An Achievement Gap Revealed: A Mixed Method Research Investigation of Canadian-born English Language Learners

by

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Abstract

This study uses a mixed methods approach to investigate an achievement gap observed in the reading of Canadian-born students with a first language other than English. Quantitative analyses of large-scale reading assessment data identified characteristics of these students and showed a relationship between reading levels and students’ home language environments. This relationship was further explored using a case study approach based on interviews with students and parents. Interviews revealed the role that parental language learning can play in children’s reading. The study revealed the relative invisibility of Canadian-born English language learners, and the consequent difficulties educators have responding to their English language learning needs. School registration data was shown to be an inaccurate indication of students’ home language use. The study’s findings point to the need for policies that support the systematic identification of Canadian-born English language learners and a deeper understanding of the language learning needs of these students-at-risk.
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Dedication

To ATM
Chapter 1
Introduction

Study background

English language learners have been a significant subset of school children in Ontario for more than five decades. While immigration rates continue to rise (Statistics Canada, 2007), not all of these English language learners are first generation immigrants. Many are born and raised in Canada. While these children will inevitably have some exposure to English, there are many families and communities in which the first language is so dominant at home and extensively used that a young child will arrive at school with almost no experience or proficiency in English. In Ontario, when children register for kindergarten, information is gathered about their birth country and whether or not their first language is English. Some school boards also ask parents to specify the home language. According to school registration forms, 20% of children who enrolled in English-speaking kindergarten programs in Ontario in 2007 had a first language other than English, and 79% of these EL2 students were Canadian-born (A. Chang, Ontario Ministry of Education, personal communication, December 8, 2009). There is little information about the English language proficiency level of these Canadian-born children who speak languages other than English at home, let alone their first language proficiency.

While research on the cognitive advantages of bilingualism indicates that knowing another language in addition to English would provide advantages to these students that should lead to increased academic success, not all early childhood educators are aware of these advantages. In its 2008 environmental scan, the Toronto District School Board, Canada’s largest and most linguistically diverse school board, identified kindergarten-age learners with a home language other than English as “at-risk” because of the significant gaps between these students and students who reported English as their home language on the Early Development Index, a measure of school readiness in junior kindergarten learners (Toronto District School Board, 2008). Nor are predictions of increased academic success borne out by Canadian-born-first-language-other than English, hereafter CBEL2, students as they progress through elementary school.
Measures such as Ontario’s Education Quality and Accountability Office’s (EQAO) assessments of reading, writing and math as well as school completion rates also show that, as a group, CBEL2 learners are underachieving, with respect to their Canadian-born peers as well as their immigrant English language learner peers who have been in Canada for more than five years (Brown & Sinay, 2008; Coehlo, 2005; Jang, Kim, Gu, Zhang, Wu, & Wagner, 2009; O’Reilly & Yau, 2008). In fact, after four to six years of schooling in English, this group of students does less well than both its immigrant classmates and peers who learned English as their first language (Gunderson, 2007; O’Reilly & Yau, 2009).

One key issue for schools in recognizing and responding to the needs of CBEL2 learners is whether English language learners within this group are identified as such, and, if so, if appropriate educational supports are put in place for them. In 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Education produced its first and still current definition of English language learners:

English language learners are students in provincially funded English language schools whose first language is a language other than English . . . and who may require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English. These students may be Canadian born. (Canadian-born English language learners) may include, for example:

Aboriginal students whose first language is a language other than English;
children who were born in communities that have maintained a distinct cultural and linguistic tradition, who have a first language that is not English and who attend English language schools;
children who were born in immigrant communities in which languages other than English are primarily spoken. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a)

While anecdotal reports and registration information suggest that many CBEL2 students who enter the Canadian school system in kindergarten are English language learners, few Ontario school boards have procedures in place for the formal assessment of English language proficiency of these young English language learners. In addition, few school boards have systematic programming designed specifically for English language learners in the early years of
their schooling. The oft-stated rationale for this lack of program support is that these students are learning to read at the same time as their native-English speaking peers. This reasoning ignores the fact that they are starting with a dramatically different oral language foundation than their classmates. It is up to individual teachers to not only develop criteria and assessments to determine if CBEL2 students are English language learners, but also to determine how best to support the English language learning needs of their students who are not yet proficient in English.

By the time English language learner-specific assessment and programming is done, usually in Grades 2, 3, and 4, most CBEL2 students, even those who were non-English speaking when they entered kindergarten, have achieved competency listening to and speaking social English. English becomes their dominant language. Many of these Canadian-born English language learners develop strategies for tuning out English or for “getting by” without deep understanding in English-speaking environments, especially when it comes to the more cognitively demanding language used in school. In addition to reducing students’ motivation to learn English in order to move beyond social survival into academic success, these “fitting in” strategies may further mask a student’s English language learning needs. While the Ontario Ministry of Education has recently developed clear policies about the responsibility of school boards to address the needs of English language learners who “require focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 8), if the student’s language learning needs are not identified as such, it is difficult to provide appropriate and accurately focused supports.

If, as suggested by large-scale measures such as the Early Development Index and the EQAO Primary and Junior Assessments of Reading, a significant number of CBEL2 students are at-risk of not experiencing academic success, it is essential to understand not only whether these students are English language learners, but also how and when their lower achievement levels are related to their language development and use (Brown & Sinay, 2008; Coehlo, 2005; Jang et al., 2009; O’Reilly & Yau, 2008; Toronto District School Board, 2008). Identifying any such relationships can lead to more informed and focused support enabling more CBEL2 students to recognize, develop, and use their linguistic resources to full advantage.
This study investigates Canadian-born students with a first language other than English, providing a quantitative analysis of the information that is currently available to help educators understand the achievement gap described and a qualitative exploration of what other data could be relevant to both understanding and responding to the learning needs of these students.

Research questions

The research questions addressed in this study are:

1. What are some defining characteristics of Canadian-born students who arrive at school reporting a first language other than English?

2. Why might Canadian-born students who arrive at school reporting a first language other than English be poorer readers than their peers?

3. How does the home language environment of these students shape or influence their literacy achievement?

The researcher’s background

This study grew out of my work as an elementary school teacher who has worked extensively with English language learners in Toronto, Ontario Canada. Both my teaching and this research effort have forced me to confront certain assumptions that I brought to this study. One is that in spite of the many variables involved in processes of education and learning, there are truths and best practices to be learned by asking good questions and following established research methodologies in pursuit of answers. A second assumption behind this research is that even though English language learners are a diverse group, not only in terms of their individual characteristics, but also in terms of their situations, I believe that there are commonalities that can inform effective ESL teaching. Equally true, in my experience, is that misunderstanding is an occupational hazard in cross-cultural and multi-linguistic work and that the real learning comes from the recognition of such misunderstandings.

When I started my journey as an ESL teacher in 1997 I was supported by the considerable expertise of colleagues who introduced me, a newly minted teacher, to best practices, also sharing the resources and background information that informed their teaching. I
was also supporting my nine-year-old son in his first year of French immersion education and my twelve-year-old son in his first year of a more intensive “semi-immersion” in an Extended French program at school. The day-to-day challenges of language acquisition surrounded me. As I investigated the research about English language learners I recognized many of my students and their parents, especially in studies investigating the benefits of teaching students to draw upon their first language resources as they worked to acquire English at the same time that they were learning in other subject areas. As I explored research studies concerning the various challenges of second language learning and education, I was buoyed by the many successes that my students experienced proving that language learning is not only possible, but also exciting and enlightening.

My present school is in a community that has, for decades, been a launching pad for new immigrants. Three-quarters of the students have a home language other than English, although more than two thirds of the students were born in Canada. It was here, as a special education teacher, that I encountered students who appeared to have many of the same needs as the English language learners I had worked with, but who, I was assured, could not be English language learners because, “they were born here.” While these students lacked an identity as English language learners, they each had an aura of discouragement and defeat around their achievements at school. Shortly after I started asking questions about these students, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2007a) issued its long-awaited *English Language Learners, ESL and ELD Programs and Services: Policies and Procedures for Ontario Elementary and Secondary Schools, K to 12* that included Canadian-born students in its definition of English language learners. This formal recognition of the possible English language learning needs of many of the students I was working with reinforced my interest in understanding whether and how English language acquisition challenges figured into the learning of these students. As noted in Chapter 2, these students are neither consistently, nor readily, identifiable in the research literature, but when the under-achievement of CBEL2 students was noted in Jang et al.’s study (2009), I realized that further investigation of this data could provide important insights into these students I’d been struggling to understand.

While quantitative analyses could provide powerful descriptors of patterns and trends, they are based on snapshots of discrete data points that would barely scratch the surface of the complex realities lived by these students and their families. I needed more than singular
snapshots to help me make sense of the issues I was facing in my teaching. The interviews with students and their families offered an opportunity to breathe life into the patterns and trends identified in the quantitative analysis, adding details and dimension rather than answers to the questions raised in the quantitative analysis.
Chapter 2
Literature Review

This chapter looks at the growing body of research literature that informs educators, parents and policy makers about how to support young English language learners as they face the dual challenge of acquiring English and learning curricular subjects with their native-English speaking peers. I look at recent studies that describe the cognitive advantages conferred by bilingualism and recent literature that highlights some successful outcomes for young English language learners as well as other work that predicts more troubling outcomes. Research into the contrasting processes of additive and subtractive bilingualism and language loss describe a variety of situations still experienced by young English language learners have led to a more detailed theoretical framework describing the transfer of literacy skills from one language to another. Also outlined are the gaps in the existing literature concerning the dynamics of first language loss and effective programs to support young English language learners in recognizing and accessing the resources they have in their first language in order to support their English literacy skills.

The Canadian context

For almost half a century Canada has prided itself on being a mosaic of communities that are able to maintain distinct cultural and linguistic identities while also feeling a part of the Canadian community. Particularly in urban areas such as Toronto and Vancouver, it is common for children who were born in Canada to arrive at school with little or no proficiency in English because they, along with their parents and caregivers, are able to function fully in a home language that is not English. Arrival at school means immersion in a second language environment and the opportunity to become bilingual. While bilingualism can confer cognitive advantages, the route to bilingualism is neither singular nor smooth. Researchers continue to investigate variables such as age, attitude, learning style, L1 proficiency, and L1 literacy to understand the dynamic processes involved in learning additional languages and to design effective educational supports for these diverse learners in various situations. This study draws from the body of knowledge that is relevant to the growing number of Canadian-born English language learners in order to better understand who they are and how schools and families can better support their English language and literacy development.
Cognitive advantages of bilingualism

From newspaper headlines to scholarly conferences, the advantages of bilingualism are enumerated and elaborated daily. Considered globally, bilingualism, if not multi-lingualism, is commonplace. Researchers continue to document evidence for the cognitive advantages experienced by bilinguals across their lifespan (Bialystok, Craik & Freedman, 2007; Bialystok & Majumdar, 1998). Werker (2006) reported that more than half the infants in the world are learning language in bilingual environments while the correlation between bilingualism and the delay of onset of dementia made front-page news (Bialystok, Craik & Freedman, 2007; Bialystok & Majumdar, 1998; Cummins, 2000; Moore, 2007).

Troubling predictions and positive outcomes

While Canada’s adoption of a policy of official bilingualism was rooted more in a socio-historical rationale than a plan to bestow cognitive advantage to its citizens, the country’s celebration of its multicultural and multilingual identity would lead one to expect that children who first learn a language or languages other than English and subsequently add English to their linguistic repertoire during their early school years, would be more likely to experience academic success than their monolingual classmates. Recent data from Ontario suggests that given sufficient time, immigrant children who have a first language other than English, eventually outperform their Canadian-born classmates who learned English as their first language (Coehlo, 2005; Jang et al., 2009; OECD, 2006).

