic, cultural and learning needs. Many elementary level ELD students are mainstreamed along with their English speaking peers in Ontario schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008), even though the Toronto Board of Education’s (1995) research into the experience of refugee students in Toronto found that ESL classes were instrumental in not only providing the students with needed language instruction, but also in meeting their psychological needs. The students, in the study, would feel more comfortable in situations where their classmates shared similar backgrounds and/ or difficulties. Therefore, if ELD students are placed in mainstream classrooms finding ways to include them is a challenge but, also, essential. This is particularly true because ELD students’ inability to read and write continually excludes them in unspoken yet pervasive ways. Kosnick & Beck (2009) state that “teachers must help their students to both understand, value, and draw on their home and local culture(s) and develop an identity and way of life distinctly their own” (p.14). Bringing ELD students’ home and local culture into the classroom is an important way to provide them with inclusive education. Inclusive education is not just the placement of an
ELD student into a mainstream classroom, but also the inclusion of their unique life and literacy experiences.

Mainstreaming can be approached in three different ways. First, Carraquillo et al. (2002) find that mainstreaming refers to students who have graduated from specialized bilingual or ESL programs and now are being placed in a mainstream classroom. Here students undergo a complex set of assessment procedures to determine if they have the English skills necessary to participate in a mainstream classroom. The second type of program is the placement of ELLs in mainstream classrooms where they are supported by a specialized ESL teacher using a pull-out model. Here, students are mainstreamed into classrooms for most of the day with peers who are proficient in English, but will be withdrawn or pulled-out for specialized language instruction. The third understanding of mainstreaming ELLs is the enrolment into an all-English classroom with no support. Here schools expect ELLs to meet the same linguistic and cognitive demands as other students in the classroom in a “sink or swim approach” (p. 6). All of these models for mainstreaming ELLs are used to varying degrees in North America.

If the mainstreaming of ELLs is a complex issue, then how to support ELD students is an even more challenging problem. Toledo (1998) concludes that often schools place ELD students in traditional ESL programs that are designed for students with strong literacy skills in their first language. Freeman and Freeman (1998) object to these types of programs finding that ELLs and ELD students should not be placed in the same sheltered environment. They find that no matter how strong teachers’ pedagogy, they could not meet the needs of ELD students when placed with other types of students. Dooley (2009) concluded that in Australia a number of ESL teachers had started to create
literacy classes for ELD students, as the level of instruction in the ESL classes did not address basic literacy skills and assumed students had strong literacy skills in their first languages. Freeman and Freeman (1998) feel that ELD students need to learn “English through content instruction suited to the level of the students’ background” (p. 41). ELD students not only need to learn English in order to be mainstreamed into the North American education system, but may also be unaware of content in subject areas such as Mathematics and Science in their first language. For Toledo (1998) traditional ESL programmes provide ELD students with opportunities to learn the necessary English to participate in mainstream classrooms, but do not look at academic deficiencies. Placing ELD students with peers who have had consistent access to schooling, does not help them to learn at a level that is consistent with their previous experiences.

If placing students in ESL programs and mainstream classrooms is not conducive to learning subject content areas, how can schools support ELD students? Brown, Miller, & Mitchell (2006) conducted a study in Australia which focussed on secondary level ELD students over the age of 16 predominantly from the Sudan who had often only experienced three years of schooling. They expressed that ELD students saw the following changes as necessary to their success:

- more teachers
- more help with English in mainstream subjects
- peer support with ‘someone from your own culture’
- time to ‘learn more before you come to highschool’

(PP.11)

These ideas suggest a number of ways ELD students’ language and literacy needs can be met although they may require additional funding. Toledo’s (1998) research, however,
suggests three different models for supporting ELD learners: “all-day school-within-a-
school program, the half-day separate site program, and the all-day separate site design”
(p. 3). The first program, the all-day school-within-a-school, would take place within a
regular public school; however, students would have their own classroom and follow a
separate program and a modified curriculum including special classes and services. The
second program, the half-day separate site, would entail students being bussed to a
separate site where they would be instructed alongside other ELD peers as well as
receiving subject content instruction in their L1. Whereas, the last model, the all-day
separate site design, sees students receiving all of their programming at a school designed
for their specific needs. Once students graduate from these programs, they would be
placed in mainstream classrooms with some support from an ESL/ELD teacher.

As well as choosing an appropriate program for ELD students, teachers’
relationships with their ELD students play an important part in how they experience
schooling. The Toronto Board of Education (1995) writes that many of the refugee
students in the Toronto study felt that their teachers were distant and uninterested in
them, even though they expressed feeling open and comfortable with their ESL teachers.
Toledo (1998) examines teachers’ perspectives on ELD students and their programming
in American schools. She finds that teachers often describe ELD students as having low
self-esteem. They attribute this to the low grades they consistently get in school.
However, teachers also admit that when ELD students are with their peers they appear to
be happy. Toledo finds that teachers believe that ELD students need to become more
aware of American culture and ELD teachers do not have to learn about the students’
cultural experiences. Similarly, in Australia, Dooley (2009) found that teachers struggled
to connect with students’ prior knowledge because they saw ELD students as having a
deficit of content-area knowledge. For example, students may not have academic
knowledge of physical geography, but they have experienced different land forms which
the teachers did not acknowledge or include in their programming. Therefore, teachers
place an additional challenge on ELD students in that there is often a mismatch between
home cultures and previous knowledge and school cultures. Toledo writes that teachers’
teaching styles are often reflective of their own cultural backgrounds and can exclude
ELD students. She and researchers such as Musetti, Salas & Perez (2009) suggest that
effective teaching strategies need to include the linguistic and cultural backgrounds of the
students. For example, teachers need to make the connection between oral and written
communication more clear. Other strategies she suggests include cooperative learning,
scaffolding, progressing from simple to concrete, a holistic approach, and developing
higher-order thinking skills. In general, in order to create stronger, more positive
relationships with their students, teachers must incorporate the ELD students’ rich
cultural and linguistic heritage and knowledge.

Although not necessarily impacting ELD students while they are in elementary
schools, dropping-out of school is a common theme for older ELD students. Ingersoll
(2001) examines “low-literacy” adults’ experiences in classes in Washington D.C. and
Suburban North Carolina finding that a third of all ELD students drop-out of their
English classes. She attributes this to students “low self-esteem, lack of support from
native culture and family culture; and mixing of students with various levels of literacy”
(p. 6), which is especially true in the case of ELD students. She suggests that the most
effective programs incorporate a communicative approach that ties into the lives of
students. Often these low-literacy adults will be too timid to apply for English classes, so it is difficult to even know the total number living in the United States. As other researchers have suggested (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Toledo, 1998), it is ideal for ELD students to first attain literacy in their L1 before learning English. However, for students whose L1 is not Spanish, a dominate language in the two areas studied, it may be difficult to find such literacy classes. Therefore, teachers need to be respectful and inclusive in their interactions with ELD students to ensure that drop-out rates decrease.

In general, the mainstreaming of ELD students is a longer and much more complex process than the average ELL. Teachers must consider ELD students’ family and cultural backgrounds when designing programming and advancing students through stages of literacy and language development. Musetti, Salas & Perez (2009) who identify ELD students under the term “newcomers”, find that ELD students need more catch-up time than other ELLs. They suggest that instruction should be focussed and that students may need to take additional evening and weekend classes. Teachers need to be careful not to assume that parents’ lack of contact with the school means that they do not care about their children’s education. In fact, Dachyshyn (2008), in her research into the families of refugee preschool students in Edmonton, found that although parents were very appreciative of the education and support systems in Canada, they worried about the negative behaviours their children were learning at school. Parents wanted more moral training in schools. Musetti et al. find that teachers must learn about students’ cultures, backgrounds and families and continue to communicate with parents. Parents may not be accustomed to the level of child advocacy in North America. ELD students come to
school with vast experiences with literacy that teachers must remember not to undervalue and use in ELD students’ mainstreaming process.

2.2.2 Teachers’ Discourses

I have chosen to use the term discourse to describe teachers’ beliefs, attitudes and/or ideologies as they pertain to diversity and teaching. The term discourse is used in this thesis as a way of examining teachers’ views without the assumptions of a utopian vision implied by the term ideology. Instead possible solutions or outcomes are complex. Mills (2004) examines the notions of ideology, discourse and truth with particular emphasis on the work of Foucault. She problematizes ideology by finding that it “may downplay the importance of the subject because of its concern with groups and classes of individuals” (p. 31). Moreover, power is not simply held by one group or person, but is an interaction between people. Ideology simplifies the notions of power and truth; whereas, discourse aims to examine how subjects negotiate with power and engage in the construction of their own roles in society. For the purposes of this thesis, discourses will be understood, as quoted in Gérin-Lajoie (2008a, p. 110), as

How institutions regulate “truth” and contribute to the construction of subject positions, concepts and strategic choices. In other words, discursive formations shape subject positions for students and educators through concepts such as accountability, assessment, and standards that are dispersed through strategies including legislation, content, and performance standards, policies, pedagogies, and research funding. (Voithofer and Foley, p. 16)

Mills (2004) further writes about discourse by focussing on how discursive structures are interconnected and highly regulated. Mills (2004) looks at both Roland Barthe’s and Michel Foucault’s works examining how discourses in fact narrow ones vision and work to exclude knowledge or other realities. Discourses can create narratives which can in
turn become seen as truths or realities within a specific culture or time and place. These narratives then become seen as natural or common sense. Even though discourses are not necessarily constructed by an individual or group, they often serve to privilege one group over another.

Poststructuralism has had an enormous impact on our current understanding of discourse. Within poststructuralists understanding of discourse, truth and knowledge are always contextual. Moreover, MacLure (2003) finds that “they can be thought of . . . as practices for producing meaning, forming subjects and regulating conduct within particular societies and institutions” (p. 175). Power is changeable. It is not held by one group or person. MacLure (2003) takes this even further by stating that power is not always bad, but can, at times, give people agency and can enable them to create change. Like Mills, MacLure finds that discourses can exclude certain ways of thinking and talking. Social order is then created by the “forgetting” of this exclusion.

### 2.2.2.1 Teachers’ Discourses on Diversity

Issues surrounding diversity such as race, ethnicity, language, and culture impact all ELLs and racialized students. Much research has been done on diversity and schooling in Canada and in the United States (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; Cummins, 2001; Marx, 2006; Li, 1999). Although much of this research has not been completed with ELD students specifically, being part of the larger umbrella program for ELLs and coming from diverse backgrounds, situates ELD students within this research. For the most part, ELD students are part of what Li (1999) refers to as the emerging non-White population in Canada. They are part of a larger movement towards racial and linguistic diversification across Canada.
Definitions of race and ethnicity amongst sociologists are varied. However, Li (1999) finds that it has become common place to define people as part of an ethnic group based on superficial traits such as skin colour. Some sociologists see ethnicity as “a group of people who presumably share a common experience and origin” (p. 5) while others define ethnicity as constructed “on the basis of social relationships, not on genetic differences or primordial features” (p. 6). Here, unequal relationships and power work to create discourses on race and ethnicity. Therefore, race is viewed as socially constructed. Many researchers see race and ethnicity as social constructions (Howard-Hassmann, 2006; Hall, 2006; Gérin-Lajoie, 2005; Brubacker, 2004) that serve to privilege certain groups of people over others. However, race is just one form of socially constructed identities. Hall (2006) finds that all forms of identity are historically and not biologically defined. People are full of contradictory identities that constantly pull them in different directions. There is no simple, unified identity. Unified identities are comforting stories that the self creates.

Teachers’ beliefs about language learners and how they are labelled reflects broader discourses on the racial “other”. English (2009) examines how teachers’ discourses can normalize and constrain roles and responsibilities for ELLs. How ELLs are labelled, supported and taught is integrally connected to teachers’ discourses. She finds that professional development should aim to reconstruct teachers’ underlying ideologies. Lee (2008) discusses how teachers’ discourses on students even within a program which emphasizes critical dialogue continue to “other” ELLs. Teachers’ discourses often essentialize culture and the students’ identities. The teachers talk about themselves versus the student “other”. Here, classroom discourses continue to
subordinate students’ cultures. Lee finds that teachers need to challenge hegemonic
discourses or they risk reproducing discourses of inequity. Teachers need to understand
the discourses that influence their perceptions of ELLs in order to make decisions that
support their students’ experiences and learning in school.

As well as race and ethnicity, language and culture play an important part in how
teachers’ discourses construct ELLs’ abilities as students. First, pervasive discourses on
language situate ELLs within a hierarchy of official languages. Bourdieu (2001) writes
about the power of language in how it is defined and positioned. Dominant or official
languages suppress the languages of the less powerful marginalizing their cultures and
experiences. When a language is defined as a dialect or patois, which has shifted in
meaning from “incomprehensible speech . . . to corrupted and coarse speech” (p. 47), it
loses linguistic capital. Here, the language of the patois speakers becomes diminished by
powerful and pervasive discourses. It is not a legitimate language. The demarcation of the
official language of the nation increases the linguistic capital of the speakers of that
language thereby marginalizing the use of all other languages. Consequently, if students’
do not speak the official language, their linguistic capital is not recognized or used in
schools.

The official language that is used and reproduced in schools reveals an underlying
discourse of hegemony. Within Bourdieu’s (2001) notion of linguistic capital, the
education system becomes a powerful site for the “production and reproduction” of
official discourses. Looking at the development of language in its historical context, with
the growth of education, came the growth of official languages and formal modes of
speaking and the devaluation of different varieties of speaking. Teachers became the
identifiers and enforcers of correct language, and, therefore, of thinking. Education performed the role of placing special value on the legitimate use of language. Bourdieu (2001) finds that when dialects became devalued and the new hierarchy of linguistic capital developed, a division occurred between the language used at school and the language used in the home. This led to a devaluation of different ways of speaking, which continues in schools today.

Both language and culture play important parts in how teachers perceive ELLs in their classrooms and how these ELLs perceive themselves. Dicker (2003) discusses how language works to shape personal and cultural identity. Culture and language are intricately connected. Like Bourdieu, Dickers finds that language can determine who is part of the “in-group” and works to marginalize those who do not speak the language of those in power. Speakers of non-standard or dialect varieties of English, for example, struggle against stigmatization. English, as a language of power, is connected to British colonial power. Official languages place immigrants in a position where they are forced to change to become part of a new society. Cross’ (2003) research examines how male students in a rural middle school who speak non-standard forms of English in Jamaica by-pass the written literacy of the school and instead concentrate on oral and visual media literacy. She describes Standard Jamaican English (SJE), which is modelled on British English, as having some value to the boys, but very little use in reality. SJE, which has powerful linguistic capital within the school, is used as a way to avoid confrontations with authority figures. However, when the boys thought critically or creatively, they used Jamaican Vernacular English (JVE). Moreover, when students played with language and demonstrated verbal wittiness, it was on the playground in JVE. Despite this, students
continue to define SJE as good and their JVE, which they like, as bad. In consequence, they see their experiences outside of the school as bad. Again, official discourses serve to suppress those that do not speak the language of the powerful further demonstrating the pervasiveness of linguistic capital.

Like language, contemporary discourses on culture continue to marginalize ELLs. First, how we understand culture reflects underlying ideologies. Hoffman (1999) examines how culture, which has become central to contemporary life, needs to be more deeply and critically engaged. She uses the word “culturalism” to describe discourses that totalize cultures by defining them as “distinct, bounded” (p. 465). Culture as difference only serves to further marginalize those perceived as not being of the dominant culture – not having the cultural capital necessary to succeed. Many other theorists problematize the idea of culture as unchangeable, static and foreign (Risager, 2006; Shaules, 2007; Worsley, 1999). In particular, Risager (2006) outlines many different ways that culture can and has been understood. Three traditional notions of culture include a hierarchical concept where “culture is something that the individual human being or society either ‘has’ or ‘does not have’, or ‘has’ at a higher or lower level” (p. 32); a differential concept which “has to do with culture as something that marks off groups of people from each other” (p. 33); and, finally, a generic concept which is “what is common to humanity” (p. 33) and distinguishes it from other living things. However, she then goes on to define different fields varying concepts of culture including cultural relativism, cognitive culture, structuralist culture and cultural studies notion of culture. In general, however, the postmodern and Cultural Studies definition, which is most applicable to understanding the relationship between language and culture, present culture as
“something that is first identified via an awareness of meaningful differences between one’s own world and ‘the others’” (p. 50). Therefore, there are a variety of ways teachers can understand culture. However, an essentialist view of culture only serves to create difference and further marginalize ELLs.

Teachers’ discourses play a key part in how students begin to construct their own identities as learners and how they succeed in school. Freeman & Freeman (1998) examine how teachers’ faith in learners can expand student potential. They believe that teachers should show ‘unwavering belief’ in a student’s ability and not label the ELL student, in particular, as deficient. Bourdieu (1986) critically examines traditional or commonsense views of education which see success as connected to personal aptitude. Similarly, Goldstein (2004) writes about how discourses on linguistic and cultural capital can negatively position ELLs. In her research, she asks student teachers to examine how teachers’ discourses reproduce linguistic privilege especially by insisting on only English use in the classroom. To conclude, how teachers construct language and cultural diversity can place ELLs into hierarchies of language usage and binaries of us versus them.

2.2.2.2 Teachers discourses on their work as teachers

As well as understanding teachers’ discourses on diversity, this study aims to examine teachers’ discourses on teaching through their philosophy of teaching and how those discourses inform their perceptions of ELD students. Reflective practice amongst teachers has a long history in teacher education. First, Farrell (2004) summarizes Dewey’s work finding that there are three characteristics of the reflective journey: “open-mindedness (willingness to listen to more than one side); responsibility (careful consideration of the consequences of our actions); and wholeheartedness (commitment to
seek every opportunity to learn)” (p. 13). Here, the ideal teacher takes time to carefully reflect on his or her attitudes towards teaching and learning. Freire (2003), in his work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, examines how teachers’ methodological failings can always be connected to ideological errors. For Freire, beliefs and practice are interchangeable. If practice fails to educate students, it is because of the philosophy behind that practice.

Likewise, Clark and Peterson (1986) find that theories and beliefs make up an important part of teachers' general knowledge through which teachers perceive, process and act upon information in the classroom. Cummins, J., K. Brown & D. Sayers (2007), also, examine how “education is fundamentally ideological” (p. 37). They find that many debates over pedagogical practices create a dichotomy of us vs. them. Teachers should use all different styles to create learning situations that are ideal for students. For example, nestling a traditional transmission style lesson within a student-centred constructivist approach where students are transacting with knowledge. Historically, teachers’ reflections on teaching have been an important window into how common discourses influence the classroom.

First of all, teachers’ views on literacy, language and power can dramatically impact their pedagogy choices in the classroom. Cummins (2009) examines the connection between pedagogy and power. Using the term dialogical to connect theory and practice, Cummins finds that regardless of institutional constraints, teachers are always presented with choices

. in how they interact with students;
. in how they engage them cognitively;
. in how they activate their prior knowledge;
. in how they use technology to amplify imagination;
These choices are connected to teachers’ beliefs. Beliefs about literacy, cultural knowledge and first language linguistic abilities strongly influence how teachers interact with their students. If teachers choose to think critically about their own assumptions about language and culture, they can promote collaborative relations in their classroom.

How teachers negotiate the differences between students’ needs and curriculum expectations reflects their beliefs about education. Fu (1996) suggests that teaching to a set of standards or a pre-scribed curriculum can hinder the progress of ELLs. Teachers first need to find out what students need and then design their curriculum around those needs. Teachers need to teach to students’ interests. Often times ELLs work all day at activities they do not understand. When he compares teachers’ discourses on students, he finds that students often fail in classes where teachers focus heavily on curriculum. Teachers must include students’ cultural experiences in their teaching and find a way to make connections with students’ lives outside of the classroom and not just focus on curriculum expectations.

If teachers’ perceptions are an important aspect of students’ success, then their attitude towards new immigrants become a key component to ELLs’ educational experiences. Flores and Smith (2007/2008) state that “it is not merely the presence of difference but rather the teachers’ knowledge of and beliefs and attitudes about difference that creates the negative effect on minority-student outcomes” (p. 324). Flores and Smith outline two underlying issues in teachers’ understandings of a diverse student population:
(1) What are the attitudinal beliefs of teachers regarding diverse populations, and (2) to what degree do teachers’ personal characteristics influence attitudinal beliefs regarding students of diverse populations?

Pappamihiel (2007) finds that preservice teachers often have attitudes and beliefs that negatively impact ELLs and new immigrants. She states that although teachers’ knowledge is easy to change, often their beliefs and attitudes towards ELLs are equally difficult to alter. Teachers who come into the profession with a positive attitude towards ELLs are often much more likely to have positive interactions with those students. She also examines how preservice teachers learning to teach content areas often become frustrated when they learn that they will be asked to teach literacy skills such as reading and writing – this is not what they signed-up for. Negative discourses on ELLs are difficult to change creating a poor environment for ELLs to learn.

If teachers’ attitudes towards ELLs are negative, then failure becomes pervasive. Freeman and Freeman (1998) find that teachers often have negative attitudes towards ELLs before even meeting them. They cite an example of a school where teachers would examine their class list at the beginning of the year and determine who would be the high and low students simply by looking at the students’ names. The teachers’ discourses on ELLs only serve to push students towards failure. Instead of giving ELLs the type of instruction that will help them to learn, many teachers assume that ELLs will fail. Often teachers hold the belief that students in second language classrooms are remedial. When ELLs are placed in their classroom, regular classroom teachers do not see ELLs as their responsibility, but as the responsibility of ELL teachers and paraprofessionals. Cummins (2001) finds that ELLs will be reluctant to invest in the learning process if they feel their
teachers do not like them, respect them, and appreciate their experiences and talents, as do almost all students regardless of cultural background. The more respected students feel, the more likely they are to become invested in the learning process and, therefore, be successful. When teachers speak negatively about ELL students, teachers contribute to ELLs’ failure.

How does this impact ELD students in Ontario? Why is it important to understand classroom teachers’ discourses? Some elementary schools are supporting their ELLs and ELD students in mainstreamed classrooms, which means that ELD students are placed in a class designed for native English speaking students and, to varying degrees, supported in their learning by an ESL/ELD support worker. In her research, Yoon (2008) examines how teachers position themselves in relation to the ELLs in their classrooms. She categorizes teachers’ roles into three categories: “teachers for all students, as teachers for regular education students, or as teachers for a single subject” (p. 515). Students she observed in her study participated in lessons to varying levels with different teachers. She suggests that it is not the students’ linguistic level that is preventing them from fully participating but the environment created by the teacher by including culturally relevant material. For example, teachers who have a narrow view of their roles as educators, which means that they “did not include ELLs by positioning themselves as content teachers only for regular students” (p. 504), have lower participation from ELLs in their classroom. Similarly, teachers who focus on American monoculturalism, an assimilationist approach where students are expected to adopt American cultural and linguistic norms, had ELLs in their class who did not participate and were withdrawn. However, when teachers were more inclusive of other cultures, the non-ELL students in
the class were more likely to socialize with ELLs. No matter what the pedagogy, what mattered was how teachers viewed their roles as educators.

Teachers’ discourses on teaching can reveal how they intellectually engage students and push them to think critically about their own history and place within society. Giroux (2008) examines the connection of knowledge, power and emancipation in his work *Disabling the future – youth and the politics of disposability*. He asks that educators begin to develop a discourse that incorporates students’ history and knowledge:

> If educators are to function as public intellectuals, they need to provide the opportunities for students to learn that the relationship between knowledge and power be emancipatory, that their histories and experiences matter, and that what they say and do counts in their struggle to unlearn dominating privileges, productively reconstruct their relations with others, and transform, when necessary, the world around them. . . . Their curricula need to be organized around knowledges of communities, cultures, and traditions that give students a sense of history, identity and place. (pp. 67)

Emancipation, knowledge of culture and community, and giving students a sense of place within the curriculum are essential to Giroux’ views of education. Teachers must incorporate these concepts into their personal discourses if they are to truly intellectually engage with students.

Students’ experiences with schooling are connected to teachers’ discourses on teaching. Specifically, teachers’ behaviour and underlying values influence students’ success (Fang, 1996). When looking at what teachers think, Fang finds that “teachers’ thought processes are categorized into three primary types: (1) teacher planning, (2) teachers’ interactive thoughts and decisions, and (3) teachers’ beliefs and theories.” (p. 47) Teachers’ thought processes are a complex interweaving of beliefs, theories, practice,
planning and decision making. As Fang later states, “teachers' theoretical beliefs not only shape the nature of classroom interactions, but have a critical impact on students' perceptions of literacy processes as well” (p. 53). How students’ perceive their own learning is closely connected to teachers’ beliefs about education. Research from Fang’s study shows that teachers’ expectations can have considerable impact on students’ behaviour and academic performance, while teachers’ discourses on the nature of knowledge acquisition can affect both the teacher’s behaviour and students’ learning. This is supported by Flores’ (2001) work that states that most teachers’ implicit theories, which are equated with belief systems, influence their approaches to teaching.

Although not always overt, teachers’ underlying beliefs impact students’ experiences in unintended ways. Anyon’s version of the hidden curriculum, as discussed in Darling-Hammond et al. (2005), reveals “how teachers create conditions that enable or disable certain kinds of learning and identity construction for students” (p. 170). Teachers can inadvertently impact on how students view themselves through their curriculum choices, lesson planning and underlying philosophies. They find that a well prepared teacher understands the underlying purposes of teaching and creates an environment where the hidden curriculum fosters respect. Effective teachers have thought of the wider social purposes of teaching.

Teachers’ and students’ discourses on teaching can be vastly different and are often connected with their previous experiences with schooling. Mantero & VcVicker (2006) conclude in their study that “prior experiences can positively influence teachers’ beliefs, thereby promoting effective teaching practices. Teachers need to recognize the importance of language and culture in the acquisition of knowledge” (para. 65). Often
what students and parents see as the purpose of education does not align with teachers’ expectations. This can be even more so with new immigrants, who may have very different ideas about education. Brown (2009) compared teachers’ and students’ perceptions and found that “although students’ and teachers’ personal beliefs about teaching may not be corroborated by or correlate perfectly with empirical evidence, there appears to be a strong relationship between previous experience and the development of ideas about teaching and learning” (p. 47). Students’ previous experiences with schooling, which can be quite different from teachers’ experiences - especially for a new immigrant, can greatly impact their discourses on education.

Many teachers’ discourses are based on a common sense approach. They teach the way they have been taught. This becomes a challenge, however, when teachers are asked to teach both ELLs and ELD students. Freeman and Freeman (1998) ask for teachers to move away from a common sense approach to the education of ELLs and examine new ways of teaching. For Freeman and Freeman, “all teachers make educational decisions based on their beliefs about teaching and learning” (pp. xv). Teachers of ELLs must, therefore, re-evaluate their beliefs about teaching and learning in order to create a learning environment where ELLs can feel successful. Moreover, teachers’ discourses come from somewhere. How their perceptions are constructed is closely linked to their belief system and the official discourse. Mantero & VcVicker (2006) find that “research literature suggests teachers’ perceptions and judgments come from their beliefs systems, so it is imperative that we investigate the beliefs of mainstream and ELL teachers who interact with newcomers to our educational landscape” (para. 1). Teachers’ perceptions of
students are essential to the learning process and are especially integral to the ELL students’ experiences with education.

### 2.2.3 Evolving notions of literacy

How literacy is understood has changed dramatically over the years and continues to be widely varied. Cummins, Brown & Sayers (2007) critique the National Reading Panel’s (NRP) report on literacy in the United States, which heavily focuses on phonics and decoding. In their research, it is found that phonics instruction only assists students in decoding and reading comprehension in Grade One. As students get older, phonics instruction serves only to help them decode while reading and not to comprehend. On the other hand, extensive reading and the degree of parent involvement in children’s education, and not a phonics program, help students in their reading comprehension abilities.

Teachers’ discourses on literacy can impact how they teach ELLs. Gersten (1999) examines how teachers’ discourses on what they view as important are often not reflected in what they expect of ELLs in their literacy teaching practices. Students often copy questions from the board and do not engage in critical literacy, which promotes discussion and a deeper understanding of texts. Teachers’ discourses continually emphasize that ELLs are not meeting the expectations of typical students at their grade level. Often experienced teachers revert to coping mechanisms of first year teachers when working with ELLs. These include an over-reliance on vocabulary and spelling drills, low risk activities and reduced demands on students. Students become focused on a literacy program that emphasizes vocabulary, grammar and spelling and not critical literacy skills.
Traditional notions of literacy place people within a binary of literate vs. illiterate. However, viewing students as illiterate, if they are unable to read and write, is not a critical understanding of literacy. Freire (1985) critiques the traditional view of literacy, which views illiterates as lacking in intelligence, lazy and needing to be cured. Under this view, the illiterate is a “lost man. Therefore, one must ‘save’ him and his ‘salvation’ consists of ‘being filled’ with these words” (p. 8). The teacher becomes the saviour who must rescue the illiterate from his terrible existence. For Freire, illiteracy is political and is the result of injustice and is not just a question of methodology or pedagogy. A person only becomes defined as illiterate if living within a society where illiteracy is problematic. A technical approach to literacy education asks teachers to save the illiterates from the margins of society. Freire prefers “viewing illiterates as men oppressed within the system, the literacy process, as cultural action for freedom, is an act of knowing in which the learner assumes the role of knowing subject in dialogue with the educator” (p. 49). The illiterate student must not be viewed as inferior if true education and dialogue are taking place, but instead be viewed as a person working towards freedom within an oppressive system.

Traditional views on literacy education often privilege those with official languages. The New London Group (1996) find that “what we might term ‘mere literacy’ remains centered on language only, and usually on a singular national form of language at that, which is conceived as a stable system based on rules such as mastering sound-letter correspondence” (p. 64). The usage of the standardized language of the powerful then becomes the means by which a person becomes literate under traditional definitions of
literacy. Therefore, viewing literacy as the ability to read and write in an official language only serves to marginalize the previous literacy experiences of all ELLs.

Traditional views on literacy must evolve to include other forms of literacy than just reading and writing if they are to be inclusive of all forms of communication. Multiliteracies asks us to expand our understanding of traditional literacy to include other forms of communication. For example, The New London Group (1996) writes that “literacy pedagogy must account for the burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies . . . for instance, visual design in desktop publishing or the interface of visual and linguistic meaning in multimedia” (p. 61). The meaning that comes from the layout of a page is often as essential to the meaning of a piece of multimedia as the text. Because our world and how we transmit information and knowledge is changing, the teaching of literacy must change as well as the definition of what literacy is. Literacy is not just the understanding of text but how that text is presented, constructed and supported through visuals.

Literacy happens in the home, workplace and in cultural and religious practices. It is not just the formal, official language of the school. In general, after examining the New London Group’s writings on multiliteracies, Rowsell, Kosnik, & Beck (2008) found that across the body of their writings . . . [were] many types of literacy variations, including:

- School literacy versus home and local literacy
- Formal language versus informal, colloquial, vernacular, and conversational language
- Written communication versus graphic, projected, spoken, or enacted communication
• Literacy (the school subject) versus mathematics, science, history, geography, etc.

• Official national languages versus regional, aboriginal, immigrant, and foreign languages (pp. 152)

In their research into the New London Project, Roswell et al. (2008) see that “many types of expression and communication as literacies, whether formal or informal; spoken, gestured, written or graphic; official or unofficial; correct or ‘incorrect’; and so on” (p. 154). All types of communication, not just formal writing, are seen as literacies, reaffirming that a student who does not know how to read and write can still be seen as literate. Similarly, James Paul Gee’s (1996) work as discussed in Cummins (2001) highlights the importance of differentiating between what he terms primary and secondary discourses. Primary discourses are social interactions acquired in the home. Secondary discourses come from beyond the family and can involve highly specialized vocabulary. These discourses can be either written or oral. Cummins writes of Gee’s ideas stating that

Examples of secondary discourses common in many non-literate cultures are the conventions of story-telling or the language of marriage or burial rituals which are passed down through oral tradition from one generation to the next. Oral forms of secondary discourses are in no way inferior to written form (p. 69).

In these ways Gee’s and the New London Group’s work affirms the importance of home languages and oral literacies.

An important aspect of multiliteracies is the use of new technology in the classroom. Egleson (2009) examines the use of multiliteracies in the middle school classroom. Participant teachers took part in a study group that met to discuss multiliteracies and potential applications for classroom literacy. The teachers linked both
in and out of school literacies and found that the strategies moved them beyond textbook-centred teaching to a range of what they described as good teaching strategies. Some literacy strategies they added included blogging, digital software and the use of *Moviemaker* and *PhotoStory* software in order to create documentaries. For the researcher, new literacy strategies moved her beyond traditional understandings of literacy as reading, writing, listening, viewing and speaking. Computers and technology are a part of students’ literacy experiences outside the classroom and must be recognized as valid literacy strategies by teachers in order to keep literacy education meaningful to students.

Critical literacy is an approach to language education that asks teachers to abandon traditional notions of literacy. Critical literacy has its roots in the tradition of critical pedagogy. In general, critical literacy is concerned with how literacy is a social and cultural practice, how power is conveyed and reproduced through language use, and how students can analyze and dissect all forms of culture. Lau (2011) finds that little research has been completed on critical literacy with ELLs in the Canadian context. She calls for a more detailed account of how critical literacy is negotiated by schools, communities and classrooms.

Critical literacy asks students to look at deeper levels of comprehension by critically analyzing the author’s message and thinking beyond the information written on the page. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) outline a number of principles for understanding how beliefs about power relationships exist between the reader and the author. First, they find that “critical literacy focuses on issues of power and promotes reflection, transformation, and action” (p. 14). As a critical reader, students can reflect on
whose voices are silenced by the choices the author has made when constructing the text. Second, “critical literacy focuses on the problem and its complexity” (p. 15). Instead of having a simple, essentialist view of a problem, critical literacy asks readers to examine the injustices or imbalances of power defining the issue. Third, “critical literacy strategies are dynamic and adapt to the contexts in which they are used” (p. 15). In general, critical literacy is about creating empowerment and confidence which cannot be reproduced by copying strategies from one context to the next. Lastly, “critical literacy disrupts the commonplace by examining it from multiple perspectives” (p. 16). Students must examine the point of view of a text in order to understand other perspectives that are not present. Overall, critical literacy seeks to disrupt the common, examine multiple viewpoints, focus on socio-political issues and promote social justice.

If traditional literacy is biased and oppressive, what can critical literacy do to change those power dynamics? First, one must look carefully at the texts chosen for study and make the social issues from that text integral to the literacy program. Wilson (2007) states that “language practices and literacies are never neutral and that social issues books are an integral part of a critical literacy curriculum” (p. 40). Instead of looking at reading as solely a skill that needs to be learned, teachers must examine the social issues of the text and make them central to their teaching practice. Moreover, the selection of the text is crucial because the reader becomes influenced by the author’s words. According to McLaughlin (2004) “whenever readers commit to understanding a text - whether narrative or expository - they submit to the right of the author to select the topic and determine the treatment of the ideas” (p. 14). The author is in a very powerful position as
creator of ideas and topics, so the choice of texts must be made carefully and time must be taken to deconstruct those texts.

Critical literacy is concerned with all cultural texts whether they are books, films, television shows, posters, advertisements, or music. Critical literacy asks educators to move away from basal texts and readers that imprison language within the classroom. Critical literacy is not just about containing texts to the written word, but instead oral, visual and graphic representations of language (Norton & Vanderheyden, 2004) become a central part of the literacy experiences. For example, Norton et al. (2004) examine differences in popular culture between ELLs and mainstream students and find that one of the first places where notions of literacy become divided in an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ discourse between ELL and L1 speakers of English is in popular culture choices. However, texts such as comic books are a way that all students can access written literacy that incorporates visual images that engage them in learning. All forms of texts, especially those that are an important part of students’ lives and world views are integral to a critical literacy program.

Teachers may need to modify their approach to literacy education when teaching ELLs. Fu (1996) outlines the importance of talk in a literacy program for ELLs. Often teachers and other students in schools will know very little about ELLs, and ELLs will know little about their peers. Incorporating talk into a literacy program not only helps ELLs to improve their literacy skills, but also helps to build connections. As students get older, teachers tend to incorporate talk less and less in their teaching. Talk is a necessary step in learning to read and write. Fu suggests that instead of culturally essentializing and saying all Asians are quiet, teachers should encourage them to talk. Even though a
student-centred approach may be incongruent with the way students have been educated in their home countries, the initial struggles of adapting to student-centred learning will soon dissipate as students flourish under the freedom of expression this approach allows. Student-centred learning encourages students to develop their literacy skills through talk.

Bringing students’ dynamic and ever-changing cultural experiences into the classroom is another way that teachers can engage ELLs in literacy. Rodríguez (2009) examines how ELLs often bring transnational and transcultural experiences that could enrich classroom programs. However, schools often tear these experiences apart and ask students to forget their language and culture. In the case of Dominicans, there is a discrepancy between what parents view as education, which includes manners and moral values, and North American versions of education, which teach children how to read and write. Rodríguez writes that in many Latino homes parents often use “narrative advice, sayings, or homilies” (p. 22) when giving children advice. These forms of literacy are not reflected in North American schools, where Dominican children often feel marginalized. Incorporating transnational experiences, home languages and values, and using sayings or expressions from students home cultures are just some of the ways teachers can enhance their literacy programs for ELLs.

Despite all of this, current government trends in literacy are returning to a more traditional phonics based approach to education. In the implementation of a new literacy strategy by the NRP, Cummins et al. (2007) notice a disturbing trend towards rigid enforcement of phonics learning in the primary years in low-income neighbourhoods, and a more engaging reading program in white, middle class neighbourhoods. Beyond the initial stages of learning to read, phonics instruction does not help in developing reading
comprehension abilities. This implies that low-income neighbourhoods are being trained to decode and read texts, but not to think critically about what they are reading. Davies (1998) concurs with this view finding that “the last thing a fragile State wants is too many articulate, well-qualified students” (p. 92). The NRP’s obsessive focus on a phonics reading program in low-income neighbourhoods discussed in the Cummins et al.’s (2007) research demonstrates how “one of the unstated functions of the school is to maintain the existing socioeconomic order” (Davies, 1998, p. 94). How teachers, schools and governments understand reading deeply impacts students’ experiences with literacy in schools. Other theorists warn of government trends towards viewing literacy as a product. Comber (1998) writes that “some recent government policies and workplace training reforms have constructed literacy as a commodity or as a set of competencies necessary for economic growth, it is crucial that educators maintain an analysis of literacy which recognises the relationships between language and power” (p.7). Literacy is seen here as a powerful tool for capitalism.

In conclusion, the notion of what literacy is has moved beyond ideas of reading and writing. Myers, Hammett and McKillop (2000) agree that literacies look at communication that happens beyond the text and that critical literacy is important in creating democratic processes. In a more diverse and extensive view, literacy becomes about social interactions. Literacy is power no matter how you choose to define it.

2.3 Conclusion

Previous research on ELD students has been completed in the United States and Australia. I am interesting in studying their educational experiences in Ontario, Canada. Much of this research has been completed with secondary students and their teachers.
Therefore, I hope to contribute the unique perspective of teachers working with ELD elementary school students to the research. Literacy development is at the core of defining and understanding ELD students. These students come from ethnically, racially and linguistically diverse background. Therefore, they must be understood as part of previous research into diversity in Canada. As elementary schools in Ontario may be ELD students’ first experiences with teachers, how teachers understand their roles and see education in general can impact the relationships and experiences ELD students have in the classroom. In the next chapter, I will explain how I conceptualize my study at the methodological level by outlining the framework, techniques and analysis as well as the empirical study.
Chapter 3:  
Methodology of Study

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological framework used in my study. I also outline the techniques used, how participants were recruited, and a brief overview of the content of the interviews and the analyzed documents. This study aims to understand teachers’ discourses of teaching ELD students by answering the following three questions: How do teachers’ underlying philosophies about schooling and teaching influence their perceptions of ELD students in mainstream classrooms? What role do discourses on literacy and diversity play in shaping teachers’ perceptions of ELD students? How do teachers’ discourses reflect how they perceive the success or failure of ELD students in their classrooms? The issues I examine in my study include teachers’ discourses on education, teaching, diversity and schooling and the concepts of literacy.

3.1 Framework

My study draws upon qualitative research as its methodology. Qualitative research is a largely varied field that encompasses a wide range of approaches and techniques which are constantly changing and evolving. Although qualitative research does not have a set of methods that are entirely its own (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), in general, qualitative research can be defined as different than quantitative research in that it does not use a hypothesis and a deductive method (Merriam, 2002; Lichtman, 2010). Conversely, quantitative research does not aim to examine the social and cultural construction of what is being studied. In my study, I will understand qualitative research
as being a “situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible” (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). By situating myself within the research process, I will outline my own lens as a researcher, and use this to understand and interpret the discourses of teachers. Qualitative research can also be compared to a bricolage or crystal that “expands, mutates, and alters while at the same time reflecting and refracting the ‘light’ of the social world” (Kincheloe & Berry, 2004, p. 21). The concept of the crystal and bricolage, first used by Richardson (2000) and discussed in both Kincheloe & Berry (2004) and Denzin & Lincoln (2005), emphasizes the multi-perspective, piece work that is the qualitative research process. It is an art that attempts to connect ideas through a refracted lens.

A key part of positivist research is developing a hypothesis at the beginning of the research process and then testing that idea through the collection of data and analysis. On the other hand, qualitative researchers use an inductive approach; “that is, researchers gather data to build concepts, hypotheses, or theories rather than deductively deriving postulates or hypotheses to be tested” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). Returning to the concept of the bricoleur, Kincheloe & Berry (2004), find that qualitative researchers “move from convergent to divergent forms of meaning-making, abandoning the short-sightedness of pre-specified, correct patterns of analysis” (p. 21). The researcher does not develop a hypothesis and then aim to prove those subjective ideas, but instead develops a general question and attempts to collect a wide range of descriptive data in order to analyze and develop themes and ideas out of that data. The answers to questions are discovered from the data, not proven by the data. Qualitative research is interested in people and how they relate. Charmaz (2004) finds that no matter what the style of research, researchers must
study the “meanings, intentions and actions of the research participants” (p. 501). People, relationships and subjectivity are central to the approach. How the observer and observed relate and interact impacts the findings that begin to emerge from the data. Moreover, the feelings of individuals are described as they participate in the research process (Creswell, 2009). To conclude, qualitative research looks beyond surface meanings to illuminate values and beliefs. It is not only interested in what is said but the ideologies constructing the discourses of both the participants and researchers.

Qualitative inquiry is rich or thick in its words and descriptions. It does not aim to focus on one variable, but instead to densely describe a natural environment in order to discover themes or new ideas. Denzin (2004) differentiates between thin and thick descriptions finding that a thick description gives “the context of the experience, states the intentions and meanings that organized the experience, and reveals the experience as a process” (p. 455). On the other hand, thin descriptions seek to simply report “facts, independent of intentions or circumstances” (p. 455). Facts become separated from their circumstances and contexts. With thick descriptions, environments, participants, activities, and contexts are all described with “words and pictures rather than numbers . . . to convey what the researcher has learned about a phenomenon” (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). The researcher who is using qualitative methodology examines data that has been collected in its natural environment. Data is not collected in the labs of the quantitative research study where unknown variables can be avoided, but in schools, communities and hospitals where a variety of unknown variables can collide to create dense descriptions of reality.
Within the field of qualitative research, my study takes a critical point of view that incorporates the fields of multiliteracies and philosophies of teaching, as discussed in my theoretical framework (Cummins, 2000; Cummins, Brown & Sayers, 2007; The New London Group, 1996; Lau, 2010; Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leoni, Sandhu, & Sastri, 2005; Taylor, Bernhard, Garg & Cummins, 2008; Donnelly, 2009; Oliva, 2005; Farrell, 2004; Campoy, 2005). I will generate an explanation with conditions out of my data that explains how participants construct the reality of teaching ELD students. Often existing theories have little applicability to special populations (Creswell, 2009). As stated earlier, little research exists on the experiences of ELD students, a unique and special population, in Ontario. Moreover, a critical qualitative researcher looks beyond the surface in order to understand the discourses influencing and guiding the data. By leaving the data open to the discovery of new possibilities, I hope to generate a critical explanation that understands teachers’ discourses on teaching ELD students.

3.2 Techniques

In my study on teachers’ discourses on teaching ELD students, I use two qualitative research techniques: document analysis and semi-structured interviews.

3.2.1 Document analysis

First, what is a document? Prior (2003) writes that documents must not be thought of as “stable, static and pre-defined artefacts” (p. 2), but instead must be defined in terms of “fields, frames and networks of actions” (p. 2). Under this definition, the creators, users and settings are all part of documents. A document’s status does not depend on its features or intentions but on factors that lay beyond the document. A researcher must
examine how certain documents function in the world not just on the page. Therefore, document analysis is not just a close reading of the content of a document, but how that document is created and then used.

3.2.2 Interviews

Throughout the development of qualitative research methodology, three types of qualitative interviews have emerged (Cousin, 2009), the first being the open-ended or non-structured interview. Here, the interview is used in an observation or ethnographic situation where the interview is spontaneous and not planned. This could take the form of an informal conversation at the end of the day. The second type of interview is the semi-structured interview otherwise known as an interview guide. The researcher starts with a list of topics or themes but the actual wording and order of the questions can be altered as the interview progresses. The third type of interview is the structured interview or standardized open-ended interview. In this case, the researcher cannot add any questions and must follow the ones that are written down in the correct order. With both the semi-structured and structured interviews, the questions must remain open-ended and use language that the participant will understand.

Within the area of qualitative interviews, my study uses semi-structured interviews. At its essence, semi-structured interviews are about preparing questions ahead of time and then using those questions as a guide during the actual interview. By preparing questions for the interview, the researcher stays focussed on the intent of the interview and the issues under study. Rapley (2004) finds that a list of questions reminds the researcher of the questions to ask, gives some structure to the interview, and presents the researcher as a competent interviewee. However, by being flexible in the delivery and
wording of the questions, the researcher leaves themselves open to additional probing and unexpected occurrences.

3.3 Empirical Study

The following is an outline of my study and the rationale for choosing certain participants, interview content and documents. I will briefly describe the recruitment process and exclusion criteria for participants. Finally, I will end with a description of the coding and analysis of my data.

3.3.1 Participants

Participants were chosen based on their previous work experiences as classroom teachers. They had taught an ELD student in a mainstream classroom setting within the range of Grades 3 to 8 in an Ontario school. I have chosen this grade range for a number of reasons. First, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) only defines students as ELD if they have entered Canada after Grade 2. Students who arrive in Canada during or before Grade 2 and need support in their language development are placed in the ESL program. After Grade 8, students enter the secondary school program, high school, where the school programmers place them in ESL or ELD classes where literacy is taught separately from mainstream students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007).

In order to find participants for my research, I used professional contacts I had gained throughout my career as a teacher and graduate student. Additionally, I attempted to use the “snowball” technique, where Warren (2001) states that “one respondent is located who fulfills the theoretical criteria, then that person helps to locate others through her or his social network” (p. 87). She finds that it is typical to the snowball process to
start with people the researcher already knows and move onto strangers. However, I did not find any participants through the use of the “snowball” technique. Instead they were all professional contacts from teaching and academic contexts. I aimed to find five to ten participants for my study and successfully interviewed eight participants.

As well as having elementary school teachers in Ontario who have taught an ELD student in a mainstream classroom as part of my study, I searched for teachers with varied experiences and identities. I interviewed one male and seven female participants. I would have liked to have found more male participants. However, in elementary schools most teachers are female. Three of my eight participants had training as ESL teachers while the other five did not. My participants all had different levels of teaching experience. Two of the eight participants were new teachers when they had worked with an ELD student and are currently in their fifth year of teaching. One participant was close to retirement and had over 25 years of teaching experiences, two had been teaching for approximately 15 years, and, finally, three participants had been working for approximately seven years. My participants were ethnically and linguistically diverse. Four of the eight participants came from racialized communities including South Asian and Caribbean backgrounds. At least three of the teachers had been ELLs in Ontario elementary schools themselves. Two had immigrated to Canada, if not more and, finally, two teachers had taught extensively in other countries.

3.3.2 Interviews

Participants were also asked to participate in a one hour semi-structured interview. I used what Rapley (2004, p. 15) refers to as “a style of interviewing that encourages interviewees to produce ‘thick descriptions’ . . . to produce elaborated and
detailed answers.” In my study, the participants were viewed as what Warren (2001) calls meaning-makers who present interpretations of their reality from varied perspectives. I chose semi-structured interviews because this form of interviewing allowed me flexibility in delivery and questioning, but still kept me focussed on the intent of the interview. According to Warren (2001) the qualitative researcher must be flexible and attentive to a variety of meanings that may emerge from the interview. Interviews took place at locations that were comfortable and convenient for the participants. I interviewed five participants in their home, one in a restaurant, one in a library conference room and one in a classroom. During my interviews, I used a digital recorder. This allowed me to interact with my participants as opposed to keeping my head down and writing. I was also able to replay and listen to my interviews again in order to hear nuances and ideas missed in the interview (Rapley, 2004).

The semi-structured interviews focused on participants’ thoughts on teaching including what they see as the purpose of education, teaching and schooling, their views on diversity and ELD students and literacy programming for ELD students specifically. Cousin (2009) finds that “semi-structured interviews allow researchers to develop in-depth accounts of experiences and perceptions with individuals” (p. 71). Therefore, the aim of my interviews was to gain a rich set of data about how teachers perceive ELD students in their mainstream classrooms.

### 3.3.3 Document Analysis

For the document analysis sections, I examined the Ontario Ministry of Education documents that pertain to elementary ELD students. These documents are *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling: A Practical guide for Ontario*
educators Grade 3 to 12 (2008) and Supporting English Language Learners - ESL and ELD Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12 (2007). These documents outline important Ontario Ministry of Education policy pertaining to ELD students as well as guides for defining, understanding, supporting and teaching ELD students. In studying these documents, I was better able to understand these public policies and guidelines for ELD students. I chose to analyze these new ministry documents as they influence how ELD students are defined and supported by teachers in Ontario schools.

3.4 Analysis

Once the data has been collected, the qualitative researcher is responsible for the coding and analysis of that data. Gray (2003) writes that despite much discussion of the role and position of the researcher in qualitative methodology little has been written on the ways in which researchers influence the organizing and analyzing of data. However, the role of the researcher becomes pivotal at this stage because the researcher is in the process of creating theories and interpretations and making connections to existing research. Coding and analysis are important parts of the qualitative research process. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) finds that “the term coding encompasses a variety of approaches to and ways of organizing qualitative data” (p. 27). However, coding and analysis are something all researchers need to be able to do.

As part of the first step of the coding process, researchers must assign tags and labels in order to find the most meaningful bits of information. The coding process is not to be confused with the actual analysis, but is to be thought of as a process that links different segments of data together. Codes are the beginning of a connection between
interviews, field notes or texts and the researchers’ theoretical concepts. Atkinson (1996) outlines two ways to view coding: first, as a simplification, in that data is reduced into a simple general form. Here, data is being condensed into analyzable categories. Second, however, coding can also be thought of as a complication of data in that it “can be used to expand, transform, and reconceptualise data, opening up more diverse analytical possibilities” (p. 29). The data is used to formulate new questions and interpretations. Atkinson (1996) finds that most researchers incorporate both the concept of simplification and complication into their coding.

If coding and analysis are not the same, then what is analysis? In qualitative research data collection and analysis happen simultaneously. At the beginning of the analysis of qualitative research data there is “the identification of key themes and patterns” (Atkinson, 1996, p. 26). As the research process progresses, data should become increasingly focussed. The categories that emerge from the data analysis process reflect the interaction between the researcher and participant. Charmaz (2004) writes that rich data is essential for qualitative researchers in order for them to have a thorough understanding of what they are studying. Delamont (2002) finds that the main task of analysis is to establish patterns in the data, which are then checked for reliability. The establishing of patterns is done by exploring systematically what the data is saying. She outlines two methods for checking on reliability of the data: respondent validation and triangulation. With respondent validation, the analysis is given to the participants for feedback. Triangulation, on the other hand, is a defence against sceptics in that it has three methods to approaching the research. For example, a researcher could have three methods for collecting data, three or more researchers can be involved in the collection of
data, or the researcher could get several types of data on something within his or her research methodology. All of these strategies are put in place to protect the integrity of the data and the patterns that emerge through analysis.

In my research project, I began the analysis process with the coding and categorizing of themes for the two Ontario ministry documents on ELD students. This was done while I was recruiting and interviewing participants for the semi-structured interview portion of the research project. I used a mixed-model coding system with preselected codes and emerging codes. First, a code list was drafted at the beginning of this process and was modified as new themes and ideas emerged. Once the interviews had been conducted, I fully transcribed the taped interviews. These were then coded using the same code list used for the Ontario Ministry of Education documents, but, again, the list was modified as new ideas emerge. These codes were then used to analyze patterns and irregularities in the data and to connect the data to existing theory. The next four chapters discuss my analysis and conclusions.
Chapter 4: Ontario Ministry Documents on Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling

The following chapter seeks to understand Ontario Ministry of Education documents on students supported by the ELD program and how these documents endeavour to transform education by creating equalizable educational experiences for all ELD students. The document *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling – A practical guide for Ontario educators Grades 3 – 12* (2008) examines typical profiles of ELD students, ways to assess these students, appropriate teaching strategies, different program delivery models and ways to support students in transitioning to mainstream classes and secondary programs. The policy document *English Language Learners ESL and ELD programs and services – Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (2007) outlines definitions and goals for both the ESL and ELD programs as well as a variety of components of the policy and services including developing a school board wide plan, reception and orientation, initial assessments, placement, programming, graduation requirements, assessment, evaluation and reporting, involvement in large-scale assessment, discontinuation of ESL/ELD support, allocation of resources, and teacher qualifications and professional development. A number of themes arose from my analysis of these Ontario Ministry of Education documents, the most prevalent being: reinforcement of national languages, inclusion of students’ home language and prior experiences in the classroom, socialization to formal schooling norms and transforming school structures. This chapter focuses on the contradiction in the two documents between the suggested inclusion of students’ prior experiences and home languages and
the need for ELD students to assimilate to formal schooling norms as opposed to schooling changing to meet the needs of ELD students.