Efforts to disaggregate Ontario data, however, have shown that one group of learners has consistently under-performed on a variety of measures of academic success. Whether measured in the Grades 3, 6, 9 or 10, EQAO assessments of reading, writing and math or in rates of school completion, Canadian-born students who enter the school system in kindergarten speaking a language other than English perform significantly less well than their immigrant peers as well as their classmates who learned English as their first language (Coehlo, 2006; Jang et al. 2009; O’Reilly & Yau, 2008; TDSB, 2008). This troubling outcome is also predicted by a school readiness measure made on junior kindergarten students in the Toronto District School Board.
after their first five months of school. The Early Development Index identifies significant gaps between ESL and non-ESL students, noting that:

about twice as many ESL students as non-ESL students are in the lowest 10% of EDI scores in the areas of physical health and well-being, and language and cognitive development (while) in communication skills and general knowledge, the gap is greatest where over one third (37%) of the SK ESL students have the bottom 10% of EDI scores, compared to 6% among their non-ESL counterparts. (TDSB, 2006, p.5)

Adding vs. subtracting languages

To explain such a wide range in outcomes for English language learners, researchers have begun to look for specific factors that may explain such differences. Garcia (2000) reviews more than a decade of research into the role of cross-linguistic transfer on children’s reading, concluding that the most consistently positive transfer effects have been observed among students who have a level of meta-linguistic awareness that appears to facilitate more active use of L1 resources such as identity as a reader as well as specific strategies appropriate to the reading task. Exactly how and when such meta-linguistic awareness develops and sustains itself is not known, although several studies suggest further investigations of whether and how direct instruction could develop and support these skills (Chen, Xu, Thien-Kim, Hong, & Wang, 2010; Garcia, 2000; Genesee, Geva, Dressler & Kamill, 2006). The Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language-Minority Children and Youth (August & Shanahan, 2006) reviews 293 studies from its database of 970 relevant studies and yet even given this wealth of data, in their synthesis of research relevant to cross-linguistic relationships, Genesee et al. (2006) note the paucity of research into how cross-linguistic factors influence the development of English literacy in school. McCardle, Mele-McCarthy and Leos (2005) also call for a research protocol that considers specific student characteristics including “changes in language proficiency in both (all) languages (which may include decline in L1 as well as rate of increase in proficiency in either or both L1 and L2,” (p. 73) but there is no suggestion of what data to collect or how to collect it across the diverse range of language groups represented in the populations of interest.

The term “additive bilingualism” first coined by Lambert (1975) points to a pedagogical approach that supports acquisition of a second language as an additional resource, rather than at
the expense of the learner’s first language. An additive bilingualism approach is suggested to be critical to the success of French immersion programs (Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Swain & Lapkin, 1982) as well as bilingual education programs in the United States (Cummins, 2009; Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 1997). An additive bilingual approach is only possible if the learner continues to have access to his or her first language. This can be problematic for minority-language speakers who are immersed in a majority-language culture and school as is the case for many young learners entering Toronto schools. As documented by Wong Fillmore (1991), unless there is a conscious and concerted effort to maintain minority-language learners’ first language when they enter a majority-language school, there is a rapid erosion of first language use and proficiency. Wong-Fillmore argues that this leads to a subtractive bilingual environment and a significant loss of the advantages an English learner has in meeting the challenges of school. Although most English language learners who start their schooling in Canada fit this scenario, there is relatively little data collected about the L1 history, use, or proficiency of these English language learners or about how these characteristics change over time. Based on the theme analysis of several case studies of learners in western Canada, Kouritzin (1999) notes that “more attention is paid to the causes of language loss than to its effects” (p.15). While the students in Kouritzin’s study clearly identify themselves as English language learners, their teachers, family members and employers often assume that either because of the length of time that they’ve been in Canada or because of a perceived proficiency in listening to or speaking English in social contexts that they are no longer English language learners and that any academic difficulties that they experience are likely due to other factors.

The lack of a consistent process for assessing or tracking the progress of English language learners makes it difficult to know how many of the CBEL2 students who are reading at lower than expected levels should be identified and supported as English language learners, but given the consistently huge gap between the relatively small number of students identified as “ESL students” on the EQAO Student and Teacher Questionnaires compared to CBEL2 students who participate in the EQAO Primary Assessment, it is a fair assumption that not only is under-identification of English language learners an issue in Ontario, but so too is the concern that students are inadvertently involved in a process of subtractive language learning with English becoming their dominant language built on the erosion rather than the foundation of their first language.
**Drawing on first language resources**

Cummins’ interdependence hypothesis (1996) provides a theoretical framework for how various linguistic proficiencies can transfer across languages. The associated threshold hypothesis (Cummins, 1996) proposes that the cognitive advantages of bilingualism are only available to learners who achieve a “threshold” level of proficiency in both languages. Further developments of this hypothesis have led researchers to explore whether there are specific transfer-ready skills, whether age may be a factor in the transfer of such skills for younger or older learners, and if there is a linguistic threshold required for skill transfer (Chen et al., 2010; Collier, 1987; Cummins, 1981; Gunderson, 2007). Some studies have established that phonemic awareness, a critical skill in the early stages of literacy, can be transferred from a first language to a second (Durgunoğlu, Nagy, & Hancin-Bhatt, 1993; Comeau, Cormier, Grandmaison, & Lacroix, 1999; Wise & Chen, 2010). Schiff-Myers (1992) draws on the threshold hypothesis to describe distinct categories of bilingualism, calling for further exploration of the dynamic nature of these categories and urging investigation of how changes she describes as “arrested language development” might affect second language proficiency. To date, much of that further exploration has been directed toward an understanding of the efficacy of bilingual education programs designed to support students whose first language is Spanish, a group that represents 75% of the English language learners in the United States.

Bilingual education, in which the school system is actively involved in developing and maintaining L1 proficiency as a route to academic success in English is not an option in Canada as well as many schools and school systems in the USA where there is no dominant L1 community. In this multilingual context, inadequate resources and expertise to assess students and provide learning materials in multiple languages make established approaches to bilingual education impractical and irrelevant (Cummins, 2009).

**Gaps in the research literature**

While a growing number of studies related to identifying English language learners with learning difficulties call for better measures of language status and first language proficiency (August, Francis, Hsu, & Snow, 2006; August & Hakuta, 1998; August & Shanahan, 2006; Lipka, Siegel & Vukovic, 2005; McCardle et al., 2005), these calls to action have not produced consistent protocols for describing or measuring first language proficiency especially with
respect to changes over time. While there is little empirical research evidence of the effect of interventions designed to support first language proficiency in a multilingual environment, there is a growing body of resources that describe specific interventions that have been developed and used for young English language learners (Coelho, 2004; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007b; Schecter & Cummins, 2003; Westernoff, Lassa, & Bismilla, 2000). In a short-term study done with kindergarten-age English language learners, Goldenberg, Rueda and August (2006) found that recognition and encouragement of first language use at home did, at least in the short-term, have a positive effect on English literacy development of these students. In addition to measuring student performance, large-scale assessments, such as the EQAO, offer an opportunity for schools or school boards to measure the effectiveness of curricula and programs that have been implemented to address specific learning needs. This could be a valuable tool for educators developing and evaluating programs that build on learners’ first language proficiency as a means to supporting their English literacy development.
Chapter 3
Methodology

Overview of the methodology

In order to first identify key characteristics that might influence the reading skills of Canadian-born EL2 learners and then investigate the study’s other research questions about how and why these characteristics and the students’ home language environment might influence their literacy development, the study took place in two phases. The Phase One analyses addressed the study’s first research question, identifying several characteristics that showed some relationship to lower performance on the Grade 3 EQAO Assessment of Reading. The results of these quantitative analyses informed the design of questionnaires used in the second phase of the study, a qualitative exploration of the home language history and use of eight students who belong to the CBEL2 cohort. This chapter describes the participants involved in each phase of the study as well as the methods used for data collection and data analysis.

Phase One included three quantitative analyses of existing data from the large-scale EQAO Primary Assessment of Reading. In the first analysis, student data was grouped according to students’ birth country and first language. Stratified analyses were done to better understand the reading achievements of those students who were born in Canada with a first language other than English, a cohort this study refers to as “CBEL2.” This cohort of students was compared with other groups in order to identify both common and distinguishing characteristics that could be associated with reading achievements. Subsequently, I examined whether the criteria of birth country and first language were accurate predictors of students’ current home language use. Findings from the initial analyses led to a re-grouping of the EQAO data in an effort to identify possible relationships between home language use and academic achievement.

The second phase of the study employed case studies, a methodological approach that is both better suited to address the how and why components of the research questions and to use what Denzin (1978) has termed “methodological triangulation” to strengthen both the reliability and validity of the study’s findings (Berg, 2001; Yin, 1994). As “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994, p. 13), the case
study approach was selected to further validate and extend the findings of Phase One. Case data was gathered using individual interviews with students and parents. Information from the interviews was supplemented in some cases with information from the students’ school records and teacher interviews. The approach taken is described by Stake (1995) as a “collective case study” in that it selected several cases to serve as both background and testing ground for the findings in Phase One in order to better understand the theoretical implications of the findings in Phase One and to identify more reliable measures of the study’s major variable of interest, that is home language use. Yin recommends the collective, or multiple-case design for its perceived robustness, but cautions against applying a sampling logic that treats individual cases as representative of a larger pool of subjects. Instead he argues that the multiple case approach is particularly useful when a case predicts similar results to other cases – or contrary results but for predictable reasons according to the theoretical framework that generated the research questions.

While the case study method could be an effective approach to explain the relationship between home language use and reading achievement, the scope of this phase of this study was too limited in terms of the number of interviews and the amount of information gathered about each case to develop a meaningful explanation of how home language use affects students’ reading performance. A more apt description of the approach taken is that of a descriptive case study in that it was based on how and why research questions that were generated from a clearly articulated theoretical framework (Berg, 2001; Yin, 1994).

**Participants – phase 1**

Data for Phase 1 are from the large-scale EQAO Primary Assessment of Reading administered in May 2009 to all Grade 3 public school students in Ontario. A total of 131,983 students participated in the 2009 EQAO Primary Assessment of Reading. Students who had taken the French version of the test, were home-schooled or enrolled in French Immersion or alternative Section 23 programmes, were not included in the study. In addition, records that did not include information about students’ first language and/or birth country, records for which Student Questionnaire data was not available and records for which reading achievement data was not available were also eliminated from the data. Data for 97,178 students were included in the analyses.
Participants – phase 2

Phase Two of the study involved interviews with eight students and at least one of each student’s parents. Six of these students, in Grade 4 at the time of the interviews, had participated in the 2010 EQAO assessment, another student who was in Grade 5 time had taken the EQAO assessment in 2009, while one student, in Grade 3 at the time of the study, was preparing for the 2011 assessment. Seven of the students attended an inner-city elementary school in which almost two-thirds of the students in Grade 4 belonged to the CBEL2 cohort. Involvement of the school was solicited in a letter from the Principal Investigator who was also a teacher at the school (Appendix A). The eighth student who volunteered to participate in the study attended a public school in the greater Toronto area in which slightly more than half of the students belonged to the CBEL2 cohort.

Recruitment of participants began with an invitation letter, written in English only and written on school letterhead and signed by the School Principal (Appendix B). This invitation letter was sent home with the more than 100 Grade 4 students at the inner city Toronto school that had agreed to be the study site. The invitation letter introduced the Investigator, explained the purpose of the study and invited participation from parents whose children had been born in Canada and had a first language other than English. Seven parents responded to this letter. The Investigator contacted all of the respondents by phone to explain the purpose of the study, confirm that the students were born in Canada and had a first language other than English, review confidentiality and consent guidelines and to answer questions and clarify logistical details about the interviews. As a result of these phone calls, it was learned that three of the students had not been born in Canada and so they were not included in the study. Since one purpose of this phase of the study was to interview students and parents who spoke mostly or only languages other than English at home, it became clear that an English-only letter was unlikely to generate responses from parents with limited proficiency in English. To address this issue, several of the teachers who had distributed the information letters to students polled their students to ask if any students thought that their parents might be interested if informed about the study in their home language. As a result of this informal polling, the initial information letter was translated into Vietnamese and followed up with a phone call from an interpreter to the family that had expressed interest (Appendix C). Another family, informed of the study by the person who had translated the letter, also contacted the Investigator about participating in the
study. A snowball effect resulted in the participation of two Tamil speaking families who had learned of the study from students and parents who had responded to the original information letter. Since verbal communication had proved more effective with all of the families, the Investigator responded to these expressions of interest by telephone with the assistance of an interpreter who explained the information in the invitation letter as well as the more detailed information about consent. All of the qualifying families who had expressed interest agreed to participate. The Principal Investigator reviewed the consent letter with each parent before starting an interview (Appendix D).