4.1 Framing an understanding of ELLs

The policy document lays out a range of criteria for the inclusion of students in ESL and ELD programming. A number of different students qualify for the label ELL. The policy document outlines two major categories: Canadian-born ELLs and Newcomers from Other Countries (p. 9 - 10). Canadian-born ELLs include aboriginal students who speak a first language other than English, children from distinct cultural and linguistic communities and children born into immigrant communities where English is not spoken. Newcomer ELLs are defined under three categories. The first is Visa or international students who, the policy document suggest, usually come to Canada for secondary school in order to enter Canadian universities. The other two categories of newcomer ELLs include students whose families immigrated to Canada as part of a voluntarily, planned process and those families whose children arrive as a result of war or other crises in their homeland. Both of these last two groups of newcomer ELLs may have had consistent or inconsistent access to formal schooling including English language classes. ELD students, in the policy documents, are only part of the newcomer group and can either be voluntary migrants or fleeing war or other crises. In other words, ELD students come from diverse experiences and backgrounds.

An important theme in the policy document is the use of students’ first languages. First, the policy document suggests the use of the student’s first language during the orientation process “whenever possible” (p. 15). This is pervasive throughout both the policy document and the guide to supporting ELLs with limited prior schooling: the
importance of including the student’s first or home language wherever possible in schooling. For example, the guidelines document states “Students whose language and culture are valued gain confidence in their abilities to succeed in learning” (p. 12) and then later lists “opportunities to maintain and use first language as a bridge to new learning” (p. 13) as a broad-based strategy. Here, we see the promotion of the use of students’ first language within English speaking schools. However, access to bilingual schools in many immigrants’ first language is not even mentioned. Here we can see how Bourdieu’s (2001) notions of how the official language reproduces hegemony: the student who does not speak French or English as their first language must conform to Canada’s official language policy and does not have the same access to resources in their first language.

How the policy document defines ELLs, at times, frames some ELLs as the outsider using language that recreates coercive relations of power between dominant group institutions and subordinated communities. The policy document writes of “children who were born in communities that have maintained a distinct cultural and linguistic tradition” (p. 9). What the culture is distinct from is not made clear. The use of distinct culture as part of a description of some ELLs born in Canada suggests that culture is static and that there is a uniform Canadian culture that students in English speaking schools are all a part of – white, English speaking, modern and Anglo-Saxon in origin. If, as Hall (2006) writes, there are no simple, unified identities, how does one begin to understand what a distinct culture is without creating static, essentialized definitions of culture? By framing students’ culture and language as “distinct”, the students then become the racial other (English, 2009; Lee, 2008) who exists outside the norms of
Canadian society. The policy document, thereby, reproduces coercive discourses on the ‘other’ who does not share the qualities of a normalized Canadian.

Canadian ideas about multiculturalism are also reflected in the discourses of the policy document. For example, the policy document calls for the inclusion of “cultural groups” (p. 14) when asking the school boards to consult community partners. The use of the term “cultural groups” reflects discourses on multiculturalism that are pervasive in Canada. The cultural other is encouraged to retain their cultural heritage according to Canadian government policy on multiculturalism (Howard-Hassmann, 2006). However, in the policy document, there is a simultaneous pull to become more Canadian by learning the Standardized English taught in schools: “students … may require instruction in some of the vocabulary and grammatical forms of standard Canadian English in order to succeed in school” (p.18). Here, the practice of speaking Standard English in schools is paradoxical to the acceptance of cultural diversity, which Howard-Hassmann finds the Canadian multicultural policy espouses.

Children who are born in Canada and live in established communities where they speak their first language and have a limited exposure to English or French are also defined as ELLs. The policy document lists “aboriginal students whose first language is a language other than English” (p.8) along with immigrant communities under the heading Canadian-born ELLs. It defines all of the Canadian-born students as having been “raised in families or communities in which languages other than English are spoken” (p.8). Despite having been born in Canada - in the case of First Nation communities being the first group of people in Canada before European languages were even spoken or the notion of Canada as a country or British colony was even conceived - First Nation
students continue to be thought of as the “other” who does not speak one of Canada’s two official languages. Moreover, the policy document in adherence to Canada’s Charter of Rights and Freedoms does not ensure aboriginal students’ rights to education in their first language – not an official language of Canada. The policy asks that school boards consult First Nation Education Authorities to ensure that “aboriginal students receive culturally appropriate reception and orientation services” (p. 16), but the use of aboriginal languages is not mentioned. This suggests that the initial orientation at a school may be culturally appropriate, but does not necessarily include the use of Aboriginal languages. In general, even in communities with Canadian born citizens, the use of one of the two official languages is required in schools.

The practical guide to *Supporting ELLs with Limited Prior Schooling* document delves more deeply into understanding and supporting ELD students. This document creates profiles for many different types of ELD students describing in detail their prior experiences:

Fatima, 13, was born in rural Sudan. Her first language is Nuer, and she also speaks some Arabic. She attended school sporadically for four years before her family fled civil war. She spent time at home with her cousins and siblings – two older brothers, and older sister, and a younger brother. When she arrived a year ago, she was assessed, placed in a Grade 7 class, and provided ELD support.

This year, in Grade 8, she is becoming more comfortable and more socially outgoing, enjoys learning, and is an interested, observant participant in classroom activities. While Fatima’s oral language grows every day, she still struggles with adapted and age-appropriate printed texts and with writing tasks. Fatima can say many of the words in some of the printed text, but because of her limited academic English, she does not comprehend most of what she is reading. Since she has an excellent memory, she relies heavily on demonstrating her learning and communicating orally. (pp. 15)
Through the use of these profiles, the document promotes a more holistic view of children where the difficulties students may have experienced in the past are acknowledged and taken into consideration when programming, supporting and assessing ELD students. Moreover, the profiles outline the students’ social adjustment process with their peers pushing teachers towards looking at the whole child and not just their academic achievements.

The use of the profiles and the discussion of ELD student prior experiences are important tools in framing how teachers view and work with students; however, by consistently pointing out the negative experiences of ELD students, the document, at times, reproduces discourse on Canada as the saving nation. The ELD student is described in the guidelines as having needs that “extend beyond schooling. Some families may have experienced great difficulties, and may still carry the burden of separation and loss” (p. 8). The guidelines further outline some of the difficulties ELD students may experience upon entering Canada such as “unresolved asylum claims, financial hardships, limited facility with English, outstanding health issues, and the isolation and the newness of their lives in Ontario present daily challenges. . . They require many supports to rebuild their lives” (p. 8). While it is important for teachers to know about the difficulties their students may be experiencing, this way of speaking reflects discourses found by previous researchers on Canadian teachers on the topic of diversity. When analyzing the assimilation discourse present in the participants of her own research on student diversity in Canada, Connelly (2008) writes that “often educators’ language around naming difference in these interviews falls into a language of “helping others,” or the binary opposition of “us and them” articulated in static term” (pp. 168 – 169). This helping or
supporting of students reflects underlying discourses around assimilation. The guidelines document reproduces this binary of “us vs. them” because it becomes “us” - Canadian society, schools and teachers - who must help “them” - the foreign student - to find safety, adjustment and, ultimately, success.

4.2 The use of prior knowledge in the classroom

One of the most prevalent themes in the guidelines for ELLs with limited prior schooling is the incorporation of ELD students’ prior knowledge. Here, the guidelines document advocates for a pedagogy that includes students’ cultural and linguistic knowledge. This is reflected in the quotation by Eugene Garcia (1999) found at the beginning (p.5) of the document:

We must first comprehend the fact that children – all children – come to school motivated to enlarge their culture. But we must start with their culture … and look first to determine how they seek to know themselves and others and how their expertise and experience can be used as the fuel to fire their interests, knowledge, and skills … for they are rich assets. As teachers, we enter their world in order to aid them and to build bridges between two cultures. (pp. 82)

Here, students’ previous knowledge and skills are thought of as rich. The building of bridges between two cultures suggests acculturation in that students learn about the new school culture, and their previous culture and knowledge is of value in the classroom. At the beginning of Chapter 1, the guidelines document states “every ELL with limited prior schooling needs to see himself or herself as a learner, with a place and a contribution to make in the classroom and the school community” (p. 5). The knowledge and experiences of ELD students not only need to be valued but also must contribute to the learning of the class. Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leoni, Sandhu, & Sastri (2005) write about prior knowledge stating that it is not only a matter of previous school
knowledge, but also “the totality of the experiences that have shaped the learner's identity and cognitive functioning” (p. 38). Everything that makes up the past experiences of a student needs to be valued by the school.

The guidelines further place emphasis on students’ prior knowledge by suggesting that students’ home languages are used in the classroom. During initial writing assessments, “all languages in which the student can write even a little” (p. 24) should be collected and used to determine literacy levels. This suggests that ELD students’ previous literacy skills are of value and can add to classroom instruction. Many researchers write about the importance of the use of home languages in the classroom (Rowsell, Kosnik, & Beck, 2008; Taylor, Bernhard, Garg & Cummins, 2008). Instead of creating a graveyard of lost literacies (Taylor et al., 2008), students’ literacy skills outside of school need to become an integral part of students’ literacy experiences in schools. The guidelines document further supports the use of home languages in the classroom when it lists recognizing “first language (L1) and culture as tools for learning” (p. 36) under keys for effective instruction. Moreover, teachers are told to “support the use of L1 for learning” (p. 40) when teaching academic language, and to “incorporate opportunities for peer support in L1, where possible” (p.48). All of these instructional practices promote a pedagogy that incorporates the use of students’ prior knowledge in the classroom.

As well as using the L1 in initial assessment procedures and with group work, it can be used for assessment purposes. The use of the L1 is suggested as a tool to be used during assessment such as the creation of “a dual-language book on the computer” (p. 27). Here, the teacher assesses a book that is written in both the student’s L1 and in English. When assessing students’ ability to read and write, the guidelines suggest the use
of students L1 in creative ways that allow students to continue to use their first language while still participating in classroom activities that can be assessed for learning:

Although we may not understand the first language, we can listen to children read and know whether they read fluently or haltingly; whether they use pictures or other strategies to tackle words that they do not know; whether they attend to print on the page; or whether they have book knowledge, such as holding the book or turning the pages. These can all be determined during a reading and writing conference – a powerful opportunity of assessment for learning in action. (pp. 26)

Here, students L1 is not just an instructional tool, but something to be assessed and reported on. It is an essential part of the students’ schooling.

The use of the home languages in school is only suggested as a support, however, and the responsibility of maintaining first language usage falls on the family. Researchers (Ingersoll, 2001; Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Toledo, 1998) have found that it is ideal for ELD students to first attain literacy in their L1 before learning English. However, in Ontario the main language of instruction in schools continues to be English with the L1 being used as a strategy to support English language learning. For example, the guidelines document further reinforces the use of L1 by stressing “the importance of first language maintenance and continued development for reasons of family communication, cultural identity, overall language development, and as an asset in the global community” (p. 25). The document further states

Some families may decide to speak English at home to accelerate the process of English language acquisition for their children. It is important that parents and students understand the vital role of continued development of first language skills throughout the process of acquiring a new language (pp. 25).

In both of these cases, the school promotes the use of students’ L1 and encourages parents to continue to use the L1 at home. However, the maintenance and further development of the L1 does not fall on the responsibility of the school, but on the parents.
Dachyshyn (2008) in her research finds that Canadian schools offer little support for the retention and of home languages and cultures. Ontario schools promote the use of L1 through their discourse, but do not extend that L1 usage consistently in schools thereby giving mixed messages to students and parents about the importance of the use and development of L1.

4.3 Schooling vs. education

How the policy document defines education reflects further inconsistencies in discourses on the value of students’ prior knowledge. Both the policy document and the guidelines for ELLs with limited prior schooling use the terms education and schooling interchangeably when referring to ELD students. This reflects inconsistencies found in the literature on how to label and define ELD students (Hamayan, 1994; Freeman and Freeman, 2001; Decapua, Smathers and Tang, 2009). This is important because how students are labelled and defined sets the stage for how they are perceived and understood. First, the title of the guidelines uses the term schooling: ELLs with limited prior schooling. However, the policy document states “students in these programs are most often from countries in which their access to education has been limited” (p. 22). This same quotation is then repeated on p. 6 of the guidelines for ELLs with limited prior schooling demonstrating the inconsistency in terminology for defining ELD students. When using the term schooling, one can imagine the “forms of schooling” Farrell (2008) lists in his work *Community education in developing countries: the quiet revolution in schooling*: young people of the same ages, a ‘certified’ teacher, several hundred children in a single building and supporting learning material amongst others (p. 372). Here, students are exposed to formal schooling and have access to formal literacy skills such as
reading and writing. However, education is something children are constantly exposed to in many different ways outside of schools. By defining students’ education as limited as opposed to their access to schooling as limited, the documents, inadvertently, define the many different ways they have learned outside of the classroom as limited. If students’ prior knowledge is to be acknowledged and incorporated into academic work, negating that knowledge by calling it limited only serves to further marginalize ELD students.

Learning happens in many different ways inside and outside of the classroom. Learning that happens outside of the classroom through alternative forms of schooling is briefly mentioned in the policy document. The policy document states that “Placement decisions should be based on information from: - interviews with students and their parents/families about previous access to schooling; experiences in school, including type of schooling” (p. 19). Here, the policy document emphasizes the importance of understanding the type of schools students have attended and their experiences with that school. In this case, students may have some experience with non-formal education, which is any organized educational opportunity happening outside of the formal schooling system (Rogers, 2004a). Educators and school boards may, then, discover pertinent information about the type of school students have attended and alternative forms of education, which has the possibility of informing their practice. The policy document even goes as far as to push schools to ask for information on “the students’ strengths, hobbies, and interests” (p. 19). This information could potentially lead the school towards gaining information on students’ informal education experiences, which Rogers (2004a) defines as “highly contextualised, highly participatory educational activities.” Here, everyone gains knowledge and experience through educational activities.
not happening within the formal school whether at a cultural event or at home, work or play. This becomes an important aspect of understanding ELD students’ previous experiences and knowledge. By mentioning different forms of schooling, education and learning, the policy document presents teachers with an alternative way of understanding ELD students’ previous learning experiences.

4.4 Assimilation to formal schooling norms

One of the most poignant inconsistencies in the guidelines to supporting ELLs with limited prior schooling is the expectation of students to assimilate to formal schooling norms and act in a way that is socially acceptable to schools while, as written earlier, simultaneously stating that schools need to incorporate students’ prior experiences and knowledge. First, the guidelines ask that schools deliver clear messages about school rules and expectations: “communicate clearly the importance of regular attendance; behaviour expectations; school safety plans, including bullying and harassment policies; how to get help with homework; lunch routines; and timetables” (p. 25). In many ways this statement appears supportive in that the school attempts to communicate with parents, is clear in its expectations and is proactive about bullying and harassment. However, the guidelines create a discourse of assimilation in that ELD students must adhere to school expectations that may be contrary to their previous experiences. Students’ previous experiences may not include behaviours such as standing in lines, raising your hand to answer a question, going immediately to your seat upon entering a classroom or even speaking casually with an authority figure, as suggested by the literature (Mace-Matluck et al., 1998). By expecting students to adapt to these behavioural expectations, ELD students are expected to assimilate to formal schooling
norms. This is also reinforced at the beginning of the guidelines where it states that students “are adjusting to school, its routines and expectations” (p. 6) and “they may have little experience with school routines and expectations” (p. 8). Here, the guidelines recognize that the routines of the school may not be part of the ELD student’s prior experiences while simultaneously expecting students to change in order to fit into the expectations of schooling. There is no suggestion that schools and teachers change routines and expectations to more clearly reflect the students’ previous or home behaviours. Students must change their behaviour to that which is acceptable to the school.

The guidelines document further calls for the assimilation of ELD students to formal schooling norms through a discussion of rules that are taken for granted and practiced every day in Canadian classrooms. The guidelines describe these practices as “the ‘unwritten’ rules of social interaction, such as personal space, school routines and expectations of behaviour” (p. 11). These social or behavioural expectations are then to be implicitly and explicitly taught by teachers. Darling-Hammond, Banks, Zumwalt, Gomez, Sherin, Griesdorn & Finn (2005) write about how teachers can create conditions that enable or disable certain kinds of learning and identity construction through the hidden curriculum. The teacher is key to how students understand themselves as a learner. This is supported by Cummins (2001) who finds that students’ relationships with their teachers “are more central to student success than any method for teaching literacy, or science or math” (p.1). The guidelines document further writes that “this is an opportune time to teach students about the school’s expectations of and for them” (p. 11). This implies that the ELD student is to be taught about these hidden rules, so that they
can immediately conform to school expectations. Furthermore, one of the goals that the guidelines document lists for ELD students is the development of “socio-cultural skills that will be the foundation for future learning” (p. 13). The guidelines document does not ask teachers to question their own ‘unwritten’ rules of social behaviour, but simply to be aware of them and make sure that these social behaviours are explicitly taught to ELD students.

The socialization of the ELD student is discussed at length throughout the guidelines document. In general, the possibility of becoming more Canadian is described in a positive light whereas previous experiences are thought of as unsafe. The guidelines list the following adjustment factors in the first voice of an ELD student:

- My parents brought us here so that we could have a chance for a better future.
- I want to become Canadian without losing who I am.
- I am learning that a variety of people can live together peacefully, even though they may disagree or have different beliefs.
- I am getting used to speaking to and sitting beside people of the opposite sex.
- I’m hopeful about the possibilities of my life in Canada. (pp. 9)

Here the guidelines discuss the conflict between previous life experiences and current school and Canadian expectations. The teacher can become aware, if not already, of the internal conflict of the ELD student or new immigrant by reading this reflection. However, throughout this description Canada is continually described as a positive place - better, peaceful and hopeful – suggesting that the place from where they came is worse, not peaceful and hopeless. The guidelines documents then write that “teachers need to be sensitive to students’ previous experiences, which could include conflict, unrest, and
oppression” (p.17). Even though students’ previous experiences and knowledge should be incorporated into programming for ELD students, sensitivity should be shown as these experiences may be negative. The guidelines further suggest that “for some students, it is a challenge to trust any authority figure” (p. 17). In general, many concerns with ELD students’ socialization process are discussed at length in the guidelines.

What if an ELD students tries to rebel against this assimilation process? What if they are struggling to fit their identity into this new way of being that is expected in schools? The guidelines write that part of the teachers’ job is to help in this transition to a new form of learning. They write of this process as the four stages of cultural adjustment that an ELD student may experience upon entering Canada. These include “arrival and first impressions … culture shock …. recovery and optimism …. acculturation” (p. 11 - 12) - the final goal of this process being that ELD students will “understand more about how to succeed in school and gain more balance and control in their lives” (p. 12). The teacher is to assist in the development of this adjustment to a new way of life by helping the ELD student “to develop and adjust to the academic expectations and the behaviours that address conduct and routines in the school environment” (p. 13). This is further exemplified on page 40 of the guidelines documents when it suggests that teachers “Include orientation and life skills”, and then again on page 50 when they write “It may take time and practice for students to learn to interact positively in a way that values the needs and contributions of all group members”. Again, it is not the school who adjust their structures and routines to match the ELD student’s prior experiences, but the ELD students who must change their behaviours and go through the long process of, what the
guidelines document class, acculturation. The ELD students must conform to Canadian culture and the structure of the school.

4.5 Transforming school structures – non-formal education and informal education/learning

How can schools transform their programming to meet ELD students’ needs? The guidelines document writes that “it is a challenge for a school to provide programming that meets the distinct needs of English language learners with limited prior schooling” (p. 43). In other words, ELD students present a unique and, at times, difficult challenge to schools. First, the guidelines documents suggest creating congregated classes within the existing structure of formal schooling as one method for supporting ELD students. The guidelines document clearly states that “where low enrolment makes it difficult to offer courses in all schools, boards should devise innovative alternatives, such as clustering with other schools, and providing transportation to other sites” (p. 43). This is because it has been determined, as stated in the guidelines, that for ELD students “the amount of differentiation possible in a mainstream setting is not enough to support the learner” (p. 44). The policy document also suggests supporting ELLs and ELD students through the use of “congregated classes for English language instruction, in the home school or other accessible school, for a significant portion of each school day” (p. 22). These congregated classes may be within the student’s school community or the student may be bussed to a school outside of their community. Parental agreement is required for this type of model. Both the guidelines and policy suggestion of the use of congregated classes align with Toledo’s (1998) suggestion of the all-day school-within-a-school, which would take place within a regular public school; however, students would have their own classroom and
follow a separate program and a modified curriculum including special classes and services.

The guidelines clearly outline the way these congregated classes should be organized. They include literacy and numeracy blocks and predictable, inviting classroom routines. The use of numeracy and literacy blocks in the congregated model is dependent upon the school organizing its timetable “so that all students study core subjects within literacy and numeracy blocks” (p. 46) and then “the ELD program is modelled on the school timetable, and is also delivered as literacy and numeracy learning blocks” (p. 46). The literacy programs of these students should incorporate integrated units and oral-language. A strong emphasis is placed on co-operative learning and the development of “interpersonal skills” (p. 50) within the congregated classroom. Although most of the suggested tasks are based around simple reading comprehension - “students record what they learn on fact sheets … create posters …. quizzes” (p. 47) - , the guidelines briefly mention critical thinking skills by listing “develop critical thinking skills (e.g., use news items for daily discussion, create links to prior knowledge of world events)” (p. 48) as a literacy learning block planning tip. This type of literacy block is formally structured with clear outlines and expectations. Rogers (2004a) defines this type of schooling as non-formal or flexible in that

The standardised elements common to all such learning groups are clearly schooling but the participatory elements mean that it is schooling made flexible to the local group concerned. (Towards a New Paradigm section, para. 5)

In this type of school, the requirements of formal schooling become flexible: same-age groupings and standardized curriculum. However, some elements of the formal school still remain: school building and a teacher paid for by the government.
While simultaneously suggesting the use of congregated ELD classes, the policy and guidelines document, also, suggest the integration of ELD students into mainstream classes. For example, the policy document states “English language learners should be placed in a grade-level or subject-specific classroom for at least part of the day” (p. 21). The guidelines for ELLs with limited prior schooling supports this statement by suggesting that “wherever possible, students should also be integrated into mainstream classes” (p. 44), but that this should be age-appropriate. Transitioning from an ELD to an ESL program and then to a mainstream classroom can be difficult, as found by Carrasquillo & Rodríguez (2002) who problematize mainstreaming finding that most teachers do not plan and design lessons that meet the instructional needs of ELLs. The guidelines suggest that “integration into mainstream classrooms should be an ongoing process, and the amount of integration should increase over time” (p. 63). Where integration takes place the policy document suggests that “core programs (English, social studies/history/geography, science, mathematics) be taught by content-area teachers who also hold English as a Second Language Part 1 qualifications” (p. 22) and that when integrated into a mainstream classroom “appropriate instructional support from the classroom teacher and/or an ESL/ELD teacher” (p. 23) may be used. All of these suggestions work towards creating a flexible or non-formal program of study where ELD students can be successful within the existing structure of the school.

Although the congregated classes for ELD students are suggested by the *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling* guidelines, they are not required by the policy document leaving it up to the local schools and school boards to decide which model of support best serves their needs. Specifically, the policy
document lists a variety of ways of supporting all ELLs, thereby allowing school boards and individual schools to choose their own model for supporting ELD students. The following is a list of choices on supporting all ELLs that schools “may include” found in the policy document (2008, p. 22):

- congregated classes for English language instruction, in the home school or other accessible school, for a significant portion of each school day;
- individual assistance on a tutorial/resource basis;
- core programs (English, social studies/history/geography, science, mathematics) taught by content-area teachers who also hold English as a Second Language Part 1 qualifications;
- integration into mainstream classrooms with appropriate instructional support from the classroom teacher and/or ESL/ELD teacher;
- participation in courses that encourage a high level of student involvement but that do not require a high level of proficiency in English (e.g., music, health and physical education, international language programs in some of the community languages when possible);
- participation in elementary and secondary international language programs;
- increased opportunities to use technology in developing proficiency in English
- online support;
- peer tutoring and/or bilingual tutoring;
- a combination of some or all of the above (pp. 22 – 23)

The congregated classes listed above align with previous research on ELD students and are suggested as the model of supporting ELD students in the guidelines. However, these classes are only a choice amongst many when it comes to actual policy. The policy document does not require school boards and schools to create congregated classes. A school could simply have a peer support or provide individual support for an ELD student.
and still meet the requirements of the policy on programming for ELD students. Therefore, despite outlining an intensive support system that aligns with research on ELD students, the policy document offers many other alternatives for their support.

What about transforming existing ideas of schooling by creating different forms of schooling outside of the confines of the regular school building? Although the congregated model supports creating a specialized core program for ELD students, it does not transform how we understand schooling and how it is structured. For a group of students who have never been to school or have had only some experience with schooling, being in a school with students of the same age, with a teacher, with textbooks and educational resources and a set curriculum may be a new and overwhelming experience. One suggestion for supporting ELD students is the use of “cooperative education and other workplace experiences” (p. 63). If students are not used to being with people of their own age, this interaction with adults could still be educational, but align with students’ previous experiences with informal schooling and informal learning. The guidelines document also suggests the use of “locally developed courses adapted for ELLs with limited prior schooling” (p. 51). Students attend classes that specifically meet their needs and do not follow the standardized curriculum of the government thereby transforming how formal schooling is taught with ELD students. However, both of these suggestions are made at the secondary school level and are not available options for elementary schools.

One example of a transformed school for ELD students can be found at Elmira District Secondary School in South-Western Ontario (Martin, 2010). Here, a teacher, Phil Sauder, created an award-winning program called the Elmira Life and Work School
(ELAWS). This is a secondary program set-up for a group of Mennonites who do not go to school past Grade 8. Martin (2010) writes that

> When it started, there were four kids sitting around a kitchen table. Now, more than 120 students are participating in a program that allows them to get a high school education, while maintaining the flexibility needed to help out on the family farm. Students spend approximately two days per week in a classroom setting, with the remainder of their week either working at jobs, or at their home farm. Journals are kept by the students, and reviewed by teachers every week, and considered to be part of the overall curriculum. (para. 2)

ELAWS has transformed the traditional idea of schooling having to happen within a building with students of the same age and with textbooks and standardized curriculum. School can take place in a kitchen or on a farm. The teacher and school board have created what Rogers (2004a) defines as non-formal schooling in that it is highly-participatory and is developed with the needs of the community in mind. Martin (2010) further writes about how the ELAWS School sees the importance of including the community and parents, even if not having experienced schooling themselves, in decisions on how to structure and create a schooling experience that meets the needs of students. In the *Elmira Independent*, Martin (2010) quotes the teacher at the ELAWs school as saying

> “The ELAWs program has worked, in part, because of the open lines of communication with the population they serve, and the willingness to put as much flexibility into the program as needed — while still understanding the requirements that need to be fulfilled. We’re not trying to change values; we’re trying to give them other tools to put in their toolbox.”

Here, the discourse on assimilation to formal schooling norms and values found in the guidelines is not present. Instead, the school changes its underlying structures and programming to meet the schooling needs of ELD students. However, this type of
program is currently only available at the secondary level in rural Ontario and is not set up for elementary school ELD students living in the city.

Along with transforming traditional notions of formal schooling, how teachers define success is central to ELD students’ experiences with schools. The guidelines document asks that secondary school teachers transform how they view student success in relation to ELD students by writing that

Students who are sufficiently mature and have developed skills that allow them to enter the workforce should be regarded as having reached a significant milestone in their education. (pp. 67)

Again, one can imagine that within a secondary school setting the teacher’s definition of success changes. Students do not have to meet the academic and social criteria of school in order to be viewed as successful. On the other hand, however, the guidelines document still expects ELD students in elementary schools to assimilate to formal schooling norms: “The goal is to develop the academic and socio-cultural skills that will be the foundation for future learning” (p. 13). There is not the same sense of transforming school structures or expectations. Instead ELD students must transform themselves to fit the needs of formal schooling in order to have the possibility of a successful future in Ontario schools.