Data collection – phase 1

Data from the 2009 Primary Reading Assessment was provided by the EQAO. After eliminating records for students who had taken the French version of the test, were home-schooled or enrolled in French Immersion or alternative Section 23 programmes, as well as records that did not include information about students’ first language and/or birth country and records for which Student Questionnaire data was not available. Of the remaining records, reading achievement data was available for 97,178 students. These records were imported into SPSS for statistical analysis.

Since 1997, all students in Grades 3 and 6 in publicly funded schools in Ontario have been required to participate in a large-scale assessment of reading, math and writing. These assessments are prepared and their administration is coordinated by the Education and Accountability Office (EQAO), an arms-length agency of the Ontario government. Test results scoring student performance at four levels in each of the component areas, are reported to parents and schools. Aggregate results for schools and school boards are reported publicly. The EQAO defines Level 1 as “much below provincial standard”, Level 2 indicates “approaching provincial standard”, Level 3 is “provincial standard” and Level 4, “exceeds provincial standard”(EQAO, 2009 p. 16). To facilitate comparison, this study further clustered achievement data into two categories, Below Provincial Standard (Not Enough Evidence for Level 1, Level 1 and Level 2) and At or Above Provincial Standard (Levels 3 and 4). This clustering is routinely used by the EQAO, school boards and the media when reporting EQAO results to the public.

In addition to results of students’ performance on reading, writing and mathematics assessments, the data obtained from Ontario’s Educational Quality and Accountability Office
(EQAO), also included information provided to EQAO by schools via Ontario’s web-based
Student Data Collection (SDC) system. When students register to attend school in Ontario, they,
or more usually their parents, provide information about their country of birth and their first
language. Registration information remains a part of the student’s Ontario Student Record (OSR)
and the provincially mandated electronic School Information System (OnSIS) as long as the
student is enrolled in Ontario elementary and high schools. It is very rare that this information is
verified or updated after the student’s original registration date. Some OnSIS information is re-
coded to create broader categories. For example, while a school registration form might record
the specific country of birth, this information is re-coded to indicate either “YES, student was
born outside of Canada” or “NO, student was not born outside of Canada.” Similarly,
information collected at registration about a student’s first language is re-coded as either “YES,
student did learn English as first language at home” or “NO, student did not learn English as first
language at home.” When a student writes an EQAO Assessment, this data from OnSIS is linked
to each student’s assessment results along with responses to the EQAO Student Questionnaire
completed by each student at the outset of the assessment period.

OnSIS data linked to individual achievement results provided by EQAO includes
information about each student’s birth country, first language, gender, current enrollment in an
ESL or ELD program, current status on an Individual Education Plan (IEP) and/or whether the
student has been identified to have a learning exceptionality.

Many studies have tracked the academic achievements of immigrant English language
learners with respect to the length of time they have been in school in Canada or an English-
speaking country, but native-born English language learners are rarely included in these studies.
Even though many Canadian-born students arrive at kindergarten with little or no English, there
is no systematic collection of data about young students’ language proficiency and English
language learning needs which makes tracking this group’s languages and literacy development
almost impossible. Since information about birth country and first language is collected for all
students registering at public schools in Ontario, these criteria were used to try to identify
students who might have a bilingual home environment and be functionally bilingual themselves.
Grouping according to these criteria was also expected to identify those born-in-Canada students
who have entered school in need of “focused educational supports to assist them in attaining
proficiency in English” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 8), a key characteristic of an English language learner according to the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Data collection – phase 2

Interviews were conducted with each student and his or her parent(s). The interviews were designed to learn more about student and parent experiences of and attitudes toward language learning and language use. The interviews invited both students and parents to share their reflections on how or whether the child’s home language experience might affect their achievements in elementary school. Multiple case studies were developed using information from the interviews as well as some supplementary information from school records and teacher interviews. Interviews were conducted outside of school hours and at the convenience of the parents. In most cases, interviews took place in a small conference room at the students’ school, however three parents preferred to be interviewed in their homes. While the student and parent interviews were conducted separately, in most cases schedules and attention spans allowed the students to sit in as their parent(s) was interviewed and vice versa. One student interview was done on a subsequent day when the parent was not present. All of the students and parents gave permission for the interviews to be recorded.

The interviews with parents lasted between 45 and 90 minutes each, while student interviews were shorter, usually lasting twenty to thirty minutes. Each interview included open-ended questions about students’ first languages, home languages, language support at school, pre-school experiences, siblings, parents’ birthplace(s), parental education, household income, and parental aspirations for their child. The interviews also explored student and parent experiences and attitudes about bilingualism, reading, language learning and education (Appendix E, Appendix F).

Data analysis – phase 1

The EQAO Primary Reading Assessment is based on the reading skills and strategies that students are expected to learn in Grades 1, 2 and 3 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2006). Reading results are reported separately for three skill areas and three major expectations. The Overall Reading Level consolidates results in all skill areas and expectations, so it was this score that was used in analyzing students’ reading performance in relationship to other factors. The
performance of various groups was also analyzed to identify significant differences or trends with respect to specific skills and expectations.

Other data used in Phase One analyses were student responses to the EQAO Student Questionnaire completed by each student at the start of the multi-day testing period. The questionnaire is designed to gather information that has been shown to have some links to reading achievement (Lawson, Penfield & Nagy, 1999). This study used Student Questionnaire data about languages spoken and heard at home, availability of a home computer and students’ attitudes about reading, writing and math.

The first analysis grouped students according to birth country and first language. The four groups created were students born in Canada with English as a first language (CBEL1, \( n = 70,091 \)), students born in Canada with a first language other than English (CBEL2, \( n = 15,777 \)), students not born in Canada with a first language other than English (NCBEL2, \( n = 8,594 \)) and students not born in Canada with English as a first language (NCBEL1, \( n = 2,716 \)). Crosstab analysis of this grouped data was done to confirm relative achievement results observed in earlier studies and to identify other factors that might distinguish or further define the groupings.

The second analysis looked exclusively at the CBEL2 cohort, that is, the 15,777 Canadian-born students who had reported a first language other than English. In this analysis, students were grouped according to their overall reading achievement and crosstabs were again used to examine differences and commonalities among students in this cohort according to their reading achievement. As discussed in Chapter 4, this analysis revealed some unexpected areas of strength in higher level reading skills as well as variations in home language use that not only indicated that the birth country/first language criteria were not reliable predictors of a bilingual or multi-lingual home, but also that students who both heard and spoke more than one language at home were more likely to be better readers. It was this finding that led to one more re-grouping and analysis of the EQAO data.

The third analysis of the EQAO data used information from the Student Questionnaire about the language(s) a student hears and speaks at home. The Student Questionnaire includes two multiple-choice questions about home language use. One question asks students to complete the phrase, “At home I speak . . .”. The choices provided are: “only English”, “mostly English”, “another language as often as English”, “mostly another language” and “only another language”.

The second question provides the same choices for completing the phrase, “At home, people speak to me.” Student responses to these questions were used to create 5 home language groups. Five groups were created using home language information from the EQAO Student Questionnaire. Group 1, labeled Monolingual English included students who reported hearing and speaking only English at home. Group 2, labeled Monolingual Not English, included students who reported hearing and speaking only a language other than English in their homes. Instead of creating a single group that encompassed all the students who either spoke or heard another language as well as English at home, these students were divided into three groups identified as Bilingual, Gap Speak English and Gap Speak Not English. The group labeled Bilingual, was the largest group drawn from these students. Research on first language loss in children has identified significant negative consequences when the lack of a shared language leads to a decline in meaningful communication between family members (Kouritzin, 1999; Wong Fillmore, 1991). To probe the impact of this kind of communication gap when children no longer share a language with their parents, two Gap groups were created. These groups included students who reported both speaking and hearing more than one language at home. Group 4, labeled Gap Speak English included students who reported hearing mostly or only a language other than English at home while they spoke only English at home. Group 5, which numbered only 189 students, was labeled Gap Speak Not English. This very small group included students who reported hearing mostly or only English while they reportedly spoke only another language.

Since these groups provided patterns of home language use more relevant to the study’s research questions, further crosstab analysis was done on other characteristics including gender, specific reading skills and reading expectations, first language, IEP status and enrollment in ESL programs.

Data analysis - phase 2

Upon completion of all the interviews, I listened to each recording, transcribing the key points and details from each interview and combining these records with notes taken during the interview. These records were reviewed and redrafted as individual profiles in order to identify what Kouritzin (1999) would term “emergent themes” and to prepare for what Yin (1994) would describe as “pattern matching analysis . A pattern matching analysis (Berg, 2001; Yin, 1994) was
used to identify common themes and to test the validity of the theoretical framework that was used to generate the research questions. Yin proposes pattern matching analysis as “one of the most desirable strategies for case study analysis” (p. 109) because the power in comparing an empirically based pattern with a predicted one provides stronger internal validity to the results. While Yin also details how pattern matching analysis can build the case for causal links that result in an explanatory analysis, in this study, a pattern matching analysis is more effectively used to address rival explanations for lowered reading achievement and to strengthen construct validity by developing a chain of evidence to demonstrate that home language is an important variable in a child’s literacy development.
Chapter 4

Results

This chapter looks at the results of each phase of the study, identifying the major finding and themes raised for discussion in Chapter 5. In Phase 1 the achievement gap between Canadian-born EL2 learners and their immigrant and native-English-speaking classmates was confirmed. In exploring the characteristics of the CBEL2 students, it was discovered that the criteria used to predict various home language environments were not accurate and so data were regrouped using responses to the EQAO Student Questionnaire. School program support for Canadian-born English learners-at-risk is described, both in terms of how it is documented and the students who receive such support. The results of Phase 1 also reveal some differences in how students’ home language backgrounds affect the type of program support offered to them. The chapter describes various sources of information that are used to provide information about students’ home language use and the indications that students’ home language environments are much more dynamic than current school data collection systems are able to track. Finally, there is a description of how the home language environment appears to influence students’ reading achievements.

Phase 2 results are introduced with a description of the participants’ linguistic, family and academic backgrounds. All of the parents interviewed placed a high value on their children’s proficiency in English while at the same time articulating the reasons that they felt it was important for their children to maintain their home language as well as describing the many steps that they were taking to support the maintenance of the home language. There was a great deal of variation in the parents’ own attitudes and experiences with language learning that appears to have some influence on their children’s own language learning.

Phase 1

The purpose of this study was to investigate a curious achievement gap that was identified in earlier analyses of data from Ontario’s large-scale assessments of elementary students (Coelho, 2005; Jang et al., 2009; O’Reilly & Yau, 2009). Students born in Canada with a first language that was not English were consistently less likely to meet provincial standards in reading than their immigrant peers who had been in Canada for more than three years as well as
their Canadian-born classmates who reported English as their first language. By the time they reach Grade 3, CBEL2 students are not readily identifiable in the classroom as many of them have English as their dominant language and are fully assimilated into Canadian school culture even if their home language and culture is different. Data from Ontario’s large-scale reading assessment was examined to identify factors, in addition to reading achievement, that might distinguish this largely invisible group of students. This data was also analyzed to determine if the criteria used to group students were also valid predictors of students’ current home language environments. In order to address the study’s research question of why CBEL2 students might be poorer readers, the study also looked at the kinds of language learning and other academic program support schools provided to students in this cohort, especially those students who were not meeting provincial standards in reading.