4.6 Summary

In general, the policy and guidelines documents push elementary school teachers towards a new way of approaching pedagogy and understanding ELD students. The documents ask teachers to transform their pedagogy by incorporating students’ first languages into their initial interviews, instruction and assessments. Teachers must transform the curriculum to reflect the previous experiences of the ELD student. However, both documents fall short of taking a critical look at underlying structures and
assumptions around language and schooling in Ontario. They continue to reproduce discourses about the dominance of official languages and the importance of formal schooling and learning in educating children. Although there are some innovative new programs for secondary students that push the boundaries of how schooling is understood, in general, elementary level ELD students must change to meet the needs of existing structures and expectations in Ontario schools. In conclusion, both of the documents transform the content and methods of teaching ELD students, but not the existing structures. The next chapter is a description of the semi-structured interviews that summarizes the participants’ professional experiences, philosophies of teaching and experiences with ELD students.
This chapter examines how teachers perceive ELD students and education in general through a summary of their philosophies of teaching. I will describe how teachers view their roles as educators and understand the experiences of the ELD students they teach.

5.1 Sheila

Sheila defines herself as a Westernized Indian who was born and raised in Canada. She talks about her own parents’ immigrant experience from Punjab. She feels that her parents came to Canada for her to get an education. When describing the racism her parents experienced when first coming to Canada in 1975, she states

> My parents were highly educated back home, but worked in factory jobs here because that’s all they could get. You know you go through the racism in 1975. You go through all the stuff. And the same with a lot of our …

Interviewer – The racism in 1975. What do you mean by that?

> Well, my Dad had a turban and he couldn’t get a job unless he cut it off. There’s a lot of that. It’s pretty… There was a lot in Toronto.

Sheila discusses how her parents worked hard at night jobs just for her. She felt obligated to get an education and graduate from high school, and it was very important to her father that she went to university.

Sheila is a Grade 6 teacher with five years of teaching experience. However, her only experience with an ELD student was in her first two years with a boy from Jamaica. This was during her first year of teaching when she was covering a maternity leave for a more experienced teacher and then during her second year of teaching with the same
student when she was hired on a permanent contract as a Grade 7 teacher. He had already been living and going to school in Ontario for three years when she taught him Language Arts, Mathematics and Science. Sheila has many experiences with ELLs, but has had no training for ELLs specifically.

5.1.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching

Sheila reflects on how there is the perception of the larger society that education is about having the right piece of paper (degree) and that brings you respect and prestige. However, central to Sheila’s philosophy of teaching is the importance of creating relationships with her students. She explains:

Because if you have that relationship with your students. If you have a student that’s just challenging with behaviour for example and they’re very defiant. I think that if you create that rapport with that student, they want to do the work and they want to, you know be educated, because you are kind of that role model for them. You know what. I wanna be like my teacher because you have the relationship.

Sheila feels that if the students do not think you have their best interests at heart, they will think you are out to get them. She states that she is like a guidance counsellor as well as a teacher because the kids feel comfortable talking to her about their problems. Sheila, also, reflects on how a Muslim father did not want to shake her hand during a parent interview. She was offended by this at first, but after some reflection, she came to the conclusion that it was his culture. She states that you have to be open to these types of things at her school. You cannot get offended. The staff at her school is very diverse, but she does not believe you have to be of Jamaican or South Asian backgrounds to be successful working with the kids. Relationships are key to being an effective teacher.
Sheila believes that learning should not just be about paper and pencils. She references incorporating Multiple Intelligences, a concept developed by Howard Gardner that asks teachers to incorporate a wide range of learning styles such as kinaesthetic and music activities into their teaching. Sheila states that every day she questions her students, and they teach her something new. She engages her students by incorporating material that is relevant to them like video clips from MTV and using rap in her poetry units. In recent years her school has started to use a standardized literacy program. She likes this program as it clearly defines the differences between reading and writing skills and allows her to incorporate Science into her literacy program:

It is actually quite helpful because it integrates, it’s cross-curricular. So if I’m doing a space unit in Science, what it is it’s a they’re booklets where you do a little reading and then you’ve got comprehension questions. It’s very good because the teacher’s manual actually shows … you read a passage, there’s sections on reading that you can actually test them on. So they give reading comprehension questions. It gives you a writing section, so maybe you can write a little a journal on what you read.

In recent years, she has moved away from the literacy program she used in her first two years of teaching to follow the standardized program used in her school. Technology such as CD’s of class texts or readings is an important part of her program. She does not like to make students read in front of the class because this was always difficult and embarrassing for her as a child. Instead the students listen and follow along in their texts to the reading.

When Sheila discusses the parents of her immigrant students, she sees her own parents’ experiences and values reflected in their words. She finds that when parents come into the school, they can see that she is from their culture, but she is also modern and does not have an accent. She finds that this opens parents up to listening to what she has to say. If she was from a different culture, they would not be so open to her opinions.
Sheila states that it is important to educate parents about school. She really enjoys educating parents about life and western culture, which she feels a part of. Furthermore, the school settlement worker plays an important role in reaching out to parents and lending a helping hand. Sheila feels that because she has a South Asian background, she picks up on tension between different groups in her class. She says:

I understand them as well. I understand the culture. I know what’s going on. I’ll tell you something 90% of the teachers have no idea that this is happening. But it’s not that bad, it’s not that bad. Definitely Pakistani and the Punjabi kids, they still are good friends, they still but sometimes that kind of comes up. Maybe I would say, very rarely. There’s no big problems. There’s no gangs or anything like that or any rivalries.

She goes on further to discuss how there has always been animosity but more with her parents’ generation. In general, she describes new immigrants as coming from hard working families with high expectations, and she feels it is part of her role as a teacher to educate those parents.

5.1.2 ELD Students and Their Programming

In Sheila’s first and second year of teaching, she worked with an ELD student, who she describes as also being behavioural:

He was out of his seat. He’d have tantrums. He would throw things around and stuff like that. He wouldn’t want to work and he’d get in these moods where he was like, “I don’t want to do. I don’t want to do. This is not fair. This is not fair.” He’d be just like a baby and just sulk, and he wouldn’t want to do anything.

Sheila reflects on how the other students in the class were sometimes afraid of the ELD student because in her view, he was a tough little boy. Incentives were an important part of her motivation to get him to work. She describes the ELD student as immature and responding well to prizes. One day she noticed him staring at some candies she had with
her lunch. He said he really liked candy. In response to this revelation, she decided to “meet him half-way”: he would get a candy for completing assignments in class whether it was poetry, answering three more questions or drawing. She started what she refers to as a point system. She found that this strategy really worked well with him. She taught him for two years. In Grade 8, he had a different teacher and she observed that he really misbehaved. His morale decreased. Sheila states that he “became very, very naughty.” She found his behaviour heartbreaking and wondered what the situation was like at home.

Sheila reflects on how she finds it difficult to work with students who “don’t know the basics” like multiplication and division.

The problem with these children also is they don’t know. It’s hard to give them. They need to know the basics, and I find a lot of them don’t know their multiplication or division.

She finds that very needy kids are put into mainstream classes. She feels it is a problem to try and support the Special Education students, ELLs and regular kids at the same time. She gives the ELL’s and Special Education students levelled work to do at a corner table. When other students question why these students are doing different work, she describes how she takes the time to explain to the students that everyone has different strengths and weaknesses. Her ELD student in her first two years of teaching enjoyed programming that included popular culture:

So he loved poetry and . I know all these kids they love the R & B and Hip Hop music – especially did. Especially the class that I had was into that type of music. So I explained . . . I put some, some rap songs for the class. And they were like, “why is she playing rap music? This is pretty cool.” And kind of how I engage my students - especially the boys.

She, also, describes using a buddy system to support her students. She strategically picks students who will not look down on the ELL. However, she found that most of the
students in her class were afraid of the ELD student she worked with because he was a bully. It was difficult to find peer mentors.

5.2 Lisa

Lisa has been teaching elementary school for eight years. In her fifth year of teaching, she taught an ELD student from Africa in her mainstream Grade 5/6 class. Lisa’s school has a large Ojibwa population, so Ojibwa language classes are offered to students as an alternative to French as a second language classes. Lisa has had much training around diversity and equity and is a leader in her school and her school board with promoting equitable discourses and teaching pedagogy. When she was in pre-service, she took what she calls an ESL related-studies course. It was an optional course, and it did not give her any official qualifications. She felt that this course opened her awareness because there were people in the class who had worked with ELLs or had been ELLs themselves. She also completed an internship at the end of pre-service where she worked directly with an ESL teacher in a school. She learned about ESL programming and the integrated model as well as learning strategies like using visuals in her classroom. However, she wishes she could have more in-service training on teaching ELLs. She is currently working as a Grade 4 teacher in an Afro-centric school.

5.2.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching

Lisa feels that education is the cornerstone for building the future of a lively democracy. Education is not just school, but includes social programs, which she describes as programs that keep students physically, emotionally and mentally healthy. Teachers need to build on students’ emotional needs as well as academics. This may
include things like getting along, working with people from different cultures and character education, which for Lisa is about the building of social skills and focusing on emotional concerns. She has also had the Roots of Empathy program in her classroom, which is a year-long program where a mother and baby from the community come into the classroom to guide children in building empathy. However, in her experience, Lisa finds that teachers often ignore injustices they see at school:

This little girl is telling me that the boys were doing this to her at recess. I’m not prepared to handle this. And also I guess reacting to those types of problems in a common sense way. Then I’ve also seen teachers handle situations by ignoring the situation and I think that does more damage.

She feels that teachers need to react to the emotional concerns of students. She states that these common sense values come from her family and culture. Lisa believes that developing relationships with all students is the beginning of creating appropriate programming for students. This can be difficult when the student does not know English, but she finds that you must still find a way to relate to them.

Respecting diversity and creating equitable education is an important part of Lisa’s pedagogy. At her previous school, she took a leadership role creating equitable curriculum:

We started equity bins, so we had teacher resources and student texts, all in one room of the library placed according to different areas of equity, so it could be like African heritage or aboriginal heritage, Islamic culture, Judaism, like religious areas also anti-homophobia and gender issues and gender diversity and ableism and peace and social justice, . . . So then we started a series of workshops on cultural proficiency for teachers and those workshops – we had a couple of different people come in as well as our equity team.

Lisa incorporates cultural diversity into her own classroom program. In Social Studies, when the curriculum mandated students to learn about ancient civilizations, she focussed
on Aztec and Mayan aboriginal groups to reflect the experiences of her aboriginal students. Incorporating students’ prior experiences and a diverse range of cultural experiences are central to Lisa’s philosophy. She states that critical literacy is an important part of her literacy program:

I try to do that as much as possible. In all areas of program. I really want the kids to become critical thinkers, so in terms of critical literacy ahh having them just questioning the things that they’re reading and questioning what they’re seeing and in the world around them – not just in what they’re reading, but in like their social world and the magazines and commercials that they’re seeing all the time or the video game advertisements. We try to look a lot of those things critically and then analyze them.

She particularly likes to focus on media literacy and not use social studies textbooks. Some strategies she includes are read alouds, inferencing, making personal connections, guided reading and independent, silent reading. She uses multi-media such as advertisements, magazines, commercials, you tube videos and sometimes Smart Boards.

Lisa’s school has a large aboriginal population. Therefore, her classroom expectations are based on the seven sacred teachings of the seven grandfathers, which include wisdom, respect, love, humility, honesty and truth. When there are behaviour or discipline issues in the classroom, the concerns go through this framework. There is also an Ojibwa language program at her school that is about reclaiming a language, as the students do not speak Ojibwa at home. Lisa mentions that she likes to invite parents into the school so that she can learn more about her students’ cultures and then bring those cultures into the classroom:

I’ve a couple of situations, occasions where that’s been the case and the parents came and spoke to me and we talked about what things were like at home, so that not at home I mean their home country so I had an understanding of what their cultural background was and I think that’s important for teachers to be aware of. It’s just it’s different in order to be able to respect diversity we need to have an understanding of what the
differences are and except those differences and use those differences as sort of, use those differences and encourage the students to then be proud of those differences.

When she speaks to parents, she encourages them to continue using their first language in the home. She believes that knowing different languages and different ways to do things supports students’ critical thinking.

5.2.2 ELD Students and Their Programming

While teaching a Grade 5 class, Lisa, also, tutored an ELD student from another class. Lisa discusses how he and his family struggled with schooling and were often described as behavioural by the school. She talks about how the school board sent a teacher who knew the language of the students to support them in their learning and settlement process. As well as tutoring an ELD student, Lisa taught an ELD boy in her Grade 5 classroom. She describes many of the students in her class as being resistant to including newcomers. The one boy in the class who was able to translate the language of the ELD student refused to do so:

The other boy in my class didn’t really want to have anything to do with him, unfortunately… It’s just – at that age – as I’m sure you’re aware, you can’t ask students to be ambassadors, who don’t want to be.

In the following years, she continued to stay aware of his growth and peer relationships. She showed concern for him as he tried to fit in to peer groups and worried about the choices he made:

I have to say though that as I’ve said before I’ve seen a couple of times in the past year, so and I think in some ways it concerns me to see who he is friends with now because I think maybe he’s trying, he’s trying too hard to fit in. And I, I see him sort of hanging around kids who might not always make the best, make the best the choices and my, and I think that he’s, he’s trying to partner up with them or get into groups with them because he’s sees that it’s cool, he’s sees it as whatever teenagers see other
teenagers who are not making the best decisions and how he sees them. Unfortunately, and also his quiet demeanour has changed a lot and I was shocked when I first saw him after not seeing him for I think it was a year, I hadn’t seen him or almost a year. He came right up me and said “Hi, Miss. Do you remember me?” And I was so taken aback. I had no idea who he was because that same boy would not have come up to me in that way. . . . He came up to me that way, and it was front of his friends, and I was shocked – completely shocked. I was blown away. I had no idea who he was. I said, “You look familiar.” And he was like “you don’t remember me.” And then he said his name and I was just blown away. I said, “No way.” And it was just, it was interesting. And the way he was kind of show boating in front of his friends was kind of … disconcerting. It was good that he had come out of shell, absolutely. I’m happy that he’s found his voice. However, I don’t know if it’s in a good way.

Throughout the interview, Lisa continues to return to the topic of her ELD student’s changed behaviour and reflect on and question what has happened with his settlement process.

When she taught literacy to her ELD student, one of the main focuses of his program was copying. She did not want to single him out because she found with kids a lot of power comes from how they feel in a social group, and she did not want to disempower him. She had him copy from the board, and she would make modifications where necessary. He sat on the edge of a row, so that she could more easily support him.

At the beginning it was just copying. Copy this here, . . . see that there, copy that there. So a lot of it at the beginning initially was just straight copying. But and I started to worry a little bit that oh my gosh he’s not understanding at all what he’s copying but then I did start to see that he was starting to get it. He was starting to, he was starting to change things or add to what he was copying.

As well as copying from the board, she remembers that her ELD student really liked to work in groups. She found engaging him orally to be a great strategy. She would often have peer mentors support him with his literacy development. Lisa promoted the usage of the student’s first language by encouraging his parents to read and speak to him in his L1 at home. She tries to empower parents by respecting their first language usage.
5.3 Sara

During her interview, Sara briefly talks about her own immigrant experiences as a child speaking Russian in Ontario schools. Sara has been teaching for 20 years. She began her career as a secondary school teacher where she taught Art and Family Studies. She then taught Grade 1 and Grade 5 before finally moving to Grade 8 where she has been teaching Language Arts, Social Studies and Drama for the last five years. During her time as a Grade 8 teacher, she taught three ELD students from Jamaica who were mainstreamed into her classroom. All three of the students had been in Canada for at least three years when she taught them. She has attended workshops led by instructional resource teachers at her school board. She learned about teaching History with ELLs and was introduced to informative websites, templates and organizers. She also counts having conversations with teacher friends who are experienced ESL teachers, as important to her professional development.

5.3.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching

Sara reflects on how teachers have highly controlled personas that they bring into the classroom whether it’s the shoes they wear, the material they have prepared or how they choose to present themselves. However, her personal philosophy is that life-long teachers need to become careful observers that get involved with and are concerned with people first. Sara sees developing strong relationships with her students as a key aspect of her role as a teacher. She keeps her room open at lunch so that students can come for extra help, and she runs Hip Hop dance groups and movie clubs. Moreover, she sees it as part of her role as a teacher to guide her ELD students in their peer relationships in order
to support them in the hallways and in other teachers’ classrooms. When discussing one of her female ELD students, Sara states

I would always have peer mentors that she could rotate through that would be useful for her to hear their ideas and for them to help her with her ideas and so she built a whole lot of friendships. Alex especially enjoyed this. He, on certain projects, kids actually got to go to each others’ homes. It was the first time he’d invited anyone in the class to his house. His mother was very pleased about that and seeing that association actually grow, so that was a different thing to see.

She talks about how friendship was important to all three of her ELD students. She describes the “coloured” students in her school as creating community and supporting each other. They hang out together in the halls. All three of her ELD student are of Jamaican background and are accepted by this group of students. Sara describes herself as being accepted and respected by the “coloured” students.

Sara discussed her literacy program at length. Creating assessment practices that allowed her ELD students to be successful in school was important to her as she was an ELL and immigrant herself at this age:

I think it simply means and especially translates to my own immigrant experience that education goes beyond the criteria of judgemental spelling that it goes into assessing skills that a student needs or a person needs and giving them the opportunities to practice and practice without judgement, but with good sound suggestions. To give the student a chance to achieve the Level 4’s and not be all hung up about Level 2’s because they haven’t developed those specific skills that are overall judgement pieces.

Giving students space to write and develop their literacy skills without constant judgement is key to Sara’s assessment practices. She did not like the texts and classroom material her school had provided her with, so she created her own program that incorporated films and a range of different texts including picture books. She would create a wall of terms and play games to develop students’ vocabulary. Students would have a formal assessment piece as well as an assignment that was more authentic and
included visuals, drama or music. She likes to bring authentic texts such as cookbooks and newspaper articles into the classroom. Critical literacy is an important part of her program. During History class, students are asked to look at how the Black Loyalists, Residential Schools and Land Claim rights are under-represented in the textbook. One year, she had her students write the textbook publisher demanding an answer as to why these topics were not addressed. She is critical of teachers in her school who tackle issues of diversity but do not think carefully of their audience and how their words can impact and isolate their students. For example, two Muslim girls came to her one day because a teacher had read a book on a girl named Mohab who had been forced into marriage at the age of ten. These girls felt that this teacher hated them because they perceived the teacher as talking down to them. They felt that this teacher had no interest in listening to them. Sara describes trying to redirect the girls to talk to this other teacher and to explain that this other teacher did not hate them; she just did not understand fully what she was reading. Overall, Sara is critical of how diversity is discussed and incorporated into her school’s discourses.

Sara has strong feelings about the inclusion of parents and the differences between what the school board mandates and what is being done to include diverse communities in the school:

The school has a political agenda for diversity, but does not support it. And why would I say that to you. Well because when they start to show faces of cultural differences and quotes of different kids, it’s all a feel good. The one thing they have done right is they include the languages of the different cultures that attend the school board. So that’s a great thing. What is another good thing? There are websites that parents can access. But what is not a good thing is when we get from the head down, these certain phrases of unification such as, “everybody smile.” Well, a smiling fool is to be found in my school board. “What do you mean, smile?” I would say. We have to have a smile because of a reason. We are not such
fools that smile at any thought. And what is the underlying current, well listening to Sixty Minutes and seeing the Reverent that this inspiration was taken from and should you look at sources? Should you consider for where they come and the intent they have? Is that what an educated, critical analysis would demand of you? Let alone a teacher, but the director of the head of the board of education. That a right winged organization, Christian, would tell all his men and women to smile. Of course because if they questioned or think twice about something, it is unchristian, it is … it is not the way to live. “Smile and be happy. Eat this chocolate, live it good.” Colour your hair blond and you’ll be rich.

Sara supports the board’s efforts to incorporate students’ home languages and reach out to parents through the internet, but is wary of the board’s ‘feel good’ approach to diversity and equity. Sara reaches out to the parents or the guardians of her students for their support in students’ learning. For example, for one of her ELD students she relied on a woman he called Grandmother, with whom Sara developed a strong relationship. This Grandmother supported her Grandson’s work by setting clear boundaries and demanding he complete his academics before becoming involved in social and sporting activities. In general, she describes how she takes the time to explain to parents how they can become more involved in their child’s education and learn the ‘right’ questions to ask. Sara feels that parental involvement is an essential part of students’ learning.

5.3.2 ELD Students and Their Programming

Sara is also concerned about her ELD students and their peer interactions. She reflects on why one of her ELD students chose to return to Jamaica instead of continuing onto secondary school in Ontario:

Because the adjustment to school institution, timing, homework expectations was not within her realm of acceptance. She knew how to dress and she was looking for the good times, but doing the work was something that was so foreign to her.
Sara reflects on the reasons for her students’ non-compliance to schooling norms and seeks to create positive relationships with her student through lunch time extra help and dance groups. She recounts the experiences of Alex, an ELD student, who was invited to another student’s home for the first time in three years of being at the school because they were working on a project together. Sara reflects on how she encourages students to become mentors:

And so they become true mentors in where they feel good in sharing ideas, not protective, not that this is a unique experience. Aren’t I lucky? Oh, look at me smart, but that there is a relationship between being smart and importance of helping others understand.

These mentors would then become supports for the ELD students in the hallway and in other teachers’ classrooms. As part of Sara’s philosophy of teaching, she tries to instil in all her students the value that being smart means that you guide and mentor others. Mentors would also learn from the experiences of the ELD students.

Sara incorporated a range of techniques including technology and oral language to support her ELD students’ literacy development. Students are given choices as to topics they would like to research. They use the internet to find texts that have visuals and written words. She describes one of her ELD students stating that

She could do things wonderfully on the computer. She could a website. She could do clip art. She could take the quote. She would a take a piece and copy it and then I would ask her “now read it and put it in your own words.” And so she would have time to use the computer to do that piece and it would be very short and very specific with her.

Her ELD students liked to take DVD’s home to watch and gain more background knowledge of the unit they are studying. She has a range of films and documentaries in her classroom library available for students. Sara does not mention using students’ home languages as a strategy specifically with her students. However, she does talk about
herself as an ELL and uses her first language in the classroom to try to raise students’ awareness of different languages and see that speaking another language is not unique, but actually normal. With Alex, her male ELD student, she recounts a conversation on the documentary *Boys of Baraka* where he made a connection to previous units stating that “The black man hasn’t come far from the days of the white traders.” He then talked about how if there had been any white kids in the school in the documentary, it would not have been that way. Sara reflects that this type of interaction is why she is in the classroom.

5.4 Jenny

Throughout the interviews, Jenny proudly recounts her Ukrainian heritage. Jenny has been teaching for six years. She started her career working with Grade 4 – 6 students for two years in a small Special Education classroom designed for students with severe behaviours. She describes these children as very troubled and needing restraints. She has also briefly worked as a support teacher with Special Education students in mainstream classrooms. As a mainstream classroom teacher, she has taught Math, Language Arts, Science, Dance, Drama and Social Studies to Grades 6, 7 and 8 students. In her Grade 7 classroom in her fifth year of teaching, she taught an ELD student from Pakistan. She has taken the time to read the new Ontario Ministry of Education documents on supporting ELLs; however, she has not taken any training on ELLs offered by the school board because the workshops are all after school and not during the day. She would gladly participate in any professional development for supporting ELLs because she feels quite disempowered as a classroom teacher, but only if her classes are covered, so that she can attend the training during the school day.
5.4.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching

Justice is an important theme in Jenny’s philosophy of teaching. First, she critiques current school board policies that mandate students follow certain rules, which she finds contrary to more child-centred pedagogy:

So we can look at these rules that are in place. They may not best meet the needs of every student and, so, how do we change those rules to meet the needs of every student? And I think what we’ve done is, “here’s the circle – everybody needs to be a square peg and still needs to be in it.” And so there’s, to me there’s a conflict between our teaching methodologies now and these rules that we have in place.

She feels that schools need to adapt a restorative justice framework when disciplining students and not just suspend kids and, then, not educate them about the issues. For example, one of her female students was suspended for pulling off the turban of a boy in her class. When the student returned to school, it was not explained to the girl why this type of behaviour is inappropriate. Jenny, also, discusses both racism and classism at length and how classism is imbedded in schools. Students in wealthier, white communities have access to better school facilities. Jenny feels that her previous school had poor facilities because there were so many Black and Indians as well as immigrants to Canada. She challenged her own superintendant by asking the superintendant if she would let her own children be educated in these conditions. Jenny is offended by the use of the term ‘white trash’. She states that “even though we say haven’t got a class system, we do based on education.” She sees issues of class and race as connected:

There are racists within teachers. There are racist teachers. I don’t care what anybody says. There’s also and that racism may not necessarily come out as the colour of your skin racist. It will come out as a class system, racist.

Furthermore, she recounts quite adamantly a conversation about Obama she had with some American teachers while attending a conference in the United States:
“Excuse me, you’re an educator, and you’re trashing a black man. You’re an educator. How the hell can you teach black students?” “Yes, I do. But they’re never going to amount to much in their life anyway.” “So you feel that way as an educator.

Jenny does not believe a teacher who has such negative views towards black students should be allowed to teach them.

Jenny incorporates a range of literacy practices including students’ home languages in her programming. She states that students can memorize most things, but they will not be able to apply this knowledge to the outside world. Jenny takes a more student-centred, cooperative learning approach where she groups ELLs with a range of peer translators. This is because she has read research on how kids learn better from each other. She likes to create media literacy units that incorporate videos. Students create magazines and analyze talk shows. When I asked Jenny about critical literacy, she replied

Unfortunately our kids aren’t really at that level. I’d like to. Right? And I tried that with the Grade 8’s. I was working on that – towards that with the Grade 8’s this year.

Jenny also loves to hear about students’ cultural stories and tells them about her culture and her grandmother’s experiences as a prisoner of war. In History class, there are discussions on Martin Luther King, Obama and Ghandi. While teaching Dance and Drama, she allowed students to incorporate their cultural dances.

Jenny describes her school community, which has a large immigrant population, as being disengaged from the school. She states that efforts that have been made by teachers in the school, such as organizing social events after school, have been blocked by administration. She thinks her administration is afraid of violence happening during school social activities. However, Jenny does not think this is a valid reason to not have social activities because, in her words, “what is the worst thing that could happen,
somebody could arrive with a gun or knife and get shot.” Despite these setbacks, Jenny stays in contact with her students’ parents:

I have a professional responsibility to talk to parents all the time, right. Invite them in for an interview and if they don’t automatically come, then arrange other times. There are classroom newsletters.

With the parents of her ELD students, communication was difficult. The father did not speak English and she had to rely one of her colleagues for translation. The colleague, who spoke the same language as the student, would not make phone calls when Jenny asked. Jenny felt this undermined her ability to make a connection with the ELD student’s father.

5.4.2. ELD Students and Their Programming

Jenny describes her ELD student as being disruptive in the classroom environment. The mainstream students are described as hardworking and the ELD student is described as brutally attacking students’ work. She recalls a conversation with her students where she says,

But if he’s going to smash the work that you guys have done or, you know, draw all over it or make paper airplanes or spit balls or then I can’t. He can’t do. Yeah. He became quite a handful. I was like, “Oh my God.” He was brutal towards the end of the year.