*Surfacing an achievement gap*

Of the 97,178 students included in the analyses of EQAO data, the largest group (72 %) was students born in Canada with English as their first language (CBEL1, \( n = 70,091 \)). The group of students born in Canada whose first language was not English (CBEL2) was the second largest cohort (16 percent, \( n = 16,777 \)). Students not born in Canada whose first language was not English (CBEL2) were 9% of participants, while the group of students not born in Canada who registered English as a first language (NCBEL1) included only 3 % of the participants.

The first step in analyzing the EQAO data was to confirm Jang et al.’s (2009) observations of relative results of students grouped by birth country and first language. The results of the 2009 Grade 3 Assessment of Reading showed the same ranking of these groups (see Table 1), with the largest percentage of students who did not meet provincial expectations in reading, once again, being those born in Canada with a first language other than English.

*Canadian-born EL2 students*

With the advantages conferred by prior knowledge and increased opportunity for bilingualism, one might expect that the CBEL2 group would perform better than their peers, but these expectations are not supported by the data. The CBEL2 group consistently ranked lowest, not only in overall reading performance, but also in each of the three specific skills areas -
understanding explicit information, understanding implicit information and making connections - and in all three key reading expectations - reading for meaning, understanding form and style, and reading with fluency.

Table 1

*Overall Reading Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Percentage of students below provincial standards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canadian-born First Language English</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBEL1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian-born First Language Not English</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBEL2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Canadian-born First Language Not English</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBEL2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Canadian-born First Language English</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBEL1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Conversely, the NCBEL1 group – students born outside of Canada with English as a first language, consistently ranked highest, both in overall reading as well as specific skills and expectations.

The NCBEL2 and CBEL1 groups alternated in their rank as second or third, but were, more often than not, within one or two percentage points of each other. A closer look is required to develop a more informed understanding of similarities and differences between these cohorts of students in order to understand what could be causing the 9% achievement gap in overall reading results.

The demographic and Student Questionnaire information collected by the EQAO make it possible to investigate which, if any, characteristics or attitudes distinguish the CBEL2 students as a group from the higher-achieving cohorts. In many areas, there are more similarities than differences. For example, most of Ontario’s Grade 3 students, even those born outside of Canada, have been at the same school, even more at the same school board, since kindergarten. More than 80% of students in each group said that there was a computer at home that they could use for schoolwork. Access to a home computer is marginally better in homes of immigrant and EL2 students, perhaps because a family with ties to another country is more likely to invest in a home computer for easier communication across long distances or perhaps because immigrant and EL2 families feel that access to a home computer provides an important advantage for their children.

Commonalities also prevailed in the information about student attitudes and habits that was compiled from responses to the Student Questionnaire completed by each student at the beginning of the assessment period. In spite of their group status as the lowest achieving readers, very few CBEL2 students responded “NO” to the statement “I am a good reader.” They were somewhat more ambivalent than their NCBEL2 and CBEL1 peers about whether they were definitely “yes” or only “sometimes” good readers. At least 95 % of students in each cohort responded either “yes” or “sometimes” to the statement “I read by myself at home”, but there were noticeable differences in the cohorts of students who responded positively. Half of the EL2 students, both those born in Canada and those born outside Canada, reported reading at least sometimes with someone older at home, compared to 56 % NCBEL1 students and 62 % of CBEL1 students.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Percentage of students enrolled in an ESL or ELD program</th>
<th>Percentage of students with an IEP</th>
<th>Percentage of students enrolled in an ESL or ELD program AND with an IEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canadian-born First Language English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>&lt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBEL1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian-born First Language Not English</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBEL2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Canadian-born First Language Not English</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBEL2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Canadian-born First Language English</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBEL1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some interesting differences between groups emerged in the area of academic support (Table 2). According to the EQAO, 10% of all the students who took the test were “enrolled in an ESL or an ELD Program.” Not surprisingly, students who had reported a first language other than English were more likely to be in this category with students born outside of Canada being more likely to be enrolled in an ESL or ELD program than their Canadian born EL2 peers. It is interesting to note that 14% of the students born outside of Canada who had reported English as their first language were reported to be enrolled in an ESL or ELD program compared to only 1% of the Canadian born EL1 students.

Whether Canadian-born or immigrants, lower achieving students who had reported a first language other than English were more likely to be enrolled in an ESL or ELD program than the lowering-achieving students who had reported English as a first language, although the lower achieving EL1 students who were born outside of Canada were ten times more likely to be enrolled in an ESL or ELD program, another indication that NCBEL1 students are not reliably monolingual-English (Table 3).

The EQAO uses data about ESL/ELD program enrollment supplied by each school board, but school board personnel acknowledge the limitations of the data collected about ESL/ELD program support (R. Brown, Toronto District School Board, personal communication, February 19, 2008). There are no consistent guidelines to assist schools in assessing students’ English language proficiency or determining the ESL or ELD programs provided to English language learners. The delivery of ESL and ELD support also varies dramatically depending, in part, on student need and community demographics, but also on teacher expertise and the allocation of school and board resources. The indication that “Student is enrolled in ESL or ELD program” encompasses a wide and poorly defined range of program options - from minor accommodations made by a teacher in a regular classroom to half-day targeted support from a specialist teacher in a segregated classroom.
Table 3

*Students-at-Risk Receiving ESL and/or IEP Support*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Percentage of students not meeting provincial standards in Overall Reading and enrolled in an ESL or ELD program</th>
<th>Percentage of students not meeting provincial standards in Overall Reading and have an IEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canadian-born First Language English CBEL1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian-born First Language Not English CBEL2</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Canadian-born First Language Not English NCBEL2</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Canadian-born First Language English NCBEL1</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These factors mean that the information reported by the EQAO about the number of students enrolled in ESL or ELD programs is of limited use as a measure of student achievement.
or program effectiveness, but it is a useful check of the assumptions made about the groupings used in this study. This data also indicates that ESL or ELD support is the often the program-of-first-response for struggling students who have a first language or home language other than English.

Special education programs and services are another form of support provided to assist lower achieving students. Such support is documented in Individual Education Plan (IEP) and the existence of an IEP is noted on students’ report cards. In Ontario, policies and procedures regarding both the provision of special education services and the documentation of such are more established and regulated in both policy and practice than ESL and ELD programs. In spite of their lower achieving status, only 9% of the CBEL2 students had an Individual Education Plan (IEP) compared to 13% of all students and 17% of their CBEL1 cohort. Students born outside of Canada were even less likely to have IEP’s. Twenty-five percent of the CBEL1 students who did not meet provincial standards in reading were receiving support documented in an IEP compared to 17% of the lower achieving EL1 students born outside of Canada and 16% of the at-risk CBEL2 students. Only 10% of the at-risk students who had been born outside of Canada and reported a first language other than English had an IEP.

Less than 4% of students in any cohort had been formally identified as having a learning exceptionality\(^1\), most likely because there has not been time, nor resources and/or expertise, to flag and formally assess students this early in their academic life. In addition, there is a high level of awareness among educators in multicultural Ontario of the historical over-identification of English language learners as having learning or intellectual disabilities (Cummins, 1986). This has made educators hesitant to refer English language learners and immigrant students who are struggling with academics until they have had more time in the English school system to develop proficiency in English.

Although very few Grade 3 students had been formally identified on the intellectual exceptionality spectrum, Table 4 shows an interesting difference between the students who had

\(^1\) Language impairment, speech impairment, learning disability, giftedness, mild intellectual disability
been formally identified as exceptional. Six percent of the students identified as gifted belonged to the high-achieving NCBEL1 group that represented only 3% of all the students.

Table 4

*Students formally identified with Intellectual Learning Exceptionalities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student Group</th>
<th>Percentage of total population</th>
<th>Percentage of students formally identified with giftedness</th>
<th>Percentage of students formally identified with mild intellectual disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Canadian-born First Language English</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBEL1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canadian-born First Language Not English</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CBEL2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Canadian-born First Language Not English</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBEL2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Canadian-born First Language English</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NCBEL1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the other end of the spectrum, 20% of the students who had been identified as having a mild intellectual disability came from the CBEL2 group that represented 16% of all students participating in the Grade 3 assessment.

Languages at home

While reports of enrollment in ESL programs raised some doubt about whether the student registration information about birth country and first language was a reliable way of describing home language patterns, it was student responses about their home language use that really called into question the criteria that were used to group students. It is clear from the more up-to-date student responses to the EQAO Student Questionnaire, shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2, that students born in Canada who, when registering for kindergarten, reported a first language other than English are not necessarily functionally bilingual by the time they reach Grade 3. The prediction that students who reported English as their first language are living in monolingual households is similarly not validated by student responses on the Student Questionnaires. In fact, one third of Canadian-born, English-as-a-first language (CBEL1) students reported that at home people speak to them, at least occasionally, in a language other than English with 10%
of these CBEL1 students indicating that “at home people speak to me in another language” at least as often as they are spoken to in English.

While these CBEL1 students do hear more than English at home, it's doubtful that they could be described as functionally bilingual since 93% report that at home they speak “mostly English” or “only English”.

![At Home, People Speak to Me](image)

**Figure 2.** Languages heard at home

By contrast, more than half (53%) of the EL1 students who were born outside of Canada (NCBEL1) report that they are spoken to, at least occasionally, in a language other than English. Similar to their Canadian-born counterparts, the NCBEL1 students are more likely to respond mostly or always in English, but many more of them appear to be bilingual since 9% report that at home they speak mostly or only another language and an additional 15% of these students report speaking another language as often as English.

Both Canadian-born and immigrant students who registered that English was not the first language they spoke at home are, relative to their EL1 peers, more likely to speak and be spoken to in a language other than English, but there are many in both groups who hear and speak mostly or only English. While this data is a clear indication that the majority of the EL2 students’ homes are bilingual, or perhaps multilingual environments, it is not possible to
determine to what extent the individual members of these households are proficient in understanding or communicating in the languages that are heard.

When EQAO data was re-grouped according to students’ home language use, the importance of having a home language in addition to English can be observed in overall reading results of students in the bilingual group (Table 5).

Table 5
*Numbers and Reading Levels of Students in Various Home Language Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Language Group</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Percentage of students meeting provincial standards in overall reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual English</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>47720</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual Other</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2348</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>50222</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>821</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There was significant variation in the reading performance of students in these different groups. Those students who reported that they still spoke mostly or only another language at home were less successful than their peers who spoke at least some English at home. Students from bilingual homes did slightly better than those from monolingual English homes, except for those students who reported a gap between what they spoke and heard at home. Of particular note is the significant difference between the Bilingual students (65% at Level 3 or 4) and their Gap English classmates who still hear another language at home, but speak mostly or only English.
The achievement gap between home language groups was consistent, and at times slightly greater, when the overall reading score was broken down into key reading skills and the overall expectations of the Ontario reading curriculum. The criteria used to group students in these home language categories is based on the students’ self-reports recorded in the EQAO Student Questionnaire. Information collected from Student Questionnaires is difficult to verify and validate. It is also important to note that beyond what is collected from students in an EQAO assessment year, educators do not have access to this information for individuals or on a systemic level. Still, it is interesting to look at how the kinds of support offered to lower-achieving students vary with the different home language groupings.

Presumably there are some students receiving ESL and special education support who, perhaps because of that support, did meet provincial standards on the EQAO assessment but since ESL and IEP support are designed for students at risk, this analysis looked only at students-at-risk, that is, those who did not meet provincial standards in Overall Reading on the EQAO assessment. Whether organized by birth country/first language groups (Table 3) or by home language groupings, (Table 6), students-at-risk who had a home language other than English or in addition to English were more likely to be enrolled in an ESL program than their EL1 or monolingual English peers. There does not appear to be total reliance on the registration form data to identify students needing ESL program support. 2% of the CBEL2 students-at-risk are reported to be enrolled in an ESL program, while only 1% of the more reliably Monolingual English group are reported to be receiving ESL support.

One purpose of the EQAO Assessment is to assist teachers in identifying students in need of support and perhaps to provide some insight into the kinds of support that might be most helpful for individual students, or at the school and board levels, the kinds of support that should be built into program planning.
Table 6

*ESL Enrollment and IEP Status of Home Language Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Percentage of students enrolled in ESL or ELD program</th>
<th>Percentage of students not meeting provincial standards in Overall Reading and enrolled in ESL or ELD program</th>
<th>Percentage of students not meeting provincial standards in Overall Reading and have an IEP</th>
<th>Percentage of students not meeting provincial standards in Overall Reading and enrolled in ESL or ELD program AND with an IEP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual English</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual Other</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap English</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap Other</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 6, it appears that students-at-risk are more likely to be enrolled in ESL programs than have an IEP, but, as noted above, there is less consistency or accountability for what constitutes an ESL or ELD program than there is for students who have an IEP. For those students who are receiving support, the type of support does appear to be appropriate. Twenty-eight percent of the monolingual English students-at-risk have an IEP, a more appropriate
method of support than the ESL or ELD program that is recorded for only 1% of these students. Fifty-three percent of the students-at-risk who reported a Monolingual-Not-English home environment have are reportedly enrolled in an ESL or ELD program, while only 10% of the students-at-risk in this group have an IEP. There’s a narrower split of support noted for bilingual students. It is not possible to know whether this split is based on accurate assessment of students’ learning needs, support program availability or variations in procedures for documenting support, but it does indicate some capacity for identifying and distinguishing between ESL, ELD and special education needs. The support profiles for the two Gap groups are remarkably similar even though, according to student reports about their home language use, the students have distinct, almost opposite, language profiles. In both cases, whether students report hearing mostly English and speaking mostly another language or vice versa, schools are more likely to describe the support provided as an ESL or ELD program rather than special education.

This re-grouping of students based on updated information from the Student Questionnaire rather than the registration forms completed six years earlier offers some insight into the dynamic nature of students’ home language environments. As shown in Table 7, there are some significant discrepancies between what one might predict about home language use based on the registration forms and what students reported on the EQAO Student Questionnaire.

It is clear that while most of the CBEL2 students heard and spoke more than one language at home, so did many of their classmates even if they had reported English as their first language or immigrated relatively recently to Canada. Responses to the Student Questionnaire indicate that while 87% of the CBEL2 students both hear and speak another language in addition to English at home, more than a third of the students who were born in Canada and reported English as their first language report similarly bilingual (or perhaps multilingual) home environments. More than half of the students who were born outside of Canada, but reported that English was their first language, responded that they spoke and heard more than one language at home.

Table 7

*Home Language Groups and Registration Data Groups*
While it can be expected that home language patterns would change dramatically over the course of the five years since most Grade 3 students were registered for school, it is unlikely that so many students whose first language was truly and only English and who had lived in Canada since birth, would be reporting, in Grade 3, that they both heard and spoke mostly or only another language. While some of these discrepancies shown in Table 8 could be explained by clerical error or misunderstanding on the part of the person completing the registration form, it is possible that for those students who, whether born in Canada or outside of Canada, came to school as bilinguals, the parent, having to choose only one language, noted English as the first language when registering his or her child for kindergarten in an English-speaking school.
Similarly, some parents may have felt that the record of English as a first language is the correct or preferred response that may confer some advantage, or avoid some stigma, for their child.

Table 8  
*Home Language Groups Reports of First Language on School Registration Forms*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Language Groups</th>
<th>Percentage of Students Reporting English as L1</th>
<th>Percentage of Students Reporting NOT English as L1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual English</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monolingual Other</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bilingual</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap English</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gap Other</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Phase 2*

The profiles of Canadian-born learners with a first language other than English that were developed using information from the Grade 3 EQAO Assessment raised as many questions as they answered. Without the EQAO Student Questionnaire, information available to schools about students’ home language development and use is both limited and dated since much of it comes from the time when students currently in Grades 3, 6, and 10, first registered for Junior Kindergarten. The re-grouping of data according to current patterns of home language use revealed the dynamic nature of students’ home language environments. With no systematic updating of information about students’ home language use, it is very difficult to use school-based data to explore the study’s third research question about how students’ home language experiences influence their literacy development.
The second phase of this study set out to investigate in greater depth, the language use and literacy development of eight Canadian-born students, in Grades 3, 4 or 5 at the time of the interview, who reported having a first language other than English. This qualitative investigation was designed to check some of the assumptions made about the trends noted in the analyses of EQAO data and to identify what, if any, information about home language use and development might be of value to schools in supporting all students, particularly under-achieving cohorts such as the CBEL2 or the Gap English groups.

This qualitative investigation was designed to develop a more detailed profile of individual students who belong to the CBEL2 cohort that consistently performs poorly on the EQAO assessments. By learning more about a few individual students, the study hoped to identify what, if any, information about home language use and development might be of value to schools in their efforts to understand and address the achievement gap that was identified between Canadian-born, English-as-a-second-language students and their classmates.

Participants’ profiles

Interviews were conducted with eight students and one or both of their parents. Table 9 provides an overview of the students and their parents who participated in interviews. Seven of the students attend an urban elementary school at which close to half of the 700+ students belong to the CBEL2 cohort. All of the students interviewed were in Grades 3, 4, or 5. None of the students interviewed reported receiving ESL support since starting school. The students interviewed represented a wide range of academic achievement. One student had been identified as gifted and is planning to attend a gifted class starting in Grade 5. Two other students have been formally identified with learning disabilities and receive special education support in language and math. Another student is on an Individual Education Plan (IEP), receiving special education support in language and math, but has not been formally assessed to determine why
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Student academic levels</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>L1</th>
<th>Participating Parent(s)</th>
<th>Interpreter</th>
<th>L1 Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Meetra</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dari</td>
<td>father</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>Koran class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4X/week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunera</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>After-school and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Saturdays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanuraj</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>After school and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Saturdays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jeevitha</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>father &amp; mother</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>After school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jason</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>mother &amp; father</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dinh</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Vietnamese</td>
<td>mother &amp; father</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naveenan</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>After school and</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Saturdays</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aadhira</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Tamil</td>
<td>mother</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>After school and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Saturdays</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
she is struggling with language and math. Seven of the students had participated in the EQAO Grade 3 Assessment within 18 months of their interviews. One student, in Grade 3 at the time of the interview, was preparing for the test in the late spring of his Grade 3 year. All of the other parents and students remembered the Grade 3 EQAO assessment and acknowledged receiving the results, but neither students nor parents could recall the levels they had achieved on this assessment. All of the parents’ consented to have the researcher discuss their child’s academic achievement with their current teachers and, when possible, inquire about their Overall Reading Level on the EQAO Assessment.

All of the students, except Sunera, were living with two parents and siblings at the time of the interview. All of the parents came to Canada as young adults. Interviews with Sunera’s mother, Tanuraj’s mother, Meetra’s father and both of Jeevitha’s parents were conducted without an interpreter while a Tamil interpreter was present for the interview with Naveenan’s mother and Aadhira’s mother and a Vietnamese interpreter assisted in interviews with Dinh’s and Jason’s parents. All of the interviews with students were conducted in English outside of school hours. In all cases, the students’ first language is still the dominant home language, but it was clear from student and parent reports as well as the researcher’s observations that at school, with friends and with older siblings, that English is the dominant language for all of the students.

Learning English - a priority for parents

Parents all stated that their child’s proficiency in English was a priority. In spite of the fact that during the interview Jeevitha and her parents spoke Tamil exclusively with each other while responding to interview questions in English, Jeevitha’s father stated repeatedly that English was her first language. While I did not have access to interviewee’s school registration forms, it is likely that Jeevitha would belong to the 37% of CBEL1 students shown in Table 6 who belong to the Bilingual home language group. Her father commented that English is the most important language for her to know because “she lives here.” Dinh’s parents are also clear about the importance of learning English, noting that “Dinh is a Canadian . . . his life will be here . . . that means he must master the language.” Jason’s parents agree that English is the most important language for their boys to learn, commenting, “they need it for living for sure,” but
they are quick to add that they are also committed to helping their children maintain their ability to communicate in Vietnamese.

In spite of the value that all parents placed on their child’s proficiency in English, none of the parents reported playing an active role in assisting their child’s English language learning, although several recounted stories that indicated that they were indeed engaged supporters and facilitators of this process. Several students reported that watching television played a memorable role in their acquisition of English. Older siblings also appear to have played significant roles as English teachers and role models. Jeevitha appears to be quite conscious of these forces, explaining, “with my brother, I want him to learn English, so I watch cartoons with him, but if my brother is sleeping I watch Tamil (movies) with my mother.” When asked about how Jeevitha (the eldest child) learned English, her father said that “learning English is automatic because we live in Canada”, but nonetheless, Jeevitha attended playschool with her mother before starting kindergarten so that she could learn more English. Sunera attended an all-English daycare from the time she was one-year old through her years in kindergarten. According to her mother, there were no other students with the same home language, so acquisition of English was easy. Meetra’s father recounts with delight that Meetra’s first word in English was “ever,” an early-speaker’s pronunciation of her older sisters’ frequent “whatever.” Still, Meetra’s own memories of kindergarten are that understanding all the English was hard and she didn’t like being left by her mother. She remembers starting to feel more comfortable with both school and English after making some friends. Tanuraj, the youngest of three brothers, was able to speak both English and Tamil when he started school because, he believes, his brothers brought their English language skills home from school. With three older siblings, Aadhira’s mother observes that Aadhira “understood everything” (both English and Tamil) as a baby, noting that after she started school, she started speaking more English at home. Even with an older sister, Dinh remembers his first exposure to English was when he started Junior Kindergarten at the same school. He recalls being surprised because he didn’t know how to speak English, but then “I just heard what the other kids say and the teacher and I start to try to copy them.” He sounds relieved to say “I get it now.” Naveenan doesn’t remember how he first learned English, but his mother recalls that when he started at school, he started to speak English at home. Now, seven years later, he speaks Tamil at home, but English has become his dominant and preferred language outside of home.
**Parental efforts to maintain the home language**

Students and parents all acknowledged the value of the home language, consistently stating, “it’s my mother tongue” as the reason for maintaining their use of it, even though students and parents alike saw their future as being in Canada rather than returning to live in their country-of-origin. Many of the parents wanted to be sure that their children could communicate with grandparents. This sentiment was particularly strong among parents who had been unable to return to their home country, but hoped that recent political developments would mean that their children would one day soon have the opportunity to meet their grandparents for the first time. Anticipating a time when her children will go back home, Tanuraj’s mother feels that her children are expected to be able to communicate in Tamil, observing, “The grandparents are old. They can’t learn English.” Interestingly, there appeared to be less emphasis on the importance of communicating with non-English-speaking grandparents who are living in Canada, perhaps because being immersed in English Canada, all generations understand the challenges of maintaining a minority language. However, Jason’s father, who is more proficient in English than his wife, was clear, “I want them to understand the family life. Their mother doesn’t understand English. I want them to understand their mom.”

None of the students interviewed felt that knowledge of their home language provided either advantages or disadvantages for them at school. The less academically successful students, Dinh, Naveenan and Aadhira, were more likely to point out the pitfalls and difficulties of both learning a new language and developing their skills in the home language. Several parents commented on the value of knowing another language. Jason’s father, who speaks English Cantonese and Vietnamese commented, “with my own experience, the more languages you know the better the chances you have for getting success.” explaining how his knowledge of Cantonese enabled him, serendipitously he feels, to learn about an opportunity to leave his refugee camp and immigrate to Canada. Other parents cited the more specific benefit for students in Ontario, who can earn a high school credit if they pass a proficiency test in a language other than English.