In this case, many of the peers in the class began to ostracize the ELD student excluding him and translating incorrectly for the teacher. Jenny discusses her own battle to modify her ELD student’s behaviour. Her ELD student’s behaviour was at odds with the classroom expectations:

Well, I put him back in groups all the time, but he would just be a shit-disturber. We were trying to build bridges. “Oh yeah, come on, come here in the group and help them work on building the bridge.” He’d break the
bridge. He was getting angry, right. His anger was coming out because he was frustrated.

She describes herself as advocating for her student and approaching administration and the ESL teacher in her school and feeling frustrated by the lack of support. Jenny tried strategies such as peer mentors and use of the students’ home language. However, she did not feel prepared to teach or support the ELD student in her class. After running out of strategies and ideas, Jenny resorted to behaviour modification tactics such as giving out rewards and certificates, getting recognition from the principal, and, finally, sending the student out of the classroom.

With her ELD student, many of her typical literacy strategies did not work. Jenny reflects on how she advocated for support for her ELD student to the ESL teacher, administration and school board specialists, but she felt quite alone and disempowered.

There were times where he would refuse to see his ESL teacher. And . So then he’d be in my room and he would just. I mean he started – he became more of a behaviour issue because again he wasn’t able to comprehend what we were trying to do with him. He’d throw erasers, throw pencils, pinch the kids.

Jenny states that her ELD student did not have a literacy program. Materials provided by the ESL teacher were inappropriate and the student was out of his seat all the time bothering other students. She tried having him do basic mathematical computation sheets and phonics internet games, but most of the time he was disengaged.

Building his vocabulary, basic rhyming and his Math skills I went all the way back to basic addition and subtraction, right, so really simple stuff and by the end of the year we were working on multiplication.

The ELD student would go on websites and do basic two and three letter words at the Grade 1 and 2 level; however, most of the time he was disruptive and unfocused in class.
Melissa has been teaching for 17 years in many different countries and provinces. She started her career teaching in Newfoundland for four years before moving to Mexico where she taught Grade 1 in a private Spanish/English bilingual school. She has also taught in Korea, Bulgaria, England and Germany before moving to Ontario where she has been an ESL teacher for five years. She states that except for her four years in Newfoundland her entire career has been with second-language learners. She is currently a qualified ESL teacher who has completed her Masters on learning to read and write in a second language. The school where she has been working for the last five years has a large population of Old Colony Mennonites many of whom are ELD students and some of whom are immigrants from Mexico. Old Colony Mennonites are one of many different types of Mennonites. There are more than 40 different groups within the United States alone (Cowles, 2005). In the 1920’s a group of Old Colony Mennonites migrated to Mexico from Canada to prevent being drafted by the army and being forced to attend English speaking schools. They speak a language, Plautdietsch, which is an oral language. Their experiences and customs are highly varied, but some members of the community may stand out in modern society because of the ‘old fashioned’ clothes they choose to wear and their rejection of technology including cars and electricity. There are also many of what Melissa labels Pennsylvania Dutch speaking Mennonite students at her

---

Cowles (2005) writes that “The Mennonites are an Anabaptist group that emerged from the radical wing of the Protestant Reformation during the first half of the 16th century. Among other attributes, the radical wing of the Reformation was characterized by a belief in the separation of church and state, an ethic of non-resistance, and the rejection of church hierarchy. During the Reformation, Anabaptist groups were severely persecuted by both the Catholic and Protestant churches because of their refusal to adhere to the church membership requirements of the state. Their history has been a series of migrations throughout Europe and North America in search of freedom to practice their religious beliefs without state interference” (p. 391).
school. Most of these students will come from communities that have been settled in Canada for almost 200 years and may have been the original settlers in their area. To an outsider, these two groups may appear to be quite similar, but Melissa describes them as seeing each other as quite different and rarely interacting because of the different languages they speak. Melissa states that the school has such a high population of ELLs that teachers must first create their modified lessons and then modify for the two or three mainstream students in their classrooms to meet grade level curriculum expectations.

5.5.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching

Inclusion and tolerance of different belief systems and cultures are central to Melissa’s philosophy of teaching. Melissa is critical of how her ELD students, who are Old Colony Mennonites, are treated by the larger community and even other types of Mennonites in the school. She finds that many teachers and people do not think Old Colony Mennonites value education because they miss years of schooling and often do not go to school past Grade 8.

Ahh, well you know people whisper about, “Oh, why don’t they get a job,” and then the kids leave school in Grade 8 and hang around the streets in town.

She describes the Old Colony Mennonites as being much marginalized. There are conflicts at times between what the families want and the rules and expectations of society. She describes some of the families as subsisting and doing migrant work with their children for part of the year. Melissa thinks it is important to be patient with Old Colony Mennonites and not force them to attend school more regularly. Maybe, they are the first person in their family who has learned to read, but then maybe they will teach their own children in the future to read and write. She states that many members of the
staff do not know what it’s like to be an outsider. They understand the poverty issues the students face and can be somewhat understanding of the migration – coming and going – of the students. For example, the school has implemented a health and dental program because the students are poor. However, many teachers do not know what it is like to live in a culture you do not understand.

Melissa’s pedagogy is centred on inquiry based learning, which she describes as focussing on the big ideas and not getting bogged down by the curriculum. As an ESL specialist teacher, she has helped to lead workshops in her school over the last year for classroom teachers. With this type of learning, Melissa states that all subjects need to be integrated. She uses the example of *Community*, which comes from the curriculum. Teachers take the idea that people working together in a community fulfills everybody’s needs. This idea can be incorporated into all Grade levels from Grade 1 where teachers teach community and responsibility to Grade 5 and 6 where they begin to learn about government. She co-teaches with many classroom teachers supporting them with their differentiation for all ELLs in their classrooms. She has also been leading workshops at her school through *lunch and learns* about Robert Marzaon’s strategies for building vocabulary. Students use graphic organizers, draw pictures and read books about the new word. Focussing on vocabulary development is of particular importance with ELD students, who do not have a lot of academic vocabulary in their first language.

Including the parents of Old Colony Mennonites in their children’s education is of particular importance to Melissa. She finds that some of the Canadian born Pennsylvania Dutch speaking fathers come to parents’ council meetings, but no Old Colony Mennonites, largely immigrant and ELD, or women are present. Some of the
Pennsylvania Dutch mothers come to school at lunch to lead a choir group, but the Old Colony, ELD students are not included. This concerns her, so she developed an evening program one year called *Time to Read* where parents learn strategies to help their kids read at home.

So the first time I did it I focussed on helping them understand how important it is to develop Dietsch, so that when kids bring home books, they don’t have to read the books with their kids because most of them can’t read anyway, but they can just talk about. Tell the story using the pictures and using Dietsch, so uhhh, I had seven moms which equalled 19 children for that program because it’s a parallel kids or moms or dads program, and then they meet half way through the night and then they separate again. So the parents. I modelled the strategy then the kids come in and the parents get to practice with the kids and then we separate again.

Only Old Colony mothers were invited to this program. Parents are also invited to monthly assemblies and picnics, and there is a fairly good turnout at parents’ night. Many of the students’ families are large, so babysitting is an issue. Transportation is also an issue, but there’s a lot of car pooling happening. Some of the teachers and the school administrator attend a church group meeting every Wednesday to get the parents more connected to the school. They have sewing at the school to try to include the Old Colony mothers.

5.5.2 ELD Students and Their Programming

Melissa has a range of knowledge of students’ prior learning experiences. She talks about some students’ schooling experiences in Mexico at parochial schools before coming to Canada. She states that some students went to school in High German, the language of their churches, but not a language they understand. They learn to decode and write in German, but often the students’ comprehension level is much lower than their decoding skills. However, she also states that the Old Colony Mennonites emigrating
from Mexico come to Canada with varied experiences and beliefs from how they dress to their level of education:

Even within our building, in the same Old Colony Community, we go from kids that wear jeans to kids that everybody in the family wears the same clothes. It’s all homemade by Mom. It’s all black trousers with suspenders and shirts, right? And it’s the same. The same colours, the same clothes and ahh, you know, so there’s quite a range. Even within that community in our building.

She feels that it is important not to generalize about the Old Colony culture. Some students had experiences in Mexico that included no electricity and using horses for transportation instead of cars. Other students had exposure to television and cell phones in Mexico. The school does attempt to incorporate students’ prior knowledge by participating in building competitions and having the school choir sing Handel’s Messiah. However, conflicts do arise between student and teacher expectations. Melissa finds that students can sometimes become confused over the more relaxed styles of teaching here in Canada. She finds that some students do not know how to react to an authority figure that is not remote. When she jokes with students or teases them, they start touching her clothes. It’s almost as if you are a friend or someone they cannot talk to or look at with no relationship in the middle. This can come across as disrespectful to some teachers.

As the ESL/ELD teacher in her school, she sees it as her mission to promote students’ first languages around the school. As the two main languages in the school, Plautdietsch, spoken by the ELD students and Pennsylvania Dutch, spoken by the other ELLs, are not written languages, incorporating their first language can be a struggle at times. She has purchased a dictionary that was just recently published in Plautdietsch, so that it can be used as an educational resource. Trying to incorporate students’ first languages into signs around the school is also important. Every morning the Lord’s
Prayer is read to the school in Dietsch, Pennsylvania Dutch, English and Spanish. She enjoys watching the students’ reactions to hearing their languages spoken. However, she finds critical literacy or even critical thinking is difficult with the students. One year she tried to have them think critically about gender roles and found the students became very frustrated with the topic. One boy even became angry with her. Technology is incorporated into the classroom at times. Students use computers and follow a strict code of conduct. However, many students are not allowed to watch television because of their religious beliefs. She also sees oral language as being a huge component of students’ literacy programming because as she states, “if they do not know how to talk in English, how can they write English.”

5.6 Theresa

Theresa has been teaching for 25 years and is currently on a leave of absence. She started by teaching secondary school for three years before moving to elementary schools. She taught Grade 4 for two years and Grade 3 for ten years. Her last ten years of teaching were in an ELD congregated class where many Old Colony Mennonites were bussed in for specialized instruction. Theresa’s students originate from Mexico and Bolivia. She also taught a brother and sister from Bangladesh who were refugees and one ELL from China. She says she was asked to be the teacher for the ELD congregated class of 15 students because she had experience with integrated ELD students in her mainstream classroom. She did not receive any training originally but because regulations changed during her time as an ELD teacher, she was forced to take her ESL qualifications. She counts professional dialogue and meetings with other ELD teachers in the area as the most useful example of professional development. She feels that decisions
being made by the school board in the city do not reflect the needs of her ELD students in a rural community.

5.6.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching

Theresa discusses how her philosophy of teaching has changed in recent years because two of her own children experienced difficulty with schooling: one had a severe learning disability and the other had a physical disability. For Theresa, students’ emotional concerns are as important as their academic growth. For example, she would allow her ELD students, especially when they were newcomers, to visit siblings in other classes when they felt scared or lonely. She discusses how it breaks her heart when her ELD students were penalized for not participating in activities they do not culturally agree with.

I know the one year I was … this was my first year teaching ESL and two of the girls in Grade 8 had to go out for gym class into the Grade 8 gym class and they got detentions because they didn’t bring shorts to school and the they’re not even allowed to wear short, they don’t own shorts and so they were given detention, so there was like no tolerance from the teacher, but then sometimes those teachers would treat other kids the same way. It wasn’t just against the ESL kids. It was, they, just, this is the rule and you have to obey it. Not taking into account ….

She is critical of schooling because, from her point of view, it is just about getting information to people. This information is being forced into students. She has different views about what education should be. Theresa believes many kids are not having their basic needs met and are unable to function or interact with others. Theresa does not agree with teachers who are focussed solely on the curriculum.

I believe education should be learning about life and how to integrate into life and how to be involved in humanity and how to make the world a place where we can be environmentally aware, where we can work together globally with this – with the internet and all the access we have
with the push of a button to see what’s going on in other countries, we’re still abusing the rights of people in other countries by polluting, by having our factories in other countries and even though our intentions sometimes appear to be good, I don’t think we’re doing a good job.

She recounts how a group of students in Toronto did research into where their soccer balls were coming from and discovered children in Pakistan were making them. She does not believe education should be about memorizing information. Instead kids need to learn about other people and how to interact. They need to examine the consequences of their actions. During the day, she often spends an hour talking to the students about topics that concern them. She recounts a moment in her classroom where she was teaching her students about this weird type of frog. Her students from Paraguay all knew about this type of frog and it turned into a great class discussion where students shared their cultural knowledge.

Theresa likes teaching the ELD class because she is not forced to follow the Ontario curriculum. There is more freedom. Students from all different Grade levels are placed together in her congregated ELD class. No one watches her and demands that she teach certain subject content in her ELD class.

I didn’t worry at all about following the Grade level curriculum and unless they were integrated were Math and then I’d follow that. Other than that, no, even Art. I used to use the Grade 2 Art curriculum all the time, and so, . . . . Yeah. For example, Social Studies – every fall I did the same thing with all the students, and I didn’t worry that the Grade 2 student was getting curriculum student and the Grade 6 student was getting the . . . . I taught Community every fall.

However, Theresa states that this has changed in recent years. She is no longer teaching the ELD class, but she observes that teachers are now more closely watched.

now this has changed in the last few years because they’ve become so much more umm there, there watching more closely. . . . For example, the administration is watching more closely what is going on in that room.
Building positive relationships with her students’ parents was not always easy. She found that many of the ELD students’ parents were unsupportive of education. She would coach her students as to what to say to their parents about what they were learning in school. She worried about how education was received at home:

Well, again that’s a double-edged sword with these kids because, like I said, there were times when books were burned, if I sent them home and yet other families I sent home books and I would say things to the kids, “If your parents asked you what you learned at school today, here’s going to be your response and we’d practice saying certain sentences: this is what I learned, or, go home and tell your parents”, and I’d give them some information to try to explain to their parents.

Many of the ELD students’ parents did not come into the school for parents’ night when she first started teaching in the ELD class. However, in the last couple of years, since a new comers’ centre has been built more parents are attending. There is a settlement worker who speaks Low German and calls the parents to explain the school to them and is at the school a couple of days a week. Many of the Low German parents see the local high school as sinful and do not send their children there. Instead they participate in a program called SALEP that allows Mennonites to work in local green houses instead of going to school. Theresa questions why the Old Colony Mennonite parents are allowed to do this.

5.6.2 ELD Students and Their Programming

Theresa describes her ELD students as not valuing education and as only coming to school because they are forced to by Children’s Aid. She states that 90% of her ELD students have no prior education and many did not even know how to hold a pencil when they entered her class. There was a lot of truancy and transiency. Attendance officers had to be called quite often because students would stay home to babysit their siblings. She
describes the Old Colony Mennonites as sticking together on the playground against the Anglo-Saxon students. They created their own community to protect themselves against bullying. Theresa discusses how integration of ELD students into mainstream classrooms is a struggle. First, as a classroom teacher, when the ELD students would come to her for Art, they would sit at the back and feel isolated because they did not have any friends in the class. However, there were always peer mentors who would volunteer to go and help the ELD students. When she worked as an ELD teacher in the congregated class, the students would try and trick her into forgetting to send them to mainstream classes for subjects such as Art or Gym.

The kids, I would say 95% of the time, were so comfortable in that classroom, they didn’t want to go out and be integrated into the other classrooms, so the ESL classroom was a safety net for them and because, sometimes, there would be 17 kids in my class and they’d all be Low German speaking. It was like their own little community.

Theresa describes her congregated ELD class as being a space where students feel connected and safe being themselves and mainstream classes as places where they are marginalized and, consistently, try to avoid attending.

Inclusion of students’ prior experiences and cultural knowledge appears to be an important aspect of Theresa’s literacy program. As the Old Colony Mennonites spoke Plautdietsch, an unwritten language, including texts in their first language was not possible. However, she used peer translators in her class and tried to find as many visual representations of her students through photographs and film as she could.

We could at least get pictures that and some of them had photographs from their countries, so they could bring them in, but as much as I could I would order in videos of other countries as well for them just to visually see it and then the kids in the class from Mexico would see the kids, see the screen from Bangladesh and have an understanding of the kids in their classroom from Bangladesh because they could see it on the video tape or
on the DVD and I think that kind of information, that kind of wisdom builds tolerance.

She would often incorporate technology such as DVD’s, computers and tape recorders into her lessons. The students loved videos such as Bill Nye the Science Guy and the Magic School Bus even if they did not believe in some of the school curriculum such as space and the planets. Theresa included *Jolly Phonics* strategies in her literacy program. Another strategy would be to have students cut up sentences and work in groups putting them back together. Students wrote daily in their journals depending on their levels of education. She found critical thinking difficult because of the students’ personal beliefs. She would try to get them to think critically about nutrition, as the food they ate like canned hot dogs was unhealthy. Theresa would try to pick parts of the curriculum that were relevant to her students like having a unit on community, which she taught every year. She would take students to the local fire station and shopping centres.

**5.7 Sean**

Sean is the only male participant, and he has been teaching Grade 6 and 8 Language Arts, Mathematics and Science for four years in Ontario elementary schools. Before becoming a qualified teacher in Canada, he worked as a Pupil teacher, which he describes as being like a teacher’s assistant, for six years in Guyana. He started as a Pupil teacher when he was 17 years old. In his first year of teaching in Canada while covering a teacher’s maternity leave, Sean taught two ELD students from Jamaica in a mainstream Grade 8 classroom. He is currently taking additional qualifications in Special Education where he is learning about visuals and assistive technology. However, he has received no training for ELLs and feels that it’s a tragedy that the school board does not offer more.
5.7.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching

Sean reflects on how teachers are like Jesus because Jesus was a teacher too. He retells a story about how one of the parents of his students had compared teachers to God. Sean states that teachers are very important to society because they are nurturing future engineers and accountants. When Sean discusses his philosophy of teaching, he likes to use the phrase ‘no child left behind’, which he states is a phrase that he borrows from the Americans. He talks about how his own philosophy of teaching has evolved by a comparison of how education is done in Guyana to Ontario. Sean states that when he first started as a Pupil teacher in Guyana, the teachers hit the students as part of their discipline methods. However, he no longer sees this as an acceptable discipline strategy.

Sean retells a story of how he came to realize that corporal punishment was not an effective strategy for teachers. One day after having beaten some of his students in Guyana for inappropriate behaviour, he saw a television program on how some students are hungry. The next day, he asked these same students if they had eaten breakfast. They had not. Sean then started looking at the whole child reflecting more deeply on their reasons for acting out. Sean also discusses how there was not a system of labelling and identifying students in Guyana like there is here in Ontario. For example, students were not labelled as Special Education students. If a student was failing, they were just thought of as a dumb kid. He recalls a conversation he had with a parent here in Canada who sent their child back to their home country:

And I was like, “Why would you do this?” And she said, “You know, back home if you’re dumb, the kids will tell you you’re dumb and they keep telling you you’re dumb and you’re going to get better.” So her philosophy was the kids are going to call you out. She was telling her daughter that in front of me. And if you can’t do it, they’re going to say, “Oh, you’re from Canada. You’re supposed to be smart and you’re just dumb and you’re this.
Sean states that in Guyana Special Education students might get some one-on-one support from a caring teacher, but in general there is no mercy on the student and they were often beaten by their teachers. Sean is, also, interested in how the education system in Guyana is moving towards a more American style. He states that one principal in Guyana resisted this by refusing to promote a student and this principal was consequently fired. However, he critiques the Ontario system that promotes students regardless of their achievement levels by stating that many of his students in Ontario are missing knowledge of subject areas. He wonders what went wrong in their primary years. He reflects that no system is perfect. In these ways, Sean’s philosophy of teaching is constantly changing and is based on a comparative approach between Ontarian, Guyanese and American education systems.

Reading newspaper articles and having discussions about current events are an important part of Sean’s literacy program. He likes to use technology such as Bit Strips and computers as part of his literacy and numeracy programs. He has taught his students strategies for answering short answer questions. Sean has them make connections to and between different texts. Sean describes the choices he gives students:

The other thing I did was I had a, a language – they were doing a suspense novel and I gave them some ahh, so they had to do inferring. I gave them four scenes. They had to use this now to create their own suspense story, so they had choices again, or they could have just used their imagination.

In recent years, his school has adopted a standardized literacy program where teachers follow scripted lessons and textbook literacy activities. When he teaches, he feels that he is like a doctor. First, he diagnoses the students by giving them initial assessments to find out where they are struggling. He then puts students in groups and places a high achieving student in each group. He finds as a teacher it is his responsibility to find the
intelligence of the student to tap into so that they can move on. He likes to use oral
assessment and performance tasks as alternative programming. He, also, briefly mentions
but does not describe Vgotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development and Gardner’s multiple
intelligences. His point is that there is no correct method, but you must use a blend of
different styles and methodologies.

Incorporating the community into education seems to be a priority for Sean, but
there are many obstacles. He discusses how the parents’ council at his school is almost
non-existent.

The parent council. From whatever little information I have it’s – hasn’t
been that very dynamic or functioning very well. And I’m not sure what
the issues are but there may be a feeling of exclusion,

He compares this to his own son’s school where there is a vibrant parents’ council and he
feels welcome. He likes the idea of getting members from the community into the school.
He also suggests having parents come along on school trips and making them feel more
included. Sean worries that school board procedures and policies prevent teachers from
using community resources. He also comments on diversity at his current school finding
that there are events like Asian and African heritage month assemblies and student of the
month assemblies where parents are invited into the school. There are also committees
around the school that promote diversity.

5.7.2 ELD Students and Their Programming

Sean worries about how other students in the class treat ELD students. Often their
peers would laugh at them berating them for not being able to read.

The kids would say “oh, you’re just a loser.” Yeah, they would, yeah, they
would try to like demean him. “You can’t even read and you’re in Grade
8.” Things like that.
He feels that the other students in the class were ignorant and lacking in empathy. He thinks the kids who say these things may have come from a background where it was okay to say that to another kid. Sean would speak to his class about how all students learn differently. He would try to build community spirit by explaining how kids have different intelligences. Sean worries about how his ELD students are perceived by other students. He is careful when giving them modified work so that other students do not know the ELD students have a different test. He carefully prepares his students for being withdrawn from class with words of encouragement.

Sean reflects on how he learned about his two ELD students’ personal interests and strengths and tried to incorporate that into their programming. One boy loved cricket, and Sean was the cricket coach for the school. He used cricket in his probability unit in Math. The other ELD students loved music. Sean found this more challenging to incorporate into his lessons. He recalls how he first found out that one of his ELD students could not read and write and how this explained why the ELD student would get upset when asked to read in front of the class. He started having the ELD student read to him privately. Sean discusses possible modifications he could put in place for ELD students:

Maybe I can give them a – even scribe for them if it becomes necessary, if they are weak in that area ahhh. Another one could be instructional, then I could have a classroom modification. Have them in their own spot. I can look at again strategic seating.

When I asked Sean about how he used students’ first languages in the classroom, he had not thought of incorporating the ELD students’ spoken language, Jamaican Vernacular English, into his instructional strategies, but he liked the idea. He talked about how another teacher had used translators and how the Tamil students he taught during a
weekend course were taking Tamil lessons as well. He encourages students to keep speaking their first languages because it will help them get jobs in the future.

5.8 Denise

During Denise’s first five years of teaching, she worked in a private girls’ school with a social justice, anti-racist, feminist mandate. While at this school, she taught Social Studies, History, Geography, Science and Civics to Grades 6 through 10 students. However, she wanted to work in the public system and after years of applying was finally hired by her current school as an ESL/ELD teacher for Grades 6 to 8. For her first two years as an ESL teacher, all ELL newcomers were placed in a congregated class where she taught upwards of thirty ESL and ELD students for half a day. In the afternoons, she worked with a gifted class where a few higher level ELD students were mainstreamed. After being off for a year for a maternity leave, she returned to her school to find that all ELLs had been mainstreamed. For the last four years, she has been supporting ELLs and ELD students in mainstream classrooms. She has worked with a range of ELD students, approximately three per year, from Jamaica, Afghanistan and Pakistan. She is a qualified ESL/ELD teacher who attends many of the professional development workshops her school board offers. Denise defines herself as a social activist.

5.8.1 Thoughts on Education and Teaching

Denise sees education as a basic right and responsibility for all students. She feels this way because the power of the written word is enormous.

And I think that when we don’t have a strong literate base people are more easily subject to their rights being tampered with and their overall human rights, but also comes down to also their, you know, individual rights.
Denise gives the example of a mother who does not understand the medication her doctor is prescribing her. Basic literacy skills are the most important thing as well as exposing students to a wide variety of literature and experiences. Teachers must be in tune with their students as whole people and create comfortable, low-risk environments where students feel safe taking academic risks.

Denise incorporates students’ prior knowledge into her literacy practices. She discusses how all of her ELLs whether they are from South Asia or the Caribbean come from colonial backgrounds. She worked with a classroom teacher to create a unit that focussed on the Chinese railway workers and had her ELLs read the picture book *Ghost Train* by Paul Yee. She finds this to be a much more valuable way to approach diversity than shows, festivals and food fairs, which her school principal puts pressure on her to include. She refers to this as PR (public relations) diversity in that it is very standardized and does not include all of the students’ cultures in her school. Denise has started a club called Awaz, which means *Voice* in Punjabi:

I find that with our Indo-Caribbean’s maybe because we have a little community within AWAZ, kids from that background, we’re hearing lot from them. There’s a lot of discussion from them. There’s a lot of, you know, discussion and the kids are even Special Education, born in Canada, but their parents came from Guyana all of a sudden you hear them start speaking in the dialect that their parents’ speak with the ELD students. So they become whole as well because all these years they’ve been sitting in ICOM class. Nobody really recognizes their identity as a linguistic or cultural identity, but then they come to AWAZ and they get to be completely themselves because there’s other people who are from the same kind of house hold.

Here she promotes the use of students’ first language, especially with Indo-Caribbean students, who she states see their own first language as a Broken English. She tries to teach them about the rich history of their language and culture.
Denise describes practices in her school that promote community involvement. She discusses how she takes the time to make a connection with parents through a phone call or meeting when they are newcomers to Canada. The school also has a settlement worker, who is a great resource for newcomers. This settlement worker makes phone calls to parents and invites them into the school for information sessions on job hunting and other topics. Moreover, the school has the Welcome and Information for Newcomers (WIN) program:

That’s an amazing session where families can come and tour the school, get comfortable, see what kinds of things we do here in Canada, what kinds of things we need, what it’s like to be responsible for a locker, what happens you have to share it, m, rotary, all that kind of stuff. I feel like parents don’t know exactly what the rhythm is of the school. and they don’t know how to fit into that rhythm because they don’t know it, so I think it comes down to some really good, you know, foundational kind of awareness.

Denise thinks it’s important to invite the parents of ELLs into the school and to have sessions where teachers answer frequently asked questions.

5.8.2 ELD Students and Their Programming

Denise shows concern for how her ELD students are perceived and treated by other students and members of her staff. She finds that her ELD students do much better with some teachers than others and this has to do with how teachers interact with ELD students: do they kick them out of class or try to get to know them better. Denise reflects on another negative interaction between staff members and an ELD student:

I think it’s the fact that he’s not a self-starter. I think it bothers them that he’s got his chin on the desk and he’s not doing anything academically until somebody comes to help him and they see that as this kind of learned helplessness thing, but then he also picks up on that vibe and then m, ahhh I think he resists it, but he hates them for, for, for seeing through him, but seeing their perspective through him. I don’t know if that make
sense, but kind of seeing what they think, but not understanding him. Never having a conversation with him before making these judgements. Looking at him and sort of denying his experience.