Parents supported their child’s maintenance of the first language in a variety of ways and for various reasons. All of the children except Meetra had been enrolled for at least a short while in an after-school and/or Saturday morning class to help them learn how to read and write in
their first language. Meetra’s non-enrollment in an L1 language school was clearly due to lack of opportunity rather than a lack of interest or will. She attends Koran classes in Arabic after school four days a week, but there aren’t enough Dari-speaking students in her neighbourhood to warrant an after-school International Languages class. Meetra’s reading of Dari is limited to words such as “dog”, “cat”, “mouse” and “naan.” When in Grade 3, Dinh attended after-school Vietnamese classes briefly, but stopped when he didn’t pick up the basic skills. He reports that his mother used to teach him to write Vietnamese, but now, “I can’t do it.” Although Jason attended Vietnamese classes after-school for a year, he stopped after changing schools and can read and write very little in Vietnamese, recognizing only a few words such as “rice” “noodles” or “egg”. Speaking through an interpreter, Naveenan’s mother shared one anecdote that helps explain her commitment to helping Naveenan maintain his first language even as he struggles academically in English. She reported that when Naveenan comes home from school, he sometimes explains English words to her. In other cases, when Mother tries to explain something to Naveenan in Tamil and he doesn’t understand, he suggests that she go to school and learn more English. Mother counters this advice with feedback she received from Naveenan’s Grade 1 teacher who, in the course of a classroom discussion, had asked Naveenan to tell the class the Tamil word for “tree”. When Naveenan was not able to provide the translation, the teacher phoned his mother to encourage her to speak more Tamil at home, suggesting that his parents “explain whatever you know” in Tamil. Naveenan’s mother has taken this advice to heart and feels that supporting Naveenan’s use of Tamil at home will help him improve his English.

Only a few parents identified household “rules” or policies about their children’s language use. Meetra’s father was clear that he doesn’t believe in rules about which languages to use at home, remarking, “the world of force doesn’t work.” although he did admit that, “I force a little bit because they (his daughters) should know their language.” While there are no formal rules about language use at home, Tanuraj’s mother reported that her husband, who was not present at the interview, tries to speak English with his sons. Often, when Father asks a question in English, the boys respond in Tamil. According to Tanuraj, “My dad tells me to speak in English and it comes Tamil. Tamil is easier to speak... because Tamil is my mother tongue. Every time when I’m saying something in English, I keep on saying it in Tamil.” Father has suggested that his wife speak more English at home., but Tanuraj’s mother is hesitant to do this,
in part because she feels that if she speaks incorrect English her children will learn to follow her mistakes and also because Tamil is what comes naturally when she speaks to the children.

Parents as language learners

While all the parents were engaged in supporting their children’s language learning, there was a considerable range in the how parents identified themselves as language learners. The most detailed and animated recounts of their own language learning as well as and their household discourse came from the parents of Sunera and Meetra, the most academically successful students. Sunera and her mother clearly share a fascination with language and a household steeped in talk. It is with pride that Mom claims that Sunera sometimes corrects her mother’s English grammar. Watching movies and television together provides many opportunities for dialogue and instruction in both Tamil and English. Sunera’s mother recounts with delight the time she asked her daughter, “what is this ‘snoring?’” Sunera explained in words and by example. Meanwhile, Tamil movies prompt Sunera to ask questions about Tamil culture and tradition as well as the nuances of language. Mother and daughter frequently borrow both English and Tamil books from the public library. At home, Mom reads Tamil newspapers and often shares articles so that Sunera can understand more about Tamil holidays and culture. Sunera’s engagement with language appears to extend beyond Tamil and English. She reports learning some Tibetan from the neighbour who provides before-school care for her and credits her interest in taking Spanish lessons to her Grade 3 teacher who spoke fluent Spanish.

Meetra’s father is also an experienced language learner. As a child he heard and spoke Dari and then learned Pashtu at school. His university studies of meteorology were in Russia. Even though that was 22 years ago, he still speaks Russian and can communicate well, reading and writing the Russian that he learned as a student. Reporting that most of his reading these days is in English, his primary occupation at the time of the interview was writing, in Dari, for an online Afgani political journal.

Tanuraj’s father, who was not present at the interview, speaks Hindi, Arabic and German in addition to his first language, Tamil. While apologetic about her English, Tanuraj’s mother had no difficulty understanding or making herself understood in our interview. She feels that her own English has improved enough that she can sometimes help the boys with reading and writing homework, even if her sons sometimes laugh at her when she mispronounces words
when reading English. Similarly, Aadhira’s mother started English class four months before the interview, proudly reporting that she is increasingly able to understand when her children speak.

By contrast, Jason’s mother made a passing reference to taking English lessons at her workplace for a few months when she first arrived in Canada, but discontinuing them when her schedule changed. Dinh and Naveenan’s mothers made no references to their own English language learning. Both Jason and Dinh’s mothers indicated that they needed their sons to help them out as interpreters and translators when shopping or at appointments. Interestingly, it was these two students, whose home language use was most needed on a pragmatic level, who had given up on formal classes in the home language. Each of these mothers also described their ongoing and thoughtful efforts to support their sons at school. Feeling limited by her lack of proficiency in English, Dinh’s mother does make an effort to monitor his homework and provides nightly counsel - encouraging Dinh to be a good boy, do the right thing and do well in school so that he can get a job working with his head, not his hands. Naveenan’s mother has attended an after-school parent-child reading club with him as well as enrolling him in after-school tutoring and summer school sessions.
Chapter 5
Discussion and Conclusion

Canada continues to pride itself on being a nation of immigrants and a society that supports a multicultural mosaic rather than a melting pot model of assimilation. Nowhere is that more evident than in Canadian schools, particularly in urban centres where immigrants of all ages have been welcomed and supported with a variety of ESL programs that appear to be effective, producing students who, after only four or five years in Canada, surpass their native English speaking classmates on a variety of academic measures (Brown & Sinay, 2008; Coelho, 2005; Gunderson, 2007; O’Reilly & Yau, 2009). Many distinct cultural and linguistic communities continue to thrive, decades after the early arrivals from their countries-of-origin first settled in Canada. This has led to a new kind of English language learner, the Canadian born child who, having grown up within a vibrant minority language community, arrives at school speaking little or no English. Parents and educators have high expectations for these young learners. Parents see them as the future, able to take advantage of all the opportunities that Canada offers without the trauma of immigration. Educators see them as having the best of both worlds, with access to family and cultural traditions in addition to being Canadian as well as reaping the cognitive benefits that being bilingual can confer. Surprisingly, these Canadian-born English language learners are, as a group, achieving less well than both their immigrant and native-English speaking peers. This study set out to learn more about who these students are, why they are not reading as well as their peers and how their home languages might shape or influence their literacy development.

The study’s investigations, both quantitative and qualitative, confirmed the existence of an achievement gap. Also evident from the results was the relative invisibility of Canadian-born English language learners, making it difficult to identify specific students and to respond to their English language learning needs. School registration data was shown to be an inaccurate and outdated predictor of students’ home language use or proficiency, but this registration data continues to be used in the absence of more meaningful information. Also notably missing are protocols to document or evaluate the effectiveness of ESL program support provided to students-at-risk. Interviews with students and their parents provided important insights into the dynamic nature of students’ home language environments. The interviews also revealed the
important role that parental attitudes toward and role modeling of language learning can play in
their children’s own language learning and literacy development.

The study’s findings point clearly to the need for policies that support both the
identification of Canadian-born English learners and a more systematic approach to provide
educators and parents a deeper and shared understanding of these students’ language learning
needs in order that all those concerned can more effectively support these children. More focused
attention to these students and their language learning patterns could also build on the theoretical
framework that looks at the dynamics of linguistic interdependence, additive bilingualism and
language loss when language learning, L1 loss, and literacy development occur simultaneously
in young children.

An achievement gap revealed

The results of EQAO data analyses and the student and parent interviews confirm that
many Canadian-born students whose first language is other than English arrive at school with
either enough proficiency in English and/or sufficient language learning skills to succeed
academically without the support of an ESL program.

However, both investigations also identified a significant number of students who, while
not fitting the traditional picture of an immigrant English language learner, are handicapped by
their lack of proficiency in English as they set out to acquire basic literacy and numeracy skills
with their peers in an English-only classroom. Table 5 describes the dramatic achievement gap
between the Grade 3 students reporting a bilingual home environment (65% meeting provincial
standards in reading) compared to those who heard mostly another language while speaking
mostly or only English at home, the Gap English group (55% meeting provincial standards).
This is a significant loss of student potential that appears to be unaddressed, largely because of
the difficulties in identifying the distinct English language learning needs of some of these
students as they learn to read.

There are several reasons that this achievement gap has remained undetected for so long.
In addition to the fact that Canadian-born English language learners are difficult to identify as
such, the existence of an achievement gap for Canadian-born English language learners
confounds popular expectations on several fronts. While neither country of birth nor learning English as a first language at home are considered determining factors of academic achievement, it is widely acknowledged that a reader’s prior experience or “schema” plays an important role in reading. Critics of the EQAO have commented that the content of many reading passages used in the EQAO assessments privileges some students over others because of their prior experiences and familiarity with the texts’ subject matter. This perspective would predict that students born in Canada would have some advantage over immigrant students because their prior experiences and familiarity with the Canadian culture provides them with a deeper context and schema to access and understand the cultural content of texts used in the assessments. Perhaps the advantage provided by living-in-Canada background knowledge is offset by the challenges of limited English proficiency or perhaps the lived experience of these students is distinct from that assumed by the EQAO and classroom teachers. In any case, being born in Canada does not appear to advantage young readers.

More complex is the prediction that students who reported a first language other than English would be bilingual by the time they reached Grade 3 and, therefore, enjoy the cognitive advantages conferred by bilingualism (Bialystok et al., 2007; Bialystok & Majumdar, 1998). As shown in Table 5, students living in bilingual (or multi-lingual) homes did show higher achievement levels, but students in the CBEL2 cohort were not reliably bilingual (Table 7). By using data from the EQAO Student Questionnaire it was possible to identify that it is not all CBEL2 students who are at the lower end of the achievement gap, but rather those who rather than adding English to their home language are maintaining linguistically distinct worlds at home and at school. The most at-risk students appear to be those who appear to be losing proficiency in their home language while gaining limited proficiency in academic English. If educators want to understand better why these students are under-achieving, it is important that systems be put in place in order to identify and learn more about these students early and repeatedly in their literacy development.

Identification of Canadian-born English language learners

Canadian-born English language learners are not easily identified. The students themselves, anxious to assimilate with their peers, quickly attune to the value given to English within schools and are justifiably proud as they develop enough English to at least “pass” with
their classmates and teachers. As reported in several interviews with parents, once a child starts school, parents usually see a dramatic increase in the child’s use of English at home to the point that it’s not unusual for the child to be acknowledged as the family’s English expert while parents’ attention turns to trying to maintain the home language and/or feeling unable to support their child’s efforts at school because of their own real or perceived limitations in English. Meanwhile, teachers have limited time or means to investigate their students’ home language patterns. If teachers are aware that a student’s home language is not English, but they observe that student participating comfortably in classroom conversations, the teachers can assume that these students are on a level-playing field with their peers, as they acquire new skills in reading, writing, math, etc. In this context, many English language learners remain unidentified, their language learning needs unsupported unless or until they become learning differences that fit special education criteria.

Teachers are often aware, as seen in this study’s analysis of EQAO data, that school registration form data about birth country or first language can be a misleading factor when trying to identify students in need of language learning support. The fact that 14% of the immigrant students who registered English as their first language were reported as being enrolled in an ESL or ELD program is a clear indication that the E1 report on a school registration form is not a reliable indicator of a monolingual English home or of proficiency in English. What is not available to teachers, however, are policies and procedures for gathering and documenting relevant information about students’ home languages to assist them in identifying and addressing Canadian-born students’ distinct language learning needs.

Learning about the home language environment

Investigation of the research questions about the characteristics of underachieving CBEL2 students and the reasons for their underachievement provided important insights into how students’ home language environment is – or more often is not – considered as a factor in their learning at school. The importance of oral language proficiency and a rich home language environment to support students’ early literacy development is well documented (National Reading Panel, 2000). Research also shows that linguistic foundations do not have to be re-built with a new language and that the phonemic awareness and oral language skills so critical for early readers can be transferred from one language to another (Comeau, Cormier, Grandmaison,
A major difficulty in learning how schools can build on the strengths and respond to the challenges of the different home language environments experienced by their students is that there is no systematic collection or documentation of this information beyond what is reported on the school registration form when students first arrive at a school. Information from the EQAO Student Questionnaire, while available only for those students involved in the assessment, provides more up-to-date and accurate information about home language use than what can be predicted from school registration data. Critical to the investigation of the third research question about how home languages influence literacy development, the students and parents interviewed provided important details and insights into the varied home language environments that are described only in broad strokes on the Student Questionnaire.

Of the students interviewed, Sunera, Meetra and Jason would be considered “true bilinguals” in the home language groupings used to analyze EQAO data. As indicated in Table 9, all three of these students are either High or Medium in their academic achievements. Two other Medium-Achieving students, Tanuraj and Jeevitha, described their homes as Monolingual-Not English, but students and parents all appeared to be moving steadily toward an additive bilingualism - coupling efforts to maintain proficiency in the home language with all members of the family also gaining proficiency in English. Naveenan and Aadhira, both struggling academically, appear to be moving from a Monolingual-Not English home language environment to the Gap-Speak Mostly-Only-English group. Dinh, also one of the at-risk students, is already clearly in the Gap-Speak Mostly-Only English group.

The point of identifying which home language group a student fits is not to rank one home environment as better than another nor is it to identify how some families have “gone wrong” by not maintaining a bilingual home environment. It is important to remember that many of the students in each group are doing just fine whether the results are measured by EQAO assessments, report cards or other means. The purpose of this grouping is to assist educators in identifying students who need, and are entitled to, support at school in order to develop their English language proficiency. It appears that, rather than relying on information from the registration form, responses to two multiple-choice questions, posed annually, such as
those on the EQAO Student Questionnaire could be a more efficient and effective starting point in this identification process.

**Responding to learners’ needs**

The Ontario Ministry of Education (2007a) includes Canadian-born students in its definition of English language learners. As such, they are entitled to “focused educational supports to assist them in attaining proficiency in English” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a, p.8). The policy also outlines multiple models of support that schools can implement, but is likely that most teachers, parents and students conceive of ESL support as a stand-alone program staffed by a teacher assigned to support English language learners as a distinct part of their timetable. They might not recognize support that is provided to young English language learners by kindergarten teachers who are making intentional modifications to their program to address English language learning needs of specific students or even the modifications made to a Grade 8 student’s science program that are designed to develop the student’s proficiency in academic English as well as his or her understanding of the science curriculum. Both of these scenarios fit the Ministry of Education’s definition of an ESL program, but they are usually not recognized as such by the Principal or Office Administrator responsible for identifying students “enrolled in an ESL program.” Similarly, while the students and parents interviewed for this study all stated that they had never received ESL support, several of the examples given about classroom experiences and feedback provided by teachers to parents about how to support their child’s learning indicate that, at the classroom level, there was indeed ESL Program support. The lack of systematic documentation of how English language learners are identified and which models of ESL program support are being delivered to which students makes it impossible to assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of different models of ESL programs. This lack of formal recognition of both the language learning needs and the school’s responses to these needs means that teachers, parents and students are unlikely to focus on the resources they can each bring to support the student’s bilingualism and academic achievement.

The eight students interviewed in this study all entered kindergarten with limited proficiency in English and while many appear to have received focused support from teachers who were both aware of and able to respond to the student’s English language learning needs, this support is neither documented in school records nor remembered as such in the students’ and
parents’ memory, making it difficult to assess either its costs or its effectiveness. At present, there are no consistent guidelines to assist Ontario schools in reporting whether a student is or is not “enrolled in an ESL program.” In addition, the range of ESL programs offered by schools is highly variable. More systematic documentation of the types and duration of ESL support provided to students is essential if educators want to make informed decisions about how to support and improve student learning. As protocols are developed to more systematically identify and support Canadian-born English language learners, it will also be possible to evaluate, both informally and formally, the effectiveness of various programs to support their learning.

ESL programs are not the only kind of support available to low achieving students in Ontario. If teachers feel that a student is not meeting her or her potential, they may develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) to document individualized expectations and specific strategies that will be used to teach and assess the student’s learning. Often an IEP is a first step in monitoring a student to determine if further assessment is required by a psychologist, speech-language pathologist or other professional in order to identify any kind of learning exceptionality. The Ontario Ministry of Education policy states, “school boards will have a protocol for identifying English language learners who may also have special education needs.” (Ontario, 2007a, p. 18) and there is an increasing body of research to assist in the development of such protocols including research that demonstrates that teachers should not wait for full fluency in English before providing remedial support to early readers who are struggling (Geva, 2000; Hamayan et al, 2007). Still, there remains an awareness among educators that English language learners can, and have been, easily and erroneously identified as special education students (Cummins, 1986). Using both the fear of misidentification as well as the “equitable” distribution of resources as rationales, some school administrators and special education personnel maintain the practice that prohibits students from “double dipping” despite the explicit statement in Ministry of Education policy that “where special education needs have been identified . . . students are eligible for ESL or ELD services and special education services simultaneously” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2007a, p. 19). Data from the EQAO indicates that only about 2% of students who reported a first language other than English are both enrolled in an ESL program and have an IEP (Table 6). For the larger number of students who are reported to be
either “enrolled in an ESL Program” or “have an IEP”, the support offered to students-at-risk reporting a first language other than English is more likely to be an ESL program than an IEP.

Contrary to the pattern noted in the EQAO data, the three students-at-risk that were interviewed all had IEP’s and none of them had ever been enrolled in an ESL program. Both Dinh and Naveenan had been formally identified as having a learning disability. Aadhira was receiving special education support in both language and math, but had not been formally assessed. All three of these students attend a school that has a large number of English language learners and many teachers who are trained and experienced in supporting both English language learners and special education students. Of the eight students interviewed, Dinh, Naveenan and Aadhira were the least engaged with using their home language as a resource for learning and English was quickly becoming their dominant language. In many ways, their English language learning needs were perhaps the most pronounced because of the lack of language learning support at home, but the fact that they were more distant from thinking in or identifying themselves with their home language, may also have made them less obvious candidates for ESL program support in a school where there were many students with more distinct English language learning needs.

The fact that the data collected about students-at-risk makes clear yes/no distinctions between ESL and special education programs does not mean that educators, parents and students themselves should not develop their understanding that individual students can and do embody varying degrees of “ELL-ness” and “Special Education-ness” in their learning. Just as there are important differences between the expectations and programs appropriate for English language learners and those for students with various special education needs, Canadian-born English language learners also have a distinct educational profile. Similarly, while many kinds of program support appropriate for special education students are also helpful for immigrant English language learners and may be equally appropriate for Canadian-born English language learners, the existence of the achievement gap that motivated this study indicates that a more informed and targeted response could yield better results for this group of students at risk.

Language learning and loss at home

The stories of these three students-at-risk are clear examples of the intersecting processes of second language acquisition and first language loss. First language loss is increasingly
recognized as factor in second language learning and education. There’s an increasing body of evidence for the benefits of recognizing and using one’s first language as a resource for learning in an additional language (August & Hakuta, 1998; Cummins, 2009; Gunderson, 2007; Kouritzin, 1999). Both the EQAO data and the interview subjects confirm this principle, but another factor emerged from discussions with students and their parents and that is the values and models of language learning that a student experiences at home. While almost all of the students interviewed would have been in the Monolingual-Other Home Language group when they entered kindergarten, the most academically successful students are, by the time they reach Grade 3 and 4, True Bilinguals. Tanuraj and Jeevitha, who are meeting provincial standards in their schoolwork, while still hearing and speaking mostly another language at home, appear to be proficient enough in English to be considered True Bilinguals. Meanwhile, Naveenan and Aadhira, both considered students-at-risk academically, appear to be moving into the Gap-English group, where Dinh, another student-at-risk is already situated. Analysis of EQAO Overall Reading levels shows a significant difference between the True Bilingual and Gap English students (Table 5). Comparisons of how different families use language at home provide some insight into the different conditions that surround students who make the transition from Monolingual-Other to True Bilingual relative to those Gap-English students who continue to hear, and hopefully understand, a language other than English, but speak only English at home. All of the students who were True Bilinguals or moving toward that status had at least one parent at home who self-identified his or herself as a language learner. The language-learning parents came from a wide range of educational backgrounds, life experiences, and had pursued language learning in widely varying conditions and contexts. In the interviews, these language-learning parents demonstrated various levels of proficiency when listening to and speaking in English. Most of the parents were unnecessarily apologetic or modest in describing their ability to communicate in English and several parents emphasized how much English they learned from their children rather than vice versa. While all of the families interviewed were explicit about the high value they placed on having their children learn English and were clearly committed to supporting their children in learning English and succeeding at school, the parents of the at-risk students had not provided such explicit models of language learning. Neither Dinh’s parents nor Naveenan’s mother described any ongoing efforts of their own to learn English. While none of the interviews probed why parents had or had not pursued language learning, it was clearly not because language learning was not considered important. Settlement, employment, as well as
responsibilities for both immediate and extended family members clearly had priority. Aadhira’s mother shared that she had only recently started taking English classes, now that the demands of raising six children had eased however slightly.

A common theme emerging from interviews with eight students and their parents is not enough to determine or even suggest causation. The significance of this observed pattern is to flag it for further observation that can happen both anecdotally if teachers are alerted to its potential importance and systematically as school systems implement more comprehensive assessment and data collection protocols for English language learners. The purpose of identifying the possible advantage of having a parent who provides language-learning role model is not to cast blame on parents who cannot or choose not to fill this role. Nor is it to provide schools with an excuse for why some students are not achieving academic success.

Understanding that the presence of a parental language learner as a role model at home can be a factor in how English language learners progress at school should encourage teachers to develop an understanding of each student’s home language environment and then use that understanding to help students appreciate and draw upon the resources that they have access to at home or, when necessary, to understand that the school may have to provide alternative resources, accommodations and modifications to support that student’s identity and efforts as a language learner. This kind of differentiated instruction is at the core of good teaching, but in order to know what differences need to be addressed, teachers need to know what differences matter when it comes to student achievement and how to identify those meaningful differences in individual learners.

**Study limitations and future research**

This study is based on a single measure of students’ reading achievement. The established reliability and validity of the EQAO assessment makes this a valuable measure, but further work is needed to provide measures provide both broader and deeper insights into the reading skills of these CBEL2 learners. In addition, it will be important to gather more information about learners representing a wider range of socio-economic, geographic and linguistic backgrounds than was possible to survey in the small number of interviews conducted for this study. The confirmation of an achievement gap between Canadian-born English language learners and their immigrant and native-English-speaking peers is an important finding of this
study, but in doing so, new questions are raised. Most significant is the need to determine the distinct learning needs of these young English language learners who are learning to read English at the same time as their classmates, but drawing from a very different linguistic foundation. For too long it’s been assumed that because they were learning to read at the same time as their peers, that their literacy development would follow the same trajectory, but data from this study calls this assumption to question. Further research into the role of oral language proficiency in the development of reading skills and the cross-linguistic transfer of oral language skills would greatly inform teachers’ practice and the theoretical framework that underpins studies of second language literacy. Further research on factors identified in this study could provide insights and information about relevant information to gather about a student’s linguistic development and proficiency as well as suggesting or evaluating models of program support designed to address the specific needs of under-achieving CBEL2 students, thereby narrowing or eliminating the achievement gap that affects a significant number of Ontario learners.

The possibility of a relationship between parents’ language learning attitudes and experiences and their child’s academic success also calls for further investigation of these influences and the possible relationships between students’ home language experiences and their English literacy levels.

Conclusions

While analyses of the relationships between students’ home language use and their academic achievement resolve the apparent contradiction with research on bilingualism, they also raise a number of questions for educators about how to assess and equitably support the English language learning needs of students from a variety of home language environments, which, while beyond the scope of the school’s influence, confer advantages to some students and add significant challenges to others. A more informed understanding of these advantages and challenges was key to this study’s investigation how students’ literacy development is shaped by the home language environment and critical to educators interested in responding to the language learning needs of their students. The study’s findings also call for further development of the theoretical frameworks underpinning current understandings of the links between oral language and second language literacy development as well as the role that attitudes and examples of
language learning at home might play in young English language learners efforts to learn English and maintain their first language.