She recalls a conversation with a classroom teacher who was upset because her Guyanese ELD student could not read the word Confederation, which the teacher thought was easy because it’s phonetically spelled. Denise also worries about how other students in the school treat ELD students and newcomers in general. While on supervision duty on the playground, she sees that ELD students and other newcomers are often bullied and left out by other students, even those that look like them.

With ELD students, Denise finds the best learning happens when she gets to work with them in small groups. When Denise had a newcomer ESL class with thirty students in it, she found it very difficult to create appropriate programming for the ELD students. She found their literacy needs to be much different from the other ELLs. When supporting her ELD students in small groups, she can scaffold for the students and guide them in developing rich understandings. She likes to use graphic organizers and technology such as Premier, a talking word processor, to support her students’ learning. She states that 90% of the time the ELD students in the school receive oral assessments. Denise is knowledgeable of critical literacy and tries to use it in her program but finds it difficult because of the pressures put on her by classroom teachers. With one ELD student, she had him tell her his story, which she typed into Premier for him. The student then listened to his own story, which had become a written text:

And he sat there and he watched and first of all the amount of text that was there he couldn’t even believe it. He couldn’t even believe that those were all his words, so that alone was very empowering, but then to see every word being read and to hear somebody else reading it. At one point that he was sitting there with his eyes closed and he was almost in tears because his story was being mirrored and it was being validated and so on, so in terms of the critical literacy to me was an example of that because he was
reflecting critically at his environment and something that he actually experiences on an everyday level, but he’s chosen to problematize it and not make this normal for him and that’s to me a sign of him looking at things in a critical perspective

Denise believes this is an example of critical literacy because the student is beginning to learn that he can construct written texts and control how his story and environment are written.

5.9 Summary

Overall, the participants in the study describe a student-centred philosophy that put relationships with their students ahead of imparting knowledge. However, despite this, many of them struggle with their relationships with their ELD students describing behaviour that is disruptive to the classroom environment, perceiving ELD students as the class bully or a victim of bullying, watching ELD students struggle to fit in with their peers and observing a single or group of students who were marginalized by the larger school community. Teachers are knowledgeable of their ELD students’ prior learning experiences to varying degrees. Not surprisingly, the teachers who attempted to bring that knowledge into their ELD students’ programs were met with engaged students who were more successful. However, incorporating students’ first languages into their literacy program beyond the use of peer translators is not always possible due to the fact that many of the ELD students speak oral languages that are not written down. This led to teachers making innovative and sometimes unique changes to their pedagogy in an attempt to promote ELD students’ first languages to parents, the students and throughout the school.
Chapter 6
Understanding Teachers’ Philosophies of Teaching

In the following chapter I examine how teachers understand education and teaching in general. What are the underlying philosophies and discourses influencing their perceptions of ELD students? I will, also, discuss teachers’ beliefs on and actions for the inclusion of the parents of ELD students and the larger school community in education.

6.1 The role of the teacher

When discussing their philosophies of teaching, many of the teachers emphasized the importance of creating strong relationships with their students. Researchers such as Cummins (2001) find that relationships between students and teachers are more important than any method of teaching. Similarly, Gersten’s (1999) research suggests that highly effective teachers find ways to engage with their students both on an academic and interpersonal level. These connections with students can be made through cooperative learning, workshops and other activities that allow teachers to get to know their students as people. During their interviews, my participants would mention educational theory such as multiple intelligences and the Zone of Proximal Development. However, the only consistency across many of the interviews was in discussing the importance of developing strong relationships with their students. Even teachers who did not discuss the importance of relationships with their students in their philosophies of teaching would often draw attention to its importance later in the interview. These teachers saw their roles as not only being about imparting academic knowledge, but, also, about how they related to their students.

How teachers perceive their students can have long lasting impacts on student potential. Freeman and Freeman (1998) discuss how teachers must show an ‘unwavering’ belief in
students’ ability and not label ELLs as deficient. Sheila sees the relationships she has with her students as central to providing them with positive educational experiences:

It’s up to a teacher to - you know – have, have their student reach their highest potential whether it’s through all the different multiple intelligences. Whether it’s visual or kinaesthetic there’s so many ways of teaching them. But you also I think in having a good education I think is also connecting to students.

Like Freeman and Freeman, Sheila believes that teachers must connect with students in order for them to achieve their highest potential. Central to good education is the importance of teachers having high expectations of their ELLs. Having her ELD student reach his highest potential is not always easy for Sheila. She describes her ELD student as having behaviour that is oppositional to the classroom setting. Therefore, Sheila chooses to use candy and incentives in order for her ELD student to complete his work. This is a strategy she negotiated with him after learning how much he liked candy. Sheila listens to her students and comes up with strategies to get them to complete their work through personal interactions. He is rewarded for simple tasks such as doing art and completing three questions. Mace-Matluck et al. (1998) find that when ELD students are presented with work at their level, they improve very quickly.

Teachers’ discourses on their ELLs did not always reflect their discourses on their ELD students. When discussing ELLs, some teachers describe positive relationships and hard working, highly motivated students who could be successful. For example, Jenny discusses using strategies such as incorporating students’ L1 when teaching her ELLs to have positive effects and create successful students. Olivia (2005) writes that teachers need to re-examine their beliefs to reflect changes in society. Here, we see that Jenny is changing her beliefs about education needing to only be taught in English and is beginning to include students’ L1 in her classroom. However, she struggles with her relationship with her ELD student in that she is not able to communicate with him or his parents, he often disrupts the class and, at times, destroys other
students’ work. Also, she does not feel trained, equipped or supported to deal with his disruptive classroom behaviours or provide him with appropriate numeracy and literacy programming. Researchers have found that ELD students have the added difficulty of having to learn a new set of social expectations found in formal schooling (Mace-Matluck et al., 1998; Toronto Board of Education, 1995). As stated by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) guidelines, teachers not only need to teach literacy and subject content knowledge, but also familiarize ELD students with the social and behavioural expectations of the school. Dooley’s (2009) research examines how ELD students may not have academic knowledge of different subject areas although they may have personal experiences. Even though Jenny is beginning to re-examine her views as they relate to ELLs, these same changes are not successful with her ELD student.

If teachers’ philosophies of teaching are reflective of their beliefs about life and fundamental thinking about values and knowledge, as Olivia (2005) states, what values are clashing with the ELD students and their families? Teachers’ struggle to understand their ELD students and create positive relationships reflects a conflict in their beliefs about teaching and ELD students’ experiences with schooling. Dachyshyn’s (2008) study in an Edmonton community found that parents of refugees often wanted more moral training to happen in schools and were worried about the negative behaviours their children were learning. Similarly, Melissa, an experienced ESL/ELD teacher, reflects on this struggle between teachers’ expectations and what ELD students and their families want from schooling:

What they want from school is not we are trying to give them. You know, and uhh, we’re constantly. I can see this struggle in, in my building trying to make them fit into, you know, school; whereas, they are trying to do, do school – to figure out how to do school. You know, what do I do in this building and how do I even make sense of what goes on here? How’s this going to be of any use to me what-so-ever?
Melissa reflects that the underlying discourses that frame how teachers understand the ELD students that they teach are at odds with the students’ expectations of schooling. Melissa believes that education is about socialization and learning how to adjust to the culture where you live. She states that this is why there is such a struggle with schooling in Ontario because there are so many different cultures and expectations. Musetti et al. (2009) find that teachers must learn about students’ cultures, backgrounds and families. Students and teachers enter the classroom with very different ideas of what they want out of schooling and teachers must look more carefully at students’ backgrounds or risk further marginalizing students’ educational experiences.

How teachers understand their roles as educators can deeply impact the experiences of all ELLs in school. Freeman & Freeman’s (1998) and Yoon’s (2008) research examines how mainstream classroom teachers often do not see ELLs as their responsibility. Their role is to deliver content. These teachers who see themselves as delivering subject content only and do not see it as their role to teach ELLs, risk marginalizing the experiences of the new immigrants they teach. One teacher in my study, Jenny, a mainstream classroom teacher, expresses frustration at not being given a literacy program or proper support for teaching her ELD student. In this way, Jenny does not always see her role as a teacher to be one of teaching the ELD student who is integrated into her mainstream classroom. However, many of the other mainstream classroom teacher participants describe programming and teaching ELD students as their role and responsibility. Often ESL specialist teachers are not mentioned. Not once during her interview does Sara mention an ESL specialist teacher in her school. When discussing her ELD students’ literacy programs, she describes her role as a mainstream classroom teacher as including programming, evaluating and communicating with families. She sees her role to be one of guiding her ELD students in their peer relationships and describes her ELD students as being
accepted by students in the school. Her descriptions of her ELD students tend to be positive. As Freeman & Freeman (1998) and Yoon (2008) state how teachers understand their roles in relation to the ELD students they teach can marginalize their experiences with education in Ontario. When mainstream classroom teachers see their role as only delivering content or only teaching regular students, then the ESL specialist teacher must take on all the responsibility of teaching ELL’s. This discourse is reflected in Theresa’s experiences as an ELD specialist teacher in her school. Theresa describes teachers in her school as resisting having ELD students integrated into their classrooms and using students’ first language as an instructional strategy. Teachers in Theresa’s school have a narrow view of themselves as educators. They are, as Yoon (2008) describes, teachers of regular students or of a specific subject area and not teachers for all students. The ELD students who are integrated into their classroom, in their view, are not their responsibility. The mainstream classroom teachers in Theresa’s school do not see teaching ELD students as part of their roles.

6.2 Views on Diversity

Teachers’ discourses on race, ethnicity or even culture can impact all ELLs experiences with education as well as their relationships with teachers in Ontario. First, it is important to note that race and ethnicity are historically and not biologically defined (Hall, 2006). According to Hall, these unified identities that are labelled race and ethnicity are just comforting stories, and people are actually full of contradicting identities that pull them in different directions. Gérin-Lajoie’s (2008c) research examines a typical Canadian approach to diversity in schools which emphasizes inviting or celebrating difference. Here, tolerance becomes central to the discourse on diversity not change. One teacher, Melissa, discusses diversity within the Old Colony
Mennonite community – a group whose cultural values Gingrich (2006) describes as often essentialized as conservative, male dominated and fundamentalist. Melissa says:

I can think of different families who are different in different ways and really there’s a broad range. Like some parents really, they come into parent night and their kids are so excited. The kids are brilliant and they’re talking about in Dietsch about what they’re doing in school and the parents are asking the questions and the Moms are asking the questions. But other families come into parents’ night. The mom sits there. She doesn’t even look at you. Her eyes are down. The whole time she doesn’t even open her mouth. Dad does all the talking and the kids sit and don’t say a word.

Here, Melissa observes values and customs that are contrary to her own personal values in that some of the women do not speak or make eye contact with her. However, she is careful not to essentialize all of her students’ families as having the same cultural or religious values. She sees differences within the Old Colony Mennonites. Even the labelling of Old Colony Mennonites, however, is a social construction. Li (1999) sees ethnicity as constructed on social relationships. To understand ethnicities as cohesive, unified groups is full of contradictions. There is, inherently, the assumption that they are a group that shares the same experiences and, in this case, values. One assumed value of Old Colony Mennonites is that they do not value education and must be forced into schooling by social institutions, which is reflected in Melissa and Theresa’s interviews. However, this construction of Old Colony Mennonite identity is a full of contradictions.

Teachers’ personal beliefs about new immigrants can negatively impact ELD students. Flores and Smith (2007/2008) find that teachers’ beliefs and attitudes about difference can have negative effects for minority students. These researchers want to understand teachers’ attitudes towards diverse groups of students and how teachers’ personal characteristics impact those attitudes. Many of the participants in the present study were immigrants themselves or came from immigrant families where English was not the first language. As the child of immigrants,
Sheila is personally aware of racist discourses that marginalized her parents’ initial experiences in Canada. Sheila finds that despite these negative discourses her parents worked hard so that she could get a good education. She sees these expectations reflected in the parents of her immigrant students. She sees it as part of her role to educate parents about Western customs. Another participant, Sara, is an immigrant and was herself an ELL in Ontario. She states that she likes to normalize the use of first languages in her classroom by using her own first language, at times, with the students, and discusses how her own father still has an accent. To Sara, being an ELL is a normal experience, not a negative or problematic situation. In these ways, the participants’ personal beliefs and attitudes work towards creating positive, inclusive spaces for ELD students.

However, some of the participants’ discourses work to marginalize and, at times, negatively construct the actions of ELD students. Teachers’ discourses can normalize and constrain all ELLs’ roles and responsibilities in the classroom (English, 2009). Lee (2009) discusses how teachers’ discourses continue to ‘other’ ELLs. Teachers talk about themselves versus the students and continue to essentialize students’ culture. Theresa, who is an ESL/ELD teacher who works with Old Colony Mennonites, describes her ELD students as not valuing education and as only coming to school because they are forced to by Children’s Aid.

And besides most of them are coming from family backgrounds where they don’t value education. But they’re there because the parents are told if they don’t send their kids then Children’s Aid will come in and, and intervene

Here, Theresa’s words suggest a discourse of the ‘other’, those coming from family backgrounds that do not value education, who does not share the same values, formal education, as the dominant group. The ‘other’ must be forced into education through coercive methods such as the removal of children from the home or loss of welfare cheques. Cummins (2001) states that “power and status relations between dominant and subordinated groups exert a major influence”
(p. 201). Teachers must be aware of the powerful discourses they are reproducing or risk further marginalizing their students.

One of the themes in the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) guidelines is the reproduction of discourses on Canada as a peaceful nation that saves others: words such as ‘peaceful, better and hopeful’ (p. 9) are used to describe Canada. Many of the participants’ descriptions of their ELD students’ experiences with education in Canada contradict this idea of Canada as a peaceful, better nation. Participants tell stories of students who miss their home countries and struggle with their experiences in Canada, as expressed by Theresa:

One of the things that would happen very quickly in the school year was that when they were comfortable with themselves, they would start saying things like “Mexico is a much better place, or we like Bolivia so much better.” And so, and then this talk would spread to the whole class and they’d get sort of negative about my classroom or about school in general.

Here, Theresa’s students construct their home countries as ‘better’ places, not Canada. Similarly, Denise retells a moment in her classroom when one of her newcomer ELD students from Jamaica describes a mugging he experienced over the weekend in Ontario:

When I asked him if this kind of thing would have happened in Jamaica where he grew up, he said, “No way.” because everybody there knew his father. Here his father is just another face nobody knows who he is. Back home his father was like highly respected in the community, so he had a huge sense of social security, whereas here it’s all, it’s all stripped that’s how he feels

In this case, contrary to the Ontario Ministry of Education guidelines document, the student experiences Ontario as a place of violence and sees Jamaica as better and peaceful. Another participant, Sara, describes one of her ELD students as choosing to return home to Jamaica as opposed to continuing on to secondary school in Ontario. If Canada is a better place full of peace and hope, as the Ontario Ministry documents suggest, why is this child choosing to return to Jamaica and not stay in Canada? According to the participant, the expectations of schooling are not within her ELD student’s realm of acceptance. The student has strong peer relationships
within the school, but completing schoolwork and homework is foreign to her. Her home with her father in Jamaica is a place where she feels accepted and valued. These reflections on the experiences of their ELD students with education in Ontario contradict pervasive discourses as Canada as a peaceful, better country.

6.3 Redefining schooling

An important aspect of teachers’ philosophies of teaching is how they understand schooling and the purpose and structure of schooling. Learning happens in many ways both in and out of school. For ELD students, specifically, researchers such Hamayan (2004) find that education needs to be understood as something that does not just happen in school. ELD students’ programming must focus on their life experiences and not their limited formal learning experiences. This is an important part of Sean’s programming. He takes the time to learn about his ELD students’ strengths and personal interests attempting to incorporate these interests into the learning process. When Sean finds out about his ELD students’ interests in cricket and music, he includes these themes in his programming. Freeman & Freeman’s (1998) research highlights the importance of incorporating content that draws on students’ backgrounds. ELD students may have extensive knowledge that they have learned in the community and at home. Melissa describes how the music teacher at her elementary school had the students perform the entire Messiah. Many of the ELLs in her school have extensive prior knowledge of singing in choirs – something they do in their places of worship. As many of the ELD students and other ELLs in the school have a strong knowledge of farms and building barns, Melissa’s school participates in the Canada Skills construction competition where, in her words, they do quite well. In these ways, these teachers are beginning to understand knowledge as something to be learned outside of school and attempt to bring that prior knowledge into the classroom.
As suggested by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) documents, Mace-Matluck et al. (1998) and the Toronto Board of Education (1995), school social and behavioural expectations may be new concepts for students. For example, sitting at a desk or holding a pencil may be new experiences for ELD students. Theresa describes many of her newcomer ELD students as not even being able to recognize a pencil or understand that symbols on a page can be made into sounds and words. She describes one ELD student as having to learn to hold a pencil and doing activities such as drawing a circle. In these ways, her ELD students are not familiar with the expectations of formal schooling. As an ESL specialist teacher who has worked with a number of ELD students over the years, Denise describes ELD students’ misunderstanding of school expectations as natural and to be expected. In this way, Denise’s underlying ideas about schooling and students’ behaviour are evolving to reflect the changing needs of her students. When one of her ELD students pulls a fire alarm at school, even his mother does not seem to understand the severity of the action in Denise’s opinion. In this case, Denise does not assume, as suggested by Mace-Matluck et al. (1998) that in school students should have prior knowledge of these schooling skills and behaviours. In order to support ELD students in this transition to formal schooling, Mace-Matluck et al. (1998) suggest that schools develop cohesive behaviour models. However, none of the participants in the study describe such a model. Teachers often react to students’ behaviour by putting incentives in place or describing ELD students’ behaviour as negative and, at times, destructive. In these ways, some of the teachers do not re-assess their definitions of schooling and how to teach for their ELD students and, therefore, at times, reproduce inequitable discourses on ELD students.

The idea of relationships as being at the core of teachers’ ideas about teaching and education reflects changing notions about the role of the school. One way of understanding these
evolving roles is to examine how the deeper structures of school are changing. In many ways, some of the participants appear to be moving towards Roger’s (2004b) ideas of non-formal or even informal teaching methods where the school becomes flexible to the needs of the community. Instead of focussing on students repeating back information they have learned in the classroom, there is an emphasis placed on relationships. People are at the core of education, not information. As a teacher of twenty-five years, Theresa discusses her own personal transformation. Like many of the other participants, she recounts having positive relationships with her students and supporting students with their peer relationships as an essential part of her teaching practice. Theresa states that she is moving away from and critical of a style of teaching that expects students to repeat back information they have learned from their teacher. Her conception of the function of school is evolving. People not information are at the centre of teaching and education.

The conception of the formal school as something that imparts information to students is reflective of societal discourses on education. According to Farrell (2008), assumptions about formal schooling and how school should be done have spread throughout most of the world through processes such as colonization and modernization. Traditionally, schools include classrooms with children of the same age, standardized curriculum, textbooks and other resources, and students are expected to repeat back to the teacher information they have learned. However, Theresa no longer accepts all of the criteria of formal schooling. Interestingly, she is the only teacher in my study working in what the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007, 2008) documents define as a congregated class, where elementary school ELD students of all ages are placed together to receive specialized programming. This style of congregated class is supported by previous research on ELD students (Toledo, 1998). Theresa’s classroom includes a range of
characteristics not normally found in a formal school. First, students from Grades 1 to 8 and not students of the same age learn in one room. Students of all elementary school ages work together to develop their literacy skills. Another characteristic of formal schooling that does not happen in Theresa’s classroom is following a standardized curriculum set by a governing body. Theresa states that she does not feel pressure to follow the formal curriculum and that there is a lot of freedom as to what she can teach the students. Fu’s (1996) research finds that teachers of ELLs must not teach to a set of prescribed curriculum expectations. Teachers must find out what students’ needs are and design curriculum to suit those needs. By not being forced to follow standardized curriculum, Theresa has the choice to create curriculum that suits her students’ needs. Moreover, typical classroom resources are not available to Theresa. During her interview, she describes how there were no resources provided for her teaching program with ELD students. This is difficult as she recounts having to go through the garbage to find discarded textbooks and having to get creative with her own professional development and programming. However, all of these difficulties work towards creating an environment where Theresa is no longer confined by the constraints of formal schooling and has the choice to incorporate non-formal and informal education ideals in her classroom. In other words, she has the flexibility to create programming that is relevant and achievable for her students. She has the space to create a transformed program within a somewhat non-formal structure.

If these are ways that teachers in congregated classes can begin to redefine formal schooling and incorporate non-formal structures into their classrooms, what is the reality for mainstream classroom teachers working with ELD students who are integrated into their classrooms? Rogers (2008b) examines how teachers and schools can incorporate non-formal and informal education into formal education structures. He cites examples such as extra-curricular
activities and peer tutoring, which are used extensively in many schools today. Some of the teachers in my study discussed the importance of extra-curricular activities with their ELD students. For example, Sean coached one of his ELD students on the school cricket team. He then attempted to bring cricket into the classroom to assist his ELD student with learning during Math class. Sara connected with two of her female ELD students through the use of lunch-time movie and Hip Hop dance clubs. She states that this helped her to build positive relationships with her ELD students as well as guide the ELD students towards healthy peer relationships. Musetti, Salas & Perez (2009) find that because ELD students need more catch-up time than other ELLs, students may need to take additional evening and weekend classes. Sara describes one of her female ELD students after school tutoring program called Oxford:

> Her parents took her to Oxford and she felt that she was moving ahead. She would bring her Oxford material to me, and I would further explain, or further help with some of the rote things. And that gave her a great sense of confidence because now she knew she didn’t have one person to look to. There were many people who were looking after her concerns.

Here, the ELD student in Sara’s class accesses tutoring programs found outside the formal education system and brings that learning into the school. Sara is open to working with her ELD student with this additional material, as she sees it improves her ELD student’s confidence. By connecting with ELD students through extra-curricular activities and tutoring, mainstream classroom teachers can begin to find ways to include non-formal and informal education in the formal education system.

### 6.4 Transformative Pedagogy

Understanding teachers’ pedagogies is another important aspect of examining the underlying discourses present in their philosophies of teaching. Many of the participants’ pedagogies include child-centred approaches that emphasize, like their general thoughts on
teaching and education, the importance of relationships. Sara states that “there’s many different ways to get them to feel that learning is the community, learning is what they do with each other, not just me.” In this case, students work in groups learning from each other. According to Cummins (2000), traditional ideas about teaching see education as a way of depositing information and skills into students. Students are expected to repeat back and ‘bank’ what they have learned. Constructivist teaching, on the other hand, puts students’ experiences at the centre of active learning. However, both traditional and constructivist pedagogies only focus on instructional methods. Cummins (2000) discusses how teachers need to move away from traditional and constructivist pedagogies in order to adopt a transformative style to teaching. Transformative pedagogy is concerned with the social dimensions of teaching. According to Cummins, ideas about transformative education are influenced by theorists such as Paulo Freire and “argue that all forms of instruction entail social assumptions, whether acknowledged explicitly or not” (p. 217). Teachers must not only place students at the centre of their own learning, but ask them to critically examine powerful discourses present in the texts they read and society in which they live.

With transformative education, students are prepared to exist and participate in a democratic society. This approach expects teachers to instruct students about the powerful discourses that are influencing them. In this study, to varying degrees, some participants incorporate transformative pedagogies while others do not seem to do so. When discussing her philosophy of teaching, Lisa discusses the importance of preparing students to participate in a democracy:

I think there needs to be more government investment in education and not, not just in schooling but also social programs to keep our children active and lively. I mean active in terms of the physical sense but also in terms of the emotional and
mental sense, and umm contributing, in order to contribute to umm a thriving democracy.

Here, Lisa’s discourse suggests someone who has adopted a style of teaching that is concerned not only with imparting information or creating active, child-centred learning, but, also, concerned with the social aspects of teaching. She is preparing her students to think critically about inequitable power relations in society so that they can fully participate in a democracy.

Constructivist pedagogy shares many characteristics of a transformative pedagogy including the use of whole language, seeing knowledge as catalytic and the joint construction of learning (Cummins, 2000). One of the key differences, however, between a constructivist and transformative approach is the incorporation of critical inquiry and explicit attention to power relations. Students are asked to relate learning to their own experiences. When discussing an interaction with one of her ELD students, Sara explains how the student took information he had already learned about slavery and critically incorporates it into his understanding of the documentary *The Boys of Baraka*:

I still shudder to remember him say it today: “The black man hasn’t come far from the days of the white traders.” And he had remembered that about the middle passage and when I sat and talked to him about what he meant about the white traders. He said, “All money goes to white people. Look at how these schools are. If there were three white kids in that class, that school wouldn’t look that way. They’re all black. They’re all poor. And they’re all going nowhere.” And what he wrote was exceptional.

Here, Sara seeks to transform how her students understand race and power, to critically examine how black people are oppressed historically and to understand how that oppression continues today. Sara’s transformative pedagogy asks her students to look at unequal power relations.

Many participants used constructivist pedagogy in their classrooms, but struggled to find ways to incorporate the more critical elements of transformative approaches. Jenny describes her classroom as child-centred and uses cooperative learning throughout the school year. She states
that this is because students learn best from each other. Despite this, Jenny did not feel that any
of her Grade 8 students, many of whom were immigrants or the children of immigrants, were at
the level where they could think critically. Gersten (1999) examines how teachers’ discourses
continually emphasize that ELLs are not meeting the expectations of typical students at their
grade level. When teaching ELLs, there is an over-reliance on vocabulary and spelling drills, low
risk activities and reduced demands on students. Students become focused on a literacy program
that emphasizes vocabulary, grammar and spelling and not critical literacy skills. Jenny’s literacy
program with her ELD student reflects this discourse. According to Jenny, her ELD student’s
literacy program consists of simple vocabulary worksheets and computer activities. The ELD
student is not able to interact with his peers. He sits alone in a corner or at a computer. Jenny is
not able to use a student-centered, constructivist pedagogy with her ELD student. Instead she
relies on vocabulary and spelling drills. In these ways, Jenny struggles to incorporate the critical
and at times, child-centered aspects of transformative pedagogy.

6.5 Inclusion of parents

Many researchers have emphasized the importance of including parents in education.
How teachers incorporate the parents of ELD students into their teaching and school is an
important way of examining teachers’ underlying discourses on the value of students’ home
languages and cultures. Mace-Matluck et al. (1998) list “staff who are interested in parent
involvement in schooling” (p. 100) as one of five characteristics of successful programs for ELD
students. All of the participants in my study discuss the importance of communicating with
parents. For example, Jenny sees it as her professional responsibility to communicate with all of
her students’ parents. As an ESL/ELD specialist teacher, Denise takes the time to communicate
with all of her newcomer parents when they first arrive in Ontario. Although most teachers
discuss how they communicate with and stay in contact with parents, they do not always discuss how they include parents in the education of their children. Cummins (2001) writes that “students from subordinated communities will be empowered in the school context to the extent that their parents are empowered through their interactions with the school” (p. 214). Sheila recalls how the ESL specialist teacher in her school had a dual language book presentation where parents were invited and newcomer students were given the chance to tell their stories in both their first language and in English. Here, parents supported their children with the writing of their first language. Children who were beginning to lose the ability to write in their first language or had never learned how to read and write in their first language went to parents for support in the writing of their books. The students then presented these books to their parents in a dual language showcase. In this way, Sheila’s school empowers subordinated communities through their interactions with the school. Parents’ input is an essential part of students’ learning.