The difficulties in identifying Canadian-born English language learners and the lack of a systematic process for doing so in Ontario is a significant block to answering the study’s research question about why these learner might be poorer readers than their classmates. None of the students interviewed self-identified nor were they identified in school reports as an English language learner even though the teachers of the three lowest achieving students had observed that their English language proficiency was poor. Systematic collection of information about the languages spoken and heard at home, similar to the multiple choice questions on the EQAO Student Questionnaire, would be a simple screening tool to assist schools, particularly those with a large number of Canadian-born EL2 students, in understanding the linguistic resources and challenges that are available to students at home. Collected annually, this information could identify students for further assessment of English language proficiency as well as inform teachers’ program planning. This information could assist teachers in understanding the linguistic resources available to a student in languages other than English and in assisting parents in ways that they could support their child’s literacy development in English by drawing on all of the linguistic resources available to them.

At the school or school board level, annual collection and analyses of this home language information could deepen understanding of the dynamics of home language use and help educators focus support more appropriately especially during a child’s early years in school when they experience rapid changes in language dominance and are increasingly vulnerable to loss of proficiency in their first language. Systematic collection of this data could also provide valuable information to schools, parents and cultural communities about how to effectively support bilingualism at home.

Whether new models of support are developed or existing models are extended or modified, it is important that there be a system to describe and document various models of ESL program support in order for schools, parents and policy makers to better understand and plan for improvements in student learning and teaching. The lack of systematic procedures to identify these students, assess their needs and provide appropriate support may be one of the reasons that students in this group show, on average, lower levels of academic achievement than their peers
with different birth country/first language backgrounds. The results of this study provide important insights into how schools can both efficiently and effectively identify young English language learners and gather information about students’ home language environment in order to help schools develop and implement programs of support that are focused on students’ language learning needs and build upon, rather than duplicate or falsely assume, linguistic resources that are already available to the student.
References


Ontario Ministry of Education. (2007a) *English language learners, ESL and ELD programs and services: Policies and procedures for Ontario elementary and secondary schools, K to 12.* Toronto, ON; Queen’s Printer for Ontario.


October 20, 2010

Principal Name
Principal,
School and address

Dear School Principal,

In addition to my work as a classroom teacher at XXXX School, I am a Master’s student at the OISE of the University of Toronto. In my thesis research I am interested in the reading achievement of students who are born in Canada, but report a first language other than English. Several analyses of EQAO data have shown that this cohort of students is underachieving relative to both their Canadian-born and immigrant peers, despite predictions that they should enjoy some cognitive benefits of bilingualism. One part of the study explores the role that the home language environment plays in young students’ literacy achievement. The study design includes interviews with at least 4 and as many as 8 students and at least one of their parents to learn more about their home language use. The TDSB External Research Review Committee has granted approval for this study.

As you know, more than half of XXXX School’s kindergarten students belong to this cohort of students. I am writing to request your support in allowing me to contact parents of XXXX School students to invite their participation in the study. Results of both parts of the study should provide the school and its community with insights into how to better understand and support these students.

Specifically, I am seeking your permission to send invitation letters, prepared by myself, home with all Grade 4 students, and to collect response in an envelope in the school office. I would also like to request the use of a non-classroom space in the school, for interviews with students and/or parents, depending on parent preference and availability. Interviews would be conducted outside of school hours. All communications with and materials sent to teachers, students and parents will emphasize that participation in this study is voluntary, that participants may withdraw at any time and for any reason, and that all information collected will be strictly confidential and stored securely. No individuals will be
identified in discussions or reports of the data.

If you agree to this request, parent and student volunteers would be solicited in October. Interviews would begin as soon as consent is obtained with an expected completion date of January 2011. Analysis and writing would continue through the spring and summer of 2011. Final results will be available by September 2011. I would be most interested in sharing the results of this research with you, XXXX School staff and interested members of our community in whatever forum you think appropriate.

If you have any questions about this request, please do not hesitate to contact me, or my thesis advisor Eunice Jang Ph.D. at eun.jang@utoronto.ca or (416) 978-0296 or the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273. I look forward to hearing from you about whether XXXX School is able to participate in this initiative.

Sincerely,

Martha McGloin
Martha.mcgloln@tdsb.on.ca
Appendix B

(school letterhead)

October 22, 2010

Dear Grade 4 Parent/Guardian(s),

Our school has agreed to participate in a study of Canadian-born students who have a first language other than English. The study will be investigating students’ home language development and use and possible relationships with early reading skills. The Principal Investigator of this study is a XXXXX School teacher, Martha McGloin, who is conducting the study to complete her M.A. in Second Language Education at OISE/UT. The TDSB External Research Review Committee has granted approval for this study.

Families that include a student who is currently in Grade 4 and who was born in Canada and whose first language was other than English are welcome to participate in this study. The study will involve interviews with four to eight students and at least one parent of each student. Interviews will take about one hour each and will include questions about home language development and use. All information collected will be strictly confidential.

If your family has a Grade 4 student who meets that conditions above and if you are interested in learning more about participating in this study, please return the response form below no later than Friday October 29.

Many thanks for your assistance with this effort.

Sincerely,

(name)

Principal
Canadian Born English Language Learners Learn to Read

Please complete this form and return it to the school office with your son or daughter.

☐ I am interested in learning more about participating in this study.

My child ____________________________ is currently in Grade _____.

(child’s name)

He/she was born in Canada    Yes   No (circle one)

The first language that my child understood and spoke is ___________________.

Child’s Name and Class: ________________________________

Parent/Guardian Name ________________________________

Please contact me by telephone. Telephone Number ________________

Please contact me by e-mail. E-mail address ________________

I would like to have an interpreter provide more information about this study.

Language______________________________
Appendix C

(school letterhead)

Ngày 13, tháng 12, năm 2010

Kính thưa phụ huynh học sinh,

Trường của chúng tôi hiện đang đảm nhiệm một cuộc tham khảo ý kiến với đề tài ngôn ngữ của các học sinh sinh tại Canada nhưng tiếng mẹ đề không phải là tiếng Anh.

Cuộc tham khảo sẽ được bà Martha McGloin đảm nhiệm.

Những gia đình có con em đang ở trình độ lớp 4 và sinh trưởng tại Canada với ngôn ngữ mẹ đề không phải là tiếng Anh đều có thể tham gia trong cuộc tham khảo này.

Bà McGloin sẽ nói chuyện trực tiếp với học sinh cùng cha hoặc mẹ. Cuộc phỏng vấn cần khoảng 1 tiếng về đề tài phát triển ngôn ngữ và xử dụng hàng ngày trong sinh hoạt gia đình.

Tất cả tài liệu ghi nhận đảm bảo sẽ được giữ kín.

Xin quý vị vui lòng giúp đỡ chúng tôi trong đề tài này, xin điện vào đơn dưới đây và nộp lại trường trước ngày 17 tháng 12, 2010.

Chân thành cảm ơn,

(Principal's Name)
Appendix D

December 16, 2010

Dear :

I am a Master’s student at the OISE of the University of Toronto as well as a teacher at XXXX School. I am interested in the reading progress of students, born in Canada, who first spoke a language other than English. I am doing a research study about how students’ home language might affect their reading in English.

To help me better understand the relationship between home language use and reading progress, I would like to interview you and your child about the languages you speak at home. Upon your consent, each interview will take about one hour and an audio recording will be made of each interview. Interviews will include questions about the languages spoken at home, reading habits and interests, parents’ languages, computer use and school achievements. Interviews will be outside of regular school. If you wish, an interpreter will be provided.

This research is not about your child’s progress at school and there are no consequences from the information being gathered that could affect your son or daughter or his or her school grades. I anticipate that there will be benefits for your child as a result of participating in the project. For example, in thinking about how he or she uses language at home, your child may be better able to understand how speaking another language can help him with reading English.

Participation in this project is voluntary. You and/or your child can refuse to answer any of the questions. If you decide to participate, you or your child may withdraw from the project at any time and for any reason. All the information obtained during this study will be confidential. If you or your child decide to
withdraw from the project, all information collected from you/her/him will be removed from the data and destroyed. In reports or discussions of the study, confidentiality and anonymity will be ensured by the falsification of the participants’ names and other identifying details.

The External Research Review Committee of the TDSB has granted approval for this study. (Principal’s name) has also given permission for this study to be carried out at XXXXXX School. Should you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this project, please contact my thesis advisor, Dr. Eunice Jang at eun.jang@utoronto.ca or (416) 978-0296 or the University of Toronto Ethics Review Office at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request. If you have any questions about the project, I am happy to speak with you. If you are willing to give permission for you and your child to participate in this study, please read and sign the attached consent form. You will receive a copy of the consent form for your record.

Sincerely,

Martha McGloin

(###) ###-####
Parental/Guardian Consent Form

Please complete this form and return it to

I have read the information letter that describes the Canadian Born English Language Learners Learn to Read study. I understand that all information shared by me and my child will be kept confidential and secure, and the data will be destroyed after a period of three years. I also understand that my child and/or I may withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Please select one option:

☐ I agree to allow participate with my child in the Canadian Born English Language Learners Learn to Read study. I am willing to have Ms. McGloin contact me to arrange a time and location for our interviews.

I do not agree to participate in the Canadian Born English Language Learners Learn to Read study.

Child’s Name: ________________________________________________

Parent/Guardian Name __________________________________________

Parent/Guardian Signature: _______________________________________

Date: ________________________________

Please contact me by telephone. Telephone Number

Please contact me by e-mail. E-mail

I would like to have an interpreter present for the interview.

Language

Please return this portion of the form in the enclosed envelope
Appendix E

Parent Interview Outline

Where was _____________ born?

Who was in the household when _____________ was a baby?

What is the first language that _____________ heard? who/where

What is the first language that _____________ spoke?

What do you remember about her first words?

Other children in the household?
birth order, ages, birthplace and language when _____________ was pre-school?

Now . . . Who lives in your household? (role, ages)

What languages are heard at home . . . describe

What languages are read/written in the home . . examples

What do you remember about the first language that (child’s name) learned?

Describe how you’ve seen _____________’s language change since she started school.

How do you feel about how her language has changed?

How does _____________ do in school?

Attitude? Grades? EQAO?

How do you think that knowing first language affects your child in school? In what ways?

What languages do you speak? (proficiency, preference, purpose)

What is the first language that you learned?

How did you learn other languages?

Does your household have any “rules” about language use at home?

Do you think it’s important for your children to maintain or improve their first language? Why?

(if relevant) What are some of the ways you have tried to help your child help or improve their first language?

Results? Challenges

How do you think that the school can help your child value, maintain or improve their first language?

Do you read to/with your child? language/genre/frequency

Do you read at home? language/genre/frequency

Do you use a computer? Work? Home? Language?
Appendix F

Student Interview Outline

Where were you born? (country) ____________________

What is the first language that you learned to understand and speak? ________

What grade are you in now?

What is your favourite subject at school . . . why?

What languages do you hear at home? From whom? About what?
(parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, TV, iPod computer . . .)

What languages do you speak at home? From whom? About what?
(parents, grandparents, siblings, friends, TV, iPod computer . . .)

What languages do you read at home? Media? Purpose?
(school, pleasure, computer, newspaper, food packages, letters, e-mail)

What languages do you write at home? Media? Purpose?
(school, pleasure, computer, newspaper, food packages, letters, e-mail)

What is the first language you remember learning? What do you remember?

Do you still know how to understand/speak/read/write first language?

How does (first language) help you with English?

When do you use first language when you’re in school?

Are you a good reader? Why?

What do you read at home? Language/genre/medium

What do you read at school? language/genre/medium

Do you use a computer at home? For what?

Do you remember writing the EQAO?? How did you do?

What do your report cards say about your reading? Reading Marks???