Some teachers felt that other adults in the school including administrators and ESL specialist teachers as well as school board procedures prevented them from connecting with the school community in the ways they wanted. Cummins (2001) writes that “maintenance of an exclusionary orientation by the school can lead communities to challenge the institutional power structure” (p. 215). In Sean’s school, few parents, who are almost all immigrants themselves, attend the parents’ council meeting. However, when teachers put together initiatives such as school social activities, they experienced resistance from the school administration. According to Sean, the school has an exclusionary orientation towards parents, and the community resists by not attending school council meetings. At Theresa’s school, the teachers did not want the ELD students integrated into their mainstream classroom. Theresa describes the parents of her ELD students as burning books, not supporting their children’s education and keeping their children at
home when they are supposed to be attending school. According to Theresa, the ELD students at her school stick together and, often, do not speak to the other students in the school. Very few of the parents of ELD students attend parents’ night. Here, Theresa describes the ELD community as resisting education and challenging the institutional power structure.

Not all of the participants’ schools incorporated an exclusionary orientation towards the school community. As a classroom teacher, Lisa finds ways to bring the community into her classroom. One way that Lisa includes the community in her classroom is through the use of the Roots of Empathy program where a mother and child from the community come into the classroom to teach students about social skills such as getting along and empathy. Here, Lisa collaborates with a community member to promote cohesion and inclusion amongst all of her students. The community is involved in classroom activities. She further incorporates the school community by having Smudge ceremonies and using the Seven Sacred teachings as her classroom behaviour expectations. In terms of academics, Lisa’s school has an innovative Ojibwa language program, as many of her students are of an Ojibwa background. Students are taught Ojibwa by community members – a language that they and their parents have lost. The school community advocates for the inclusion of Ojibwa classes and is hoping the local secondary school begins to offer Ojibwa classes as well. In these ways, Lisa’s school works towards collaborating with the school community to create an inclusive school structure.

Teachers’ reflections on the parents of ELD communities reveal a struggle to include them in the education of their children. In his work *Language, Power and Pedagogy*, Cummins (2000) discusses how teachers and schools can create collaborative or exclusionary orientations towards the participation of the community. The exclusion of the parents of ELD students is not uncommon. Many of the teachers of ELD students struggle to communicate with the parents of
their ELD students. Jenny was not able to speak to the father of her ELD student who spoke Urdu because she perceived that there was no one to translate for her in the school. Jenny does not mention seeking support from the settlement worker, however, or trying to find translators within the student’s family. Therefore, she expresses a desire to communicate with her ELD student’s father, but struggles to do so through regular procedures. Cummins (2009) finds that “teachers have the choice as to whether to involve parents’ in their children’s education” (p. 262). Jenny is not able to include the parents of her ELD student in his education. Jenny’s ELD student’s behaviour escalates as described earlier and by the end of the year his behaviour, in her words, is brutal. Again, as Cummins (2001) suggests the subordinated community – in this case an ELD student – who feels excluded from the classroom, undermines the power structures in the classroom defying behavioural, academic and social expectations.

If many teachers struggle to make connections with and include parents of ELD students in education, what are some more collaborative approaches that teachers can take? Cummins (2001) finds that “teachers operating at the collaborative end of the continuum actively encourage parents to participate in promoting their children’s academic progress both in the home and through involvement in classroom activities” (p. 215). As an ESL specialist teacher of many years, Melissa created an evening program for the mothers of ELD students called Time to Read. Here, mothers are taught how to read to their children at home in their first language even though many of the mothers are not able to read and their first language is not a written language. Melissa teaches them how to look at the pictures in a picture book and create a story that they tell their children in their first language. In this way, parents’ first languages are used to promote students’ academic progress. Also, parents are involved in school activities such as running a lunch time choir. However, Melissa critiques this activity saying that ELD students do
not feel included and do not join the choir because the parents who volunteer at the school are from a different community. Even though it is a constant struggle, Melissa sees it as her role as a teacher to find ways to include the parents of her ELD students in the school to support their children’s academic success. Melissa wants the parents of her students to actively participate in students’ school activities. In these ways, Melissa is moving towards a philosophy of teaching that includes the parents of ELD students. Parents are an essential part of their children’s literacy programs. They can use their first language to develop their children’s ability to read and understand texts.

6.6 Conclusion

Relationships are the centre of the teacher participants’ philosophies of teaching. Many of the mainstream classroom teachers in this study saw their role as being one of teaching all students not just regular students or delivering subject content. The participants’ philosophies reveal an understanding of education that is beginning to move away from just imparting information to students. Some are beginning to incorporate critical literacy into their programming. Many of the teachers struggled with their relationships with their ELD students. These same teachers, however, discussed positive relationships with their ELLs. This suggests that teachers’ struggles to relate to their ELD students goes beyond language and their views on racialized people. Those teachers that related well with their ELD students took the time to connect with them through extra-curricular activities that took place outside of the classroom. Teachers who reached out to parents and found ways to include them in their children’s education tended to have more positive relationships with ELD communities. In these ways, having positive relationships with ELD students is more complex and forces teachers to think of ways to relate to their students outside of the constraints of formal schooling.
The following chapter seeks to examine teachers’ discourses on teaching literacy to ELD students. I will examine the ways teachers incorporate authentic, meaningful practices including students’ home languages and critical thinking into their literacy programs.

7.1 Authentic literacy practices

Literacy is a social activity that connects people through spoken and written words, visuals and texts. How teachers develop students’ literacy skills reveals how they read and understand the world, what they value about literacy, which in turn influences what they choose to impart to their students. Lau (2011) writes that students must be immersed in authentic or situated literacy practices that engage them as a learning community. People and communication are at the centre of literacy. When discussing her literacy program, Sara states that:

There is always room - the newspaper – always room - pictures – always room for showing that a community is made of different learners whether they’re disabled, you know, whether they’re special ed. – whether they come from different cultures and fears.

Therefore, in order to make literacy meaningful, teachers must include a range of authentic text forms that are relevant to students’ lives and engage students socially. The New London Group (1996) finds that these could include, but are not limited to the burgeoning amount of media texts that are now a part of students’ lives. Many of the teachers in my study describe literacy programs that incorporate a range of authentic literacy practices such as creating a class magazine, writing an autobiography, studying raps as part of a poetry unit and reading newspaper articles and cookbooks. Here, we see teachers striving to make students’ literacy
programs meaningful and relevant. In these ways, literacy reflects the students’ own experiences and lives. Literacy practices of the home are brought into the classroom.

Literacy is not a practice that needs to be relegated to the classroom. Students participate in literacy activities on many levels throughout their day from the music they listen to, the text messages they send, to the magazines they read and, even, the conversations they have with friends. Literacy is a social activity that connects people. Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leoni, Sandhu, & Sastri (2005) find that literacy is a social and political act that is learned through people’s daily lives. Literacy is a totality of a person’s experiences. In her first few years as a teacher, Sheila created a poetry unit that she describes as dramatically changing the way her students interacted with and understood poetry:

I know all these kids they love the R & B and Hip Hop music – especially did. Especially the class that I had was into that type of music. So I explained . . . I put some, some rap songs for the class. And they were like, “why is she playing rap music? This is pretty cool.” And kind of how I engage my students - especially the boys. I didn’t know how to rap to writing poetry because this is poetry. You know. And I let them know that this is a form of poetry. “You know the rap artists that you listen to. You know Topac, for example. They’re poets.” They’re like, “nooo.” I’m like, “yes they are. Did you know?” They didn’t believe me. And I was like, “okay that’s pretty cool,” and they loved it. And you know I put all these posters up. I put all rap singers and they’re like, “what is she doing?” And then they realized like, “wow. It’s a form of – it’s poetic.”

Here, Sheila uses literacy that is already part of the students’ lives. A form of literacy they love but do not value as valid school literacy. Literacy is not found in the textbook, but is a natural part of the students’ environments. Sheila validates their prior experiences and knowledge, and the students get to have a lot of fun and enjoy learning. Literacy is not just an in-school, text driven practice. In this case, Sheila incorporates the literacies of the home and wider community to make school literacy practices relevant to students.

Students must be engaged in literacy activities that are relevant to their everyday lives and begin to understand and unravel the discourses that are informing these activities.
Researchers such as McLaughlin (2004) have found that when a person chooses to read a book they submit to the author’s choices and ideas. How then can teachers begin to erode the power of the author and the written word and begin to understand how it is constructed and reinforces dominant discourses? At the beginning of the school year, Sara has her students cut up cookbooks and critically examine the voices and narrative style each chef personality assumes in the writing of their cookbooks. The cookbooks are texts normally found in the home and not in the school. They are a form of writing that all students can make personal connections to. Students can relate, if not to the cooking, to the eating of meals created from the cookbooks. They are forms of literacy that are used daily in the community. Some of the chefs in the cookbooks write in formalized, British English while other chefs use vernacular forms of English. Sara asks the students to develop their own narrative voice in order to create pieces of writing that are dynamic and personal. Sara wants to teach her students “to write in the style that is them”. The students analyze the discourses and identities of the chefs and then construct their own voice. Another aspect of this unit is the importance Sara places on having her students tear up the cookbooks. Students participate in a novel activity where the written word becomes something they can impact and even change. The written word is not a sacred text, but something to be played with and, at times, destroyed. By physically tearing apart the cookbooks, Sara creates an atmosphere where students can begin to challenge the power of the written word. In these ways, Sara has her students use, deconstruct and then reconstruct, in their own voices, authentic texts.

Many of the teachers in my study struggled to incorporate critical literacy or even critical thinking into their literacy program. When asked to discuss how she used critical thinking with
her mainstream classroom students, Jenny responded that her students were not ready to think critically. Cummins (2001) writes that

Genuine critical literacy threatens established systems of privilege and resource distribution because it reduces the potency of indoctrination. Critical literacy enables us to read between the lines, to look sceptically at apparently benign and plausible surface structures, to analyze claims in relation to empirical data, and to question whose interests are served by particular forms of communication (p. 283)

Jenny’s classroom is predominantly composed of new immigrants and the children of immigrants. Her students are almost all racialized people. Moreover, Jenny discusses her own personal views on racism and is angered by teachers who do not have high expectations of racialized students and advocates for the use of aboriginal forms of discipline such as restorative justices in schools. Bringing these viewpoints and ideas into her classroom, could be a powerful place to begin to incorporate critical literacy into her programming.

Melissa also attempted and struggled to use critical literacy in her classroom. She teaches Mennonites, who are not a racialized community, but a group who has members that situate themselves outside of some of the norms of Canadian society including rejecting some forms of technology, wearing plain, home-made clothing and adhering to non-violence. Some members are critical of the use of televisions and media in general. However, when she attempts to have her students think critically about gender roles, she describes the students as shutting down and in one case becoming very angry. Melissa gives up on the use of critical thinking because her students react strongly and emotionally to this critical thinking activity. One could imagine in this scenario, as Melissa’s own reflections on the Mennonite community suggest, that the students are afraid that the school is trying to change them and, in Melissa’s words, make them believe what “we” believe. Melissa, in this situation, could be seen as an outsider trying to change the beliefs of the students. Instead of focussing on discourses that they personally believe in, teachers could look more closely at discourses that oppress their students. For example,
Melissa has to get permission to show any video or film to her students, and some parents will not grant that permission. Some of the children wear home-made clothes and find consumerism, capitalism and violence to be contrary to their personal believes. One could imagine that many of these students are already participating in a highly critical perspective on discourses around commercialism and war. These could be powerful places to begin critical literacy lessons that do not threaten the students’ personal beliefs. In these ways, many teachers may be surprised to find highly engaged and critical students who are capable of completing critical literacy activities.

7.2 Textbooks and phonics based learning

Literacy programs that focus on textbooks and workbooks risk losing relevance to students’ lives. A textbook cannot be flexible to the local community. When Sara had her students write the publisher of their History textbook and ask why topics such as the Black Loyalists and Residential Schools were under-represented, the publisher replied that the textbooks had to be generic in order to appeal to a wider audience. This is partly why Sara chooses not to centre her classroom program on standardized textbooks. However, this was not true of all of the teacher participants in my study. Some teachers’ literacy practices used more standardized programs and textbooks or even vocabulary and spelling worksheets. Sheila, for example, describes the literacy program her school uses as being a cross-curricular text that is currently an important part of her programming:

They’re booklets where you do a little reading and then you’ve got comprehension questions. It’s very good because the teacher’s manual actually shows … you read a passage, there’s sections on reading that you can actually test them on. So they give umm reading comprehension questions. It gives you a writing section, so maybe you can write a little a journal on what you read. They have all these different activities. It’s got a reading section after, a writing section, a media section and an oral communication section.
Here, we see Sheila adopting a new approach to literacy that her school has incorporated into their school-wide literacy strategy in the last number of years. Sheila has moved away from using the authentic literacy practices such as the rap poetry unit she used in her first couple of years of teaching to using a standardized literacy program developed outside of the school community. Although some of the readings may be engaging and relevant to the students, the texts do not necessarily reflect the prior knowledge and experiences of students in her classroom. In this way, school literacy does not reflect the totality of students’ experiences and becomes separate from their lived experiences. The use of a standardized literacy program moves Sheila away from incorporating authentic texts into student learning.

Although decoding is a necessary part of learning to read, phonics based programs are not always reflective of authentic literacy practices either. Cummins, Brown & Sayers (2007) find that relying on phonics based programs only serves to help students decode, but does not extend their thinking or deepen their comprehension of a text. They are wary of literacy programs that promote phonics and not comprehension or even critical thinking. In an attempt to create relevant programming for her ELD students, Theresa educated herself in the Jolly Phonics program. Based on the learning from this program, she would have her students study the alphabet and then add different consonants they had learned to word endings such as ‘ing’. Here, we see Theresa using a phonics based program. All of Theresa’s students are ELD students. Some of them have never learned to read and write before entering Theresa’s classroom.

Similarly, Denise discusses using phonics strategies with her ELD students:

Repeating those basic strategies of decoding, you know, reviewing the alphabet because some of our students still don’t recognize each letter or they mix up letters, reverse letters and, so, sound letter recognition is a big part and sometimes it takes an entire year to mainly get that
Cummins et al. (2007) in their research find that phonics instruction can assist students in Grade 1. Learning to decode is a necessary part of literacy. For some of Denise and Theresa’s new ELD students, phonics was an important part of their program. Dooley’s (2009) research into the experiences of ELD students in Australian schools found that teachers face the difficult challenge of combining tasks that are conceptually deep and critical while still building students basic literacy skills. In this way, teachers and researchers find phonics based instruction to be important, but teachers must remember to incorporate critical thinking and reading comprehension activities through the use of literacy tasks the students can be successful at such as oral language and small group discussions, videos and graphic texts.

Instead of using a phonics-only based program, teachers have a wide range of reading strategies at their disposal. Whether they have students make predictions about a text based on the front cover or the blurb on the back or have students make inferences about the meaning of the text by examining clues and connecting them to their prior knowledge, teachers can create literacy programs that move beyond the basic skills of decoding and move towards comprehension and eventually critical analysis and extensions to other texts and experiences.

Lisa discusses a range of literacy strategies she uses with her class:

So I’m reading this and maybe I’ll make a prediction. I might stop and say you know, “Hmmm, I wonder what’s going to happen next?” And maybe I’ll model inferencing or whatever. “I know this.” And maybe I’ll model like model like making connections, so, you know, “I wonder what’s going to happen next. I know this happened and that happened. I remember someone in my life that went through something similar. So maybe this will happen. The think alouds were taking the time and actually explicitly saying to the students. “I think this …” and encouraging them to use that as a strategy.

Lisa uses these reading strategies to engage her students in literacy development. She also gives students choices by taking them to the library and setting aside class time for independent
reading. Lisa states that her literacy program is fluid and changes every year to meet the needs of her students.

However, many of these authentic practices did not always translate to teachers’ work with their ELD students. Gersten (1999) finds that mainstream classroom teachers often rely on strategies such as copying information off the board when working with ELLs. One of Lisa’s literacy strategies for her ELD student included copying information off the blackboard. While her literacy program is highly developed, one of the strategies she relies on with her ELD student is a decoding and phonics-based approach. Hayaman’s (2004) research finds that ELD students may not understand the purpose of written language because it has not been a part of their daily life. Musetti, Salas & Perez (2009) find that connections between written and spoken communication need to be made clearer to ELD students. By having students copy work they do not understand, teachers reinforce this notion that written words are not purposeful or meaningful. Lisa’s engaging and diverse use of literacy strategies including inferencing and critical literacy did not always transfer to her ELD student’s programming suggesting that literacy, for him, was not always a meaningful task.

Moreover, Jenny, who describes a literacy program that includes creating talk shows and class magazines, focussed on only very basic phonics and vocabulary building exercises with the ELD student in a mainstream classroom.

So we would go through those websites. I would get him to do basic two and three letter words at the Grade 1, Grade 2 level: ‘And’, ‘Can’, right? Here, Jenny incorporates the use of assistive technology to support her student in his learning, which is an important part of a multiliteracies program and brings the literacy of the home into the school, which researchers such as Egleson (2009) suggest as effective literacy strategies. However, the tasks she chooses are not connected to comprehension but instead focus on
decoding meaningless text. However, Jenny does recount having some success with using rote strategies with her ELD student:

Building his vocabulary, basic rhyming and his Math skills I went all the way back to basic addition and subtraction, right, so really simple stuff and by the end of the year we were working on multiplication.

Again, as researchers such as Dooley (2009) have suggested, teachers of ELD students have the difficult task of balancing the learning of basic literacy skills with more challenging and developed literacy tasks that incorporate critical thinking.

7.3 Prior learning experiences

One of the challenges to creating authentic and meaningful literacy programs for students is having an understanding of students’ prior experiences. Freeman and Freeman (1998) find that when content is connected to students’ prior experiences than they tend to be more engaged. Teachers must focus on students’ life experiences not just their limited schooling experiences. As stated earlier, one of the most prevalent themes in the Ontario Ministry of Education (2008) guidelines for supporting ELLs with limited prior schooling is the inclusion of students’ prior knowledge into the classroom. The document states that teachers must create a bridge between students’ home lives and schooling. Theresa spends time talking with her ELD students every day. They discuss their prior experiences in Mexico, Paraguay and Bangladesh. She likes to find ways to incorporate their prior experiences and knowledge into the classroom. Sara found it important to include her students’ prior knowledge as well:

When we talk about fears and superstition – well - it is a time of flashlights and shivers, you know, you close the lights and then I’ve got kid from Pakistan talking about ghosts that walk around and the kid from Turkey about the evil eye and from the kids from Egypt that says, “oh no, we have the wandering spirit.”
Here, the students become engaged in classroom discussions because they can include their prior knowledge and unique experiences. Knowledge from their homes and cultures become a dynamic part of learning.

Lack of understanding of students’ prior experiences may be hindering teachers’ abilities to create positive relationships and authentic learning experiences with their ELD students. Prior knowledge, which Cummins, Bismilla, Chow, Cohen, Giampapa, Leoni, Sandhu, & Sastri (2005) state is the totality of experiences that have shaped students’ learning not just the experiences in formal schools, is essential to a deeper understanding of texts. One of the participants in my study, Jenny was not aware of much of her ELD students’ prior educational experiences. At the time she was teaching him, Jenny did not know that her ELD student had gaps in his schooling:

I mean he didn’t care because he didn’t get it because he’s three - four years behind. None of us knew that. None of us knew about these gaps.

She expresses frustration that she had not been made aware of her ELD student’s gaps in formal schooling. Knowing his prior experiences may have helped her to create more authentic and engaging literacy programming for her ELD student. Furthermore, sticking rigidly to a curriculum that does not reflect that prior experiences of ELD students can further work towards disengaging them from school, as expressed by Melissa:

Well, one of the big issues that we have is that our kids have very little background knowledge about a lot of the curriculum topics. So we spend a lot of time just trying to teach them about things they’ve never heard of

Here, teachers have the added tasks to teaching prior knowledge that the curriculum assumes all students have. When teaching the curriculum to ELD students, teachers must first teach the wealth of prior knowledge needed to understand a new concept.
Researchers such as Freeman and Freeman (1998) and Mace-Matluck et al. (1998) have suggested incorporating oral language, something that many ELD students will have extensive knowledge of, into their literacy programming - the idea being that if students have not learned to read and write, they will have had to have relied on their oral language as well as the visual components of texts in their daily lives. In this way, oral language must be a strong component of ELD students’ literacy programs. Freeman and Freeman (1998) suggest that successful teachers of ELD students use a theme-based oral program. One of the participants in the study, Denise, discusses the importance of using oral assessment strategies with her ELD students:

In the case of our ELD students 90% of the time their testing is done orally, and that seems to work really well with the particular ELD’s that we have. . . . They’ve relied on their oral abilities and so their oral abilities are actually quite developed more or less

Here, Denise assesses her ELD students in a medium where they feel comfortable and confident: oral communication. In this situation, ELD students have the possibility to be quite successful without knowing how to read and write.

Both Sara and Lisa, mainstream classroom teachers with little training for working with any type of ELL, observed the effectiveness of using oral communication for strategies with their ELD students. They found that students felt more confident when allowed to work in small groups discussing ideas with their peers. Fu’s (1996) research outlines the importance of oral language in a literacy program for all ELLs. Getting students to talk, not only helps ELLs to improve their literacy skills, but also develops relationships between students and teachers. Oral communication is a necessary step in learning to read and write. Melissa, who works as an ESL/ELD specialist teacher with students who are integrated into mainstream classes finds that with her ELD students

They’re learning to read for the first time in a language they don’t speak and that’s incredibly difficult and oral language is huge, huge. If we don’t get them
talking in English, the chances of learning to read in English. If you don’t know what a word sounds like how do you know if you’re saying it right or not?

Similarly, Theresa who works with ELD students in a congregated class takes time for informal class discussions every day. Students become engaged in conversations that focus on the prior knowledge and experiences. She finds this to be an invaluable way to connect with her students and develop strong relationships. Freeman and Freeman (1998) find that ELD students need much more time to study a theme or topic than other learners including ELLs. The class time taken to discuss ideas orally is an important part of ELD students’ programming. In these ways, many of the teachers in the study found oral communication to be an effective literacy strategy with ELD students.

Although some of the ELD students may not have prior experiences with written texts, most will have experience with decoding the visual aspects of texts. Graphic texts are another important aspect of any multiliteracies program. Norton & Vanderheyden (2004) write of the importance of graphics in any literacy program. Texts such as comic books are excellent ways for all ELLs to understand written texts. Freeman and Freeman (1998) also suggest that teachers use graphic texts which include photographs or illustrations. However, they also suggest that these pictures must include images of older students. Primary texts are not appropriate for older students. Denise observes the prior experiences her ELD students bring to reading the visual components of texts:

All their life they’ve been used to reading things without words, reading visuals, reading subtleties and so their very trained in that.

Denise sees strengths in her ELD students’ literacy abilities that other students will not have developed as highly – understanding the subtle visuals of texts that work to enhance their meanings. Another participant, Melissa, highlights the strengths the mothers of her ELD students who do not know how to read can bring to literacy:
They don’t have to read the books with their kids because most of them can’t read anyway, but they can just talk about - tell the story using the pictures and using Dietsch.

Here, the mothers of the ELD students can participate in their children’s education by using pictures and their first language to tell a story. The mothers decode the meaning of the text through the visual representations on the page. Using videos and pictures is an important strategy for both Sara and Theresa. Sara describes her video collection and how her ELD students would sign out videos to watch at home to learn information and knowledge needed to complete class assignments. Theresa, on the other hand, would find pictures and videos that represented the students in her class and make this an important part of her program. In these ways visuals as well as oral communication were an important part of the participants’ literacy programs for ELD students as they connected to their prior learning and literacy experiences.

7.4 Home languages in the school

Many researchers (Freeman & Freeman, 2002; Ingersoll, 2001; Toledo, 1998) have suggested that it is important for ELD students to develop their literacy skills in their first language before learning how to read and write in English. Mace-Matluck et al.’s (1998) and Freeman & Freeman’s (1998) research discusses the importance of providing ELD students with a strong oral program in their L1. They state that this helps to reduce anxiety about schooling and literacy development in general. However, having access to schools in their first languages may not always be available to ELD students. Ingersoll’s (2001) research examined ELD students in a large Spanish-speaking community where Spanish literacy classes were available for adult ELD students. There were teachers that spoke the students’ first language and besides English, Spanish was the predominant language in the community. Ingersoll (2001) found that for those ELD students who do not speak Spanish, in the area that she studied, attaining literacy skills in
their first language was not possible. In Ontario and especially the Greater Toronto Area, besides the two national languages, English and French, students speak a range of different languages. Ontario is a highly multilingual place. Despite this, finding schools that offer language in students’ specific first languages becomes difficult in most cases.

As ELD students are not offered bilingual education in their first language, unless they speak English or French, in Ontario classrooms, inclusion of their first language in English speaking classrooms becomes an essential part of their literacy programming. However, Taylor, Bernhard, Garg & Cummins (2008) find that teachers often ignore the literacies of their students. They ignore students’ linguistic capital. Bourdieu (2001) writes about how discourses around official languages often suppress the languages of the less powerful. Furthermore, Taylor et al.’s (2008) research shows how teachers often focus on a narrow range of English-only, monocultural texts. The literacies of the home continue to be ignored and, therefore, suppressed.

However, to push back against the exclusion of students’ first languages from Ontario schools, the guidelines for supporting ELLs with limited prior schooling (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008) asks teachers to include a student’s first language whenever possible. The use of their first language in the classroom is seen as a powerful tool that allows students to gain confidence in themselves as learners. As outlined by the document, students’ first language can be used in their initial orientation interviews, as an instructional strategy and even as part of assessment in the form of dual language books. Consequently, almost all of the teachers in this study mentioned the use of students’ first language to support students’ learning. The use of students’ L1 as laid out by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007, 2008) documents and demanded by researchers seems to have become a normalized part of the participants’ discourses. The participants seemed to have abandoned the idea of the English only classroom as being a valid way to teach ELLs.
However, teachers used students’ first languages to varying degrees. Many of the mainstream classroom teachers used peer mentors to translate instructions or to explain ideas to ELLs. Two mainstream classroom teachers mentioned how the ESL specialist teacher in their school had the ELLs write dual language books. Another mainstream classroom teacher mentioned using a school board translator to communicate with parents. One use of home languages that many participants discussed was the use of peer translators. For Lisa, who worked in a school with a large aboriginal population, but had few newcomers, finding a translator for her ELD student was difficult:

It was a struggle for me because I wanted to be able to rely on this other boy to maybe translate a little bit here and there. But that just couldn’t happen.

Lisa found this frustrating, but did not want to force the other boy to translate. Lisa saw the use of student’s first language as an important part of learning, as demonstrated by her approval of her school’s Ojibwa language program. However, it was not always easy for her to use her ELD students’ first language – an African language that only one of the other student’s spoke – in her classroom. Jenny, on the other hand, found it easy to use peer translators for her ELLs. She describes one of her ELLs as sitting in a group with three other students who would take turns translating for her ELL. Jenny positively describes the work of her translators and ELL speaking highly of them. However, it was difficult for her to find appropriate translators for her ELD student even though he spoke the same language as many of the other students in her class. She worried that students were translating inappropriately to her ELD student and struggled to find students that would work with him. In these ways mainstream classrooms teachers are using students’ first language in the classroom in the form of peer translators. However, it is not always easy to do so.
For example, two of the mainstream classroom participants, Sheila and Sean, both of whom speak languages other than English, did not mention using their students’ L1 as an instructional strategy. Sheila, whose parents are immigrants to Canada, taught her to speak Punjabi. However, she does not discuss the use of students’ L1 or speaking in her L1 as an instructional strategy during her interview. Sean, who emigrated from Guyana after university, speaks at least Spanish, if not other languages including vernacular English. Sean seemed intrigued by the idea of using students’ L1 when asked during his interview. He took some time to think about it and stated that another teacher in the school is currently using a peer translator in her classroom. He also mentioned how the Tamil students he teaches on the weekend are taking Tamil language classes. Both of these teachers are racialized people and are fairly newly hired teachers from Ontario pre-service programs. It is possible that these teachers are using other languages in the classroom naturally and do not think of the use of students’ L1 as instructional strategies, but just as a normal part of conversing with students. Also, as newly trained teachers, they may not have received any training on the use of students’ L1 as an instructional strategy. This would align with research that finds that there is little language teaching training in pre-service programs (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008b; Cummins, 2001; and Carrasquillo & Rodríguez, 2002). However, in general, teachers are using students’ L1 as an instructional strategy in the classroom.

Teachers with specific training for working with ELLs discussed strategies for incorporating students’ L1 in greater depth. Melissa, who has taught ELLs for the last 17 years all over the world, including at a bilingual school in Mexico, sees the use of students’ L1 as essential to their learning experiences. During morning announcements, she has the Lord’s Prayer, which the Parents’ Council has requested be spoken, read in the students’ first languages.
She enjoys watching the students’ reactions to hearing their language spoken. Melissa has had one of her students write a dual language book. She plans to use this strategy more in the future and get the students’ stories published. Here, we see the ESL specialist teacher moving beyond just using students’ L1 for peer translators and thinking about how she can make the ELD students’ L1 an essential part of their schooling experiences. One problem that Melissa struggled with was that there were two languages spoken in her school: Plautdietsch and Pennsylvania Dutch. In order for these students to speak to each other, they have to use English. Melissa found it difficult to get students from these two groups to interact consistently. Denise, who is also an ESL/ELD specialist teacher, tries to incorporate her students’ first language into her program especially in her lunchtime Awaz club. In general, she finds this strategy to be effective. However, she finds that if students have not learned to read and write in their first language, the use of dual language books can add an extra burden on the students:

One of them, the one from India apparently went to a so-called English medium school, but never learned how to read or write in English and going to English medium school – what might not have been the best thing for him because he spoke Punjabi at home. So he never learned how to read or write in Punjabi, so trying to support him here is really difficult

Denise then recounts having contacted a resource teacher at the school board. Instead of being supported, she describes being questioned as to whether she’s tried using dual language books, which she states have no impact because “it’s two foreign languages looking at them that they have to deal with.” As the student has not developed his written literacy skills in his first language, Denise finds that using it as a support only adds an additional challenge for the student. In these ways teachers with more training for working with ELLs are trying to incorporate the students’ first language in a wider range of activities.
7.5 Home language not a written language

How a language is defined and labelled can work to marginalize the people who speak it. Bourdieu (2001) examines the power of official languages and how it places people within hierarchies. When a language is labelled a *patois* or dialect it becomes devalued in schools. He has found that schools can become powerful places for the reproduction of official discourses on language. Education has led to the devaluing of different varieties of speaking. This leads to a division between the school and home. According to Bryan (2004), Jamaican Vernacular English (JVE) “represents a language that challenges the standardizing impulses of modernity, resisting homogeneity in a variable and multi-layered process of change” (p. 645). The people of Jamaica brought JVE into being because of necessity – as a way of resistance against an oppressive slave system. However, JVE is labelled a *patois* or dialect. She finds that despite the growing status of the language in the arts, for example, within Jamaican schools, pedagogy continues to devalue its use. JVE is labelled patois, so despite its growing popularity is marginalized and defined as not good within the education system.

All three of the ESL/ELD specialist teachers in my study discussed the issue of incorporating students’ home languages, when they are not written languages. All three of these teachers worked with students who spoke non-standardized forms of languages. One participant, Denise, worked with a large number of Indo-Caribbean students who spoke languages such as Jamaican Vernacular English (JVE). Within the Indo-Caribbean context, Towell (2000) and Bryan (1997) have found that the majority of Jamaicans speak JVE in their home. However, Bryan’s (1997) research found that often Jamaican’s do not describe JVE as English, and Towell (2000) states that because Standardized Jamaican English (SJE) is the official language in Jamaica, it is used in schools even though it is a second language for most students. Bourdieu’s (2001) research finds that, in general, if students’ do not speak the official language, their
linguistic capital is not recognized or used in schools. Another participant, Theresa, worked with a large Old Colony Mennonite community where Plautdietsch was the first language. A third, Melissa, supported both Plautdietsch and Pennsylvania Dutch speaking students – both of which are unwritten languages. Melissa describes Plautdietsch as being a Dutch language and states that “neither one of those languages are written in a standardized way.” She further explains that with Plautdietsch

There’s some stories, some poetry, but it used to be a written language five hundred years ago and then whatever intervened.

Melissa discusses how when going to school in Mexico some of her students would learn to decode and copy in High German – a standardized language they do not understand:

They read from the High German bible and when I say read, they’ve memorized it and part of the school in Mexico is memorizing the bible and writing out the catechisms.

In these ways, both the Indo-Caribbean students and the Old Colony Mennonites may have attended school before coming to Canada but that schooling would have happened in a Standardized form of their languages, which they may or may not have understood, not in their first languages.

Often the speakers of non-standardized languages learn to devalue their languages. Cross’ (2003) research found that male students in a middle school in Jamaica defined their Jamaican Vernacular English (JVE) as bad and the standardized English used in school as good, even though it was the language they used on the playground. Both Melissa and Denise spoke about how their students did not value their spoken languages. To combat this devaluation, Melissa, discussed incorporating and even promoting students’ home languages at length. She described how even the community did not always value their spoken language:

It’s been a struggle because they’ve never written in their own language and they don’t go to church in their own language. You know they use the High German
bible, so even getting them to think about the bible in their own language is a little bit of a culture shift. I feel like High German is almost the sacred language that you know the bible should only be in this language. You know, the school has a copy now of the Dietsch bible and the parents can take out. It’s almost like it’s maybe a little bit too radical.

In this way, Melissa describes her Plautdietsch speaking students and families as perceiving High German, a standardized form of their language and a national language, as more valuable and used in the church. Denise also found that her Indo-Caribbean students often devalued their languages.

Well, it starts with validating – all the language, languages and dialects, you know varieties of English that exist out there and that’s something that even our Indo-Caribbean’s don’t do sometimes. They, they call it broken English, which is an easy way to describe it, but there’s actually other influences as well like in the Indo-Caribbean – in Trinidad, there’s Spanish and French mix. Even the very word Trinidad means Trinity in Spanish, so to recognize the historical background of the language and where it came from, I think is a really, really important piece because it’s, it can actually go from being seen something that was broken to actually look at it as this incredible ahhh combination of this incredible new creation of history, language, culture, the people.

Bryan’s (2004) own research into JVE found that it was “developed out of situations of domination (English) and conquest (West African languages), under the exigencies of European expansionism and international commerce” (p. 642). In this way, teachers can work towards teaching their students who speak non-standardized forms of languages to value the rich history of their spoken languages and perceive them as a form of resistance against oppressive situations.

How can languages that are not written be incorporated into students’ literacy programs? Byran (1997) proposes that vernacular languages should be used as a learning tool, just like any other language. The learning of the new or standardized language needs to be thought of as second-language learning. Theresa struggles to find way to use Plautdietsch, which she refers to as Low German, in her literacy program.
the kids ... speak Low German because it’s not a written language, it was difficult, but we could at least get pictures that and some of them had photographs from their countries, so they could bring them in, but as much as I could I would order in videos of other countries as well for them just to visually see

As Plautdietsch is not a written language, she incorporates pictures and visuals from the students’ cultures to keep the lessons relevant and for the students to learn about each other.

Melissa works towards finding a range to ways to use Plautdietsch as an instructional strategy.

She states that a dictionary and bible have recently been written in Plautdietsch, so she purchased them for her school. She is currently trying to find ways to use them in the school.

Well, I have been working towards getting some written Dietsch going in the school, so last year I had a really keen guy in Grade 6, and he, when I started talking about Dietsch and writing, he went off on his own and wrote his story in English and then he wrote it in Dietsch and what he did is he just sounded out the Dietsch words and wrote them as if they were English and so he used the English alphabet and sound system to write in Dietsch and then I gave him this dictionary and he checked his spelling because it’s an English/Dietsch dictionary, so he fixed all his spelling mistakes and now he’s in the process of illustrating that book with another guy and we’re going to try and get in published.

Despite the difficulties of incorporating a language that is not written in a literacy program, especially students’ writing programs, Melissa is attempting to find creative and original ways to make her ELD students’ language a part of their literacy programming.

7.6 Conclusion

Creating authentic, meaningful programming is a challenge for teachers with any group of students. In this study, we see many of the teachers to varying degrees moving towards developing literacy programs that incorporate texts from the students’ homes and communities.

However, with ELD students, teachers experience many challenges in making authentic literacy a reality and, at times, resort to tactics such as copying from the board and phonics based learning. An important strategy some teachers discuss is the use of oral language and visuals to enhance their literacy programs for ELD students. Using peer translators to support ELD
students in their learning is an important strategy as well, but it is not always easy for the participants to find students who will fill this role appropriately. One of the biggest challenges for teachers is using students’ unwritten languages as part of their literacy programs. Validating and incorporating the students’ first languages, however, is an essential part of any literacy program that defines itself as authentic. Overall, teachers of ELD students must rethink how they approach the teaching of literacy meaningful.
Chapter 8
Conclusions

8.1 Making sense of the study’s findings

This work has attempted to understand the underlying ideas and philosophies that influence teachers’ discourses on teaching ELD students. To begin, the Ontario Ministry of Education documents *Supporting English Language Learners with Limited Prior Schooling – A practical guide for Ontario educators Grades 3 – 12* (2008) and *English Language Learners ESL and ELD programs and services – Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, Kindergarten to Grade 12* (2007) ask teachers to reassess how they approach teaching when working with ELLs. Teachers’ philosophies of teaching must change to reflect the needs of the diverse group of students they teach. The documents, as well as the extensive research on the experiences of ELLs in English speaking classrooms, ask that students’ first languages become an important part of their schooling experiences. Teachers must use students’ first languages as an instructional and assessment strategy. This demand seems to be reflected in the discourses of many of the teacher participants. In many ways, the teachers in this study reflect a discourse that normalizes the use of students’ first languages in Ontario elementary schools. However, many of the mainstream classroom teachers have not moved beyond the use of peer translators or translators when speaking to parents. Moreover, finding peer translators for ELD students, specifically, was difficult in a number of cases. Although these strategies help ELLs feel more included in the classroom and aid them in having an easier time understanding instructions, they do not reflect changes to students’ writing or reading programs. Most mainstream classroom
teachers did not discuss using dual language books, having students complete written responses in their first language or assessing students for work that had been written in their first languages. Moreover, the two newer teachers in the study did not cite using students’ L1 in their classroom suggesting they were not taught this instructional strategy during their pre-service training. Finally, although the Ministry documents are full of ideas on how to incorporate students’ first languages into the classroom, they do not offer strategies or suggestions on how to incorporate oral languages that are not written languages as instructional resources. The teachers in this study with specific training for teaching ELLs raised the issue of the challenge of using students’ L1, as the students’ first languages Plautdietsch, Pennsylvania Dutch and some of the Indo-Caribbean languages are not written languages. In these cases, some of the teachers went out of their way to find creative and unique ways to incorporate students’ L1. However, the ministry documents do not guide teachers in the inclusion of oral languages in the classroom.

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2007, 2008) documents consistently ask teachers to incorporate students’ prior learning experiences into their classroom pedagogy. This aligns with the New London Group (1996) who asks that students’ home cultures be brought into the classroom. Many of the teachers discuss going out of their way to connect with students at lunch and on personal levels in order to find out about their prior experiences. This is reflected in their philosophies of teaching that emphasize the importance of developing strong relationships with their students. The teachers then brought these prior experiences into classroom discussions, student assignments and instructional strategies. Having knowledge of students’ home cultures or at least personal interests seems to be important for many of the teachers in this study. When teachers did
not have knowledge of students’ prior experiences, they struggled to relate to and appropriately program for their students.

However, an important part of ELD students’ prior experiences happen outside of the classroom. Therefore, by forcing students to attend formal schooling and not adapting the structure of schooling to meet the specific needs of ELD students, the school can not inherently reflect the students’ prior experiences. As Freire (2003) states the oppressed are not marginals living outside of society. He suggests that the solution is to transform the structure of schooling and not force them to integrate into a structure that oppresses them. Participation in a formal school in a mainstream classroom for five hours a day and five days a week will not be reflective of ELD students’ prior experiences by definition.

To guide students in this socialization process, teachers are told to explicitly teach classroom and school expectations. In this way, ELD students’ prior experiences are framed as negative in that they hinder their ability to learn in a formal school setting. One suggestion made by the Ministry’s documents is the use of congregated classes where ELD students receive literacy development from a specialist teacher. ELD students are placed together in a class that has the potential to be flexible to their needs even if the ultimate goal is to prepare them to participate in mainstream classrooms. However, Melissa, a participant in the study, expressed frustration that in her words this policy document “had no teeth” and there were no “equity police” to enforce such suggestions. One such program, ELAWs, a secondary school program designed for Mennonites who wish to go to school beyond Grade 8 but do not feel comfortable in mainstream secondary schools, has gained much praise for its ability to be flexible to the needs of the local community. In these ways, ELD students’ prior experiences are becoming a part of
classroom pedagogy, but the deeper structure of schooling needs to be more closely examined in order to reflect the prior learning experiences of ELD students outside of the classroom.

Critical literacy, as an approach to teaching literacy to students, is present in the discourse of some of the participants. However, it is only briefly mentioned in the ministry documents. In general, the documents do not ask teachers to have students examine the powerful discourses that influence texts. If anything, they briefly suggest incorporating critical thinking into ELD students’ literacy programs. Many teachers in this study struggle to find ways to use critical thinking, let alone critical literacy, in their programming. Some describe trying and failing while others do not think their students are capable of it. This is unfortunate, as many ELD students come from racialized and marginalized communities and would benefit from programming that examines how texts reproduce discourses that further disempower them. Three of the teachers in this study have extensive knowledge of critical literacy and make it an important part of their programming. However, when discussing critical literacy with their ELD students, only those teachers who worked with students who spoke Jamaican Vernacular English, a language whose oral language the participants could understand, were able to cite specific examples of how they used critical literacy with their ELD students. In these cases, the teachers and students would be able to communicate orally allowing them to critically converse with their students and scribe for their students. Before beginning my Masters in education, I was personally not aware of the vast field of critical literacy. Over the last number of years, as I have been studying, learning and writing, I have tried to bring critical literacy into my programming where possible. It has been interesting for me to
observe how readily my ELD students are open to divergent and critical thinking. I sometimes wonder if their minds are more open because they have not been constrained by the norms of formal schooling. Therefore, promoting the use of critical literacy in the Ministry documents and giving teachers concrete, specific ways to incorporate it into their programming for ELD students may help to promote critical literacy’s use in Ontario classrooms.

8.2 Reflections on collaborative and coercive relationships

Educators and educational structures can choose to use collaborative or coercive forms of power when educating ELLs. Cummins’ (2000) work outlines four areas where teachers are faced with choices: cultural/linguistic incorporation, community participation, pedagogy and assessment. Through a discussion of teachers’ philosophies of teaching and multiliteracies programs, or lack thereof, many of these themes are discussed at length in this study. For example, the inclusion of students’ home languages becomes challenging with many of the ELD students discussed by participants because the students speak an oral language. As ELD students by definition have prior learning experiences that often do not include learning in formal classroom settings, adding a fifth set of criteria – non-formal/informal education – could add to a framework of teachers’ choices that is reflective of ELD students’ learning needs. Teachers who lean more towards the ‘transformative/intercultural’ orientation would be thought of as ‘innovative’ and those with an ‘exclusionary/assimilationist’ perspective as ‘formal’. Those teachers who would be labelled ‘innovative’ would work towards including non-formal learning such as extra-curricular activities and lunchtime clubs and informal learning experiences that happen outside of the classroom into their classroom teaching, whereas, those
teachers with ‘formal’ perspectives would only respect that knowledge gained within a formal classroom setting. In this way, the model on teachers’ choices would more closely reflect the choices teachers have when interacting with and teaching ELD students.

One area that Cummins’ (2000) work emphasises is an approach to community involvement that places an importance on creating collaborative relationships with parents and not excluding them from their children’s education. Many of the teachers in this study discuss the challenges of having the parents of ELD students be an active part of their education. Despite this, all the teachers in the study emphasize the importance of communicating with parents. However, teachers, in the study, are able to successfully communicate with parents to varying degrees. Having a school settlement worker helped one school have a much higher turnout of the parents of ELD students at the schools’ parents’ night. Some of the participants went out of their way to find creative and innovative ways to include the parents of ELD students who were often reluctant to come to the school. These took the form of an after school literacy program for parents, having a Welcome and Information for Newcomers (WIN) program and employing settlement workers who spoke the languages of the ELD students. Most of these innovative ideas were created and organised by ESL/ELD specialist teachers and settlement workers and not mainstream classroom teachers suggesting that these specialists saw the inclusion of the parents of ELD students in the school as part of their role more so than mainstream classroom teachers. In general, community involvement with the parents of ELD students creates a greater challenge for teachers, but is crucial to student success.
8.3 The contribution of the present study

This study contributes to the literature on teachers’ role definitions in that it looks at teachers’ philosophies of teaching in combination with a multiliteracies lens in order to understand their teachers’ discourses on teaching ELD students. Previous studies have examined teachers’ role definitions and choices when working with diverse groups of students (Gersten, 1999; Cummins, 2000; Yoon, 2008; English, 2009). These studies have helped to examine teachers’ choices and perspectives on ELLs. However, this study contributes to the large gap in the research on teachers’ discourses on ELD students’ experiences with education in elementary schools in Ontario. By interviewing a diverse group of teachers in four different school boards, I was able to examine a range of experiences with ELD students across the province. Positioned differently by their level of experience and training for working with all types of ELLs, these teachers represent a cross section of elementary school teachers from across the province. For these participants, working with ELD students in mainstream classroom settings was a part of their everyday teaching experiences. Some had only one experience with an ELD student while others had worked with many. Overall, this research is just the beginning of a much needed in-depth examination of the experiences of ELD students in Ontario.

During this study, I was able to dig deeply into the discourses that pervaded the teaching of ELD students in order to gain a fuller understanding of how they were being taught and perceived in elementary schools. Almost all of the teachers in the study described positive relationships with students as the cornerstone of any solid teaching program. I came to realize that even though many of the teachers described their experiences with ELLs and diverse groups of students positively, they often struggled with their relationships with their ELD students. They often did not know how to relate to
them or teach them. Very few of the participants felt prepared or properly trained to support their ELD students. Because of this, some of the teachers who have worked with a larger ELD population over many years sought their own professional development. One teacher did her Masters in learning to read in a language you do not understand and another met with colleagues in the area because she felt that the professional development she received from her school board in the city did not reflect the needs of her rural ELD students. This is reflective of my own experiences both as a mainstream and ESL/ELD specialist teachers. Before becoming an elementary school teacher, I had worked for two years teaching adult English language classes both to newcomers in Ontario and overseas. These experiences, as well as my additional qualifications training for teaching ELLs, gave me many strategies and insights for teaching ELLs. However, it is my ELD students who forced me to grow as a teacher and re-examine what I was doing in the classroom and as an ELD support teacher. I found these students did not always respond to the same strategies. I had to constantly try new things with them keeping an open mind and always being creative. I did not feel that my prior experiences or ESL training had prepared me to work with the ELD students in my classroom. They forced me to become a better, more understanding teacher who thought divergently about education.

This study is also unique in that it does not focus on one specific ethnic group but instead attempts to find commonalities between teachers’ discourses on all ELD students. For example, the study completed by Brown, Miller, & Mitchell (2006) in Australia focused on the experiences of Sudanese refugees and much of the research completed in the United States was with Latino communities where Spanish was the predominant language. As Ontario and the Greater Toronto Area, specifically, have large multilingual
populations, focusing on one ethnicity does not give a wider view of what is happening in Ontario elementary schools. In studying the teachers’ discourses, I gained a wider understanding of the value teachers and Ontario Ministry of Education policy documents place on all ELD students. The teachers’ discourses reflect people who want to know and understand their students, but, in some cases, knew little of what their students had experienced before coming to Canada. Many of these teachers described positive interactions with other ELLs and racialized students in the school, but not with their ELD student. However, those teachers that are able to describe the prior experiences of their ELD students in-depth, also, describe their experiences with ELD students in Ontario schools more positively.

8.4 Avenues for further research

As little is known about the experiences of ELD students in Ontario, there is much room and need for future research. A comparison of how different education systems of the provinces of Canada are supporting their ELD students could help them to learn from each other. What models of support are successful? What strategies work best with ELD students? How can teachers be better trained to meet the specific needs of ELD students? The teachers in the study are influenced by the prevailing discourses on teaching ELD students in the province of Ontario. Their responses to questions are influenced by the Ontario ministry documents and the pedagogy taught at Ontario pre-service institutions. Understanding how other provinces train and create policy for the teachers who teach ELD students, can provide insight into the practices in Ontario. It would also be interesting to do a comparative study into the ELD students’ limited schooling experiences before immigrating to Canada and then comparing it to their experiences.
here. For example, studying a rural school in Jamaica or a parochial school for Old Colony Mennonites in Mexico as well as interviewing students about their home life and work in order to get a larger understanding of their educational experiences and then doing a comprehensive study of a school here in Ontario with a large population of ELD students from that country.

Also, further insight could be gained by combining observations with the interviews of the participants in this study. It is possible that the participants gave me their own version of what happened and key data was overlooked or missed. Every participant brings their own lens and own ideas as to what is important or not. Conducting observations has the potential to allow researchers to have a more complete understanding of the implementation of teachers’ pedagogy and literacy programming. Many of the participants are people I have professional contact with. Therefore, they may have said things a certain way for reasons of professionalism. Despite my telling them that I had to keep our conversations private, they may still have held back on interesting information for fear of being professionally judged or appearing insensitive to the ELD students who I advocate for as a part of my role in schools.

Completing an ethnography of one or more schools with a high ELD population where students, teachers and administrators are observed and interviewed as well as interviews with parents would provide a wider range of data that looked at ELD students’ experiences in elementary schools from plethora of perspectives. Hearing what ELD students and parents have to say about their educational experiences in Ontario could provide further insight into how to better teach them. What do they want from education instead of assuming that teachers and the education system know what is right for them.
Also, learning more about ELD students’ perspectives on schooling, could add to the literature and provide a unique perspective on the role of schooling in Ontario. Teachers need to develop a better understanding of ELD students’ and families’ perspectives because of how their knowledge of ELD students impacts on how this group of students succeeds in schools. Knowledge or skills learned in school must be connected to students’ prior experiences. In these ways, an ethnography would add much to the literature on ELD students’ experiences in Ontario schools.

Further research into the impact of teachers’ philosophies of teaching on the experiences of all students in elementary schools in Ontario, could provide a deeper understanding of the complex ways teachers understand their roles as teachers and how those role definitions influence their pedagogical choices. As researchers (Freeman & Freeman, 1998; Yoon, 2008; Cummins, 2001) have suggested, how teachers understand their roles can deeply impact students’ experiences with education. A more in-depth view on how teacher development can encourage teachers to include a wider range of strategies for the inclusion of students’ L1, could help teachers to find ways to make more inclusive pedagogical choices for all ELLs. As researchers such as Lau (2011) have suggested, little is known about how critical literacy is being used in Ontario schools especially with ELLs. An in-depth study into the use of critical literacy with ELD students could be highly beneficial. Having a researcher and teacher or team of teachers create critical literacy units for ELD students and then implementing those units, could offer an amazing space to research how ELD students process and work with critical literacy. The texts could include picture books with very little written texts, advertisements with a large amount of visual, spoken texts such as radio programs or
television programs or anything that combined a large amount of audio and visual literacy, as research has found that these are two areas where ELD students can excel.

ELD students arrive in Ontario elementary school with vast and varying prior learning experiences. How teachers choose to relate to and teach these students reflects their underlying beliefs about education, literacy and diversity. ELD students present teachers with an opportunity to either modify their philosophies of teaching to meet the needs of the students or further marginalize them within the school by expecting them to conform to formal schooling norms and expectations. The possibilities for innovative, creative programming exist. Creating flexible schooling and programming can add to a dynamic and inclusive atmosphere in Ontario schools. In these ways, ELD students, in Freire’s (2003) words, “can become beings for themselves” (p. 74) and not be inside a structure that makes them “beings for others” (p. 74). School boards, local schools and teachers have the choice to move beyond traditional ideas of the formal school, literacy and the normalization of the white, English speaking student who is born in Canada and into a truly inclusive style of education that embraces diversity and uses it as a vehicle for change and innovation.
References


Lau, M. (2010). *Practising critical literacy work with English Language Learners: an integrative approach*. Retrieved from T-Space at the University of Toronto Libraries. [http://hdl.handle.net/1807/24804](http://hdl.handle.net/1807/24804)


Appendix:
Interview Protocol

Background Information: How long have you been teaching? How many ELD students have you taught in a mainstream classroom in Ontario?

Teaching and the Purpose of Education
- What does education mean to our larger society?
- What is the role of the teacher in educating children?
- How do students learn in your classroom?

Teaching and the ELD student
- The Ontario Ministry of Education policy document (2007) states that all ELLs should receive “integration into mainstream classrooms with appropriate instructional support from the classroom teacher and/or an ESL/ELD teacher” (p. 23). What types of scaffolding do ELD students require?
- In what ways do ELD students participate in classroom lessons and activities? What is their level of engagement? What does it take to make an ELD student an engaged reader?
- The Ontario Ministry of Education (2007) policy states that “all teachers are responsible for supporting academic success for all students – including English language learners. Classroom/subject teachers who have students in their classes who are English language learners are not required to hold English as a Second Language Part 1 qualifications. However, the school board should provide all teachers with opportunities for professional development in meeting the needs of English language learners” (p. 32). Have you ever received any professional development/training on how to teach and integrate ELD students into your mainstream classroom? If so, can you discuss the effectiveness of the training? If not, can you explain if this type of training would be useful to you as a teacher?

Literacy and Diversity in Schools
- How can parents’ cultural and linguistic experiences be used to support students’ academic progress?
- Describe the literacy program you used while teaching an ELD student. What opportunities are ELD students given to demonstrate their unique knowledge?
- What role does diversity play in the school? How does the school approach issues surrounding diversity? How do teachers incorporate diversity into their teaching?
- In what ways do you modify your lessons to meet students cultural and linguistic needs?
- What choices do you give students in your classroom and how do you use peers to help aid ELD students in their literacy development?