All Students Are English Language Learners:

Strategies To Better Accommodate English Language Learners in Traditional Secondary Classrooms

By

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Abstract:

The number of non-native English-speaking students is on the rise in Canadian schools, yet there is evidence to suggest that many teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach to an increasingly diverse group of students, which is certainly a cause for concern. This study examines certain issues surrounding the education of English Language Learners (ELLs) in Canadian schools and provides readers with some practical suggestions on how best to both integrate and accommodate the growing number of linguistically diverse students who will be entering Canadian classrooms.

Key words: English Language Learner (ELL), English as a Second Language (ESL), multiliteracies, multicultural education, integration, literacy, differentiated instruction, collaboration.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction

Presently, there are many programs for ESL students, but because of social, political, and economic factors, many ESL students spend only a portion of their day in the ESL or bilingual classroom. The rest of their day is spent in the mainstream classroom, yet classroom teachers are generally not prepared to integrate these students.

The above quotation from Nancy Clair’s (1995) examination of mainstream classroom teachers and English as a Second Language (ESL) students suggests that there are two major failings in ESL education today that need to be confronted. First, although many programs do exist for ESL students, they are not being properly utilized for reasons that remain largely unclear. Students do not receive the attention and assistance they require from ESL programs due to certain social, political, and economic factors that prevent students from receiving the kind of support that is necessary to succeed. Second, although students are spending the majority of their days in mainstream classrooms in the hopes of being successfully accommodated and integrated, the integration is not being carried out effectively (Clair, 1995). Students are unable to receive the attention they require because their teachers are unprepared to teach them. Teachers often either lack the training required or they lack the support and materials necessary to successfully integrate students effectively. These are both serious failings in ESL education and they need to be explored further before one can begin to develop any possible solutions to the problems.

The underlying problem behind ESL education seems to be that teachers are not being adequately prepared to teach English Language Learners (ELLs) and that they lack the resources to do so effectively. Instead, there is too much emphasis placed on the “general-purpose” mainstream classroom as it is and not enough attention is being paid to
providing teachers with the training they need to differentiate instruction to successfully assist English Language Learners.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study explores issues in additional language education from the perspectives of several experienced educators who have worked with non-native English-speaking students. Each educator has several years of teaching experience and has specifically worked with non-native English-speaking students for many of those years. In order to better understand this study, there are several terms that readers need to be familiar with. The first term, English as a Second Language (ESL), refers to the study and/or use of English by individuals who speak native languages other than English. The second term, English as an Additional Language (EAL), refers to English language acquisition as an additional language rather than just a ‘second’ language. It does not assume that English is a learner’s second language. Although ESL is a term that many people may be familiar with, in more recent literature it is becoming less common. The final term, and my preferred term, is English Language Learner (ELL). This term refers to the individuals, rather than to courses or the study of the usage of language. Each of these terms is important because they are frequently used throughout this study. It is important for me to note at this time that, although English Language Learner is my preferred term to use when referring to non-native English-speaking students, I do make reference to ‘ESL’ students as well. This is often because either my interview participant had used the term or because the literature I refer to has used the term. If the term ‘ESL’ was used, I did not want to alter the text so that it read ‘ELL’ instead. In common usage, ESL generally refers to the subject, whereas ELL refers to the individuals.
This study is important to the educational community because it is extremely relevant to today’s classroom teachers. Especially in major urban city centers, teachers will find that more often than not, many of their students will speak a first language other than English. For that reason, I have largely chosen to situate my study within the context of Toronto and all of my interview participants were found within the Toronto area. I do, however, refer to literature within a wider context and each of my participants does have experience working with students outside of the city of Toronto. Although this study will be important to all teachers of ELLs, I believe that it will be of particular importance to teachers within major urban city centers.

In major urban city centers, the number of ELLs in classrooms is on the rise. According to the Toronto District School Board’s website: “More than 50% of students in the TDSB [currently] speak a language other than English at home” (Toronto District School Board, 2013). What this study will aim to do is identify several failings in ESL education and offer practical suggestions and strategies that teachers can implement in their own classrooms in order to better assist their English Language Learners. Much of the literature currently available in regards to teaching English Language Learners seem to suggest that teachers generally do not feel adequately prepared to teach ELLs or do not feel qualified to successfully integrate them into their classrooms (Clair, 1995; Reeves, 2006; O’Brien, 2011; Cummins, 2006). I believe that this is one of the most significant challenges currently facing the advancement of English language education for non-native English speakers. If teachers do not feel that they are qualified to successfully integrate English Language Learners or do not feel that they possess the tools or support necessary to do so, they will feel uncomfortable in the attempt, or might even resist
establishing these types of pedagogies in their classrooms. I believe that it is with this issue in mind that this study needs to begin. After examining this concern, I believe it will be easier to begin exploring solutions to this concern and to provide practical suggestions on how to implement those solutions in the traditional classroom setting.

The purpose of this study, then, will be to investigate ELL education more broadly by exploring some of the many challenges surrounding ELL education as well as the successes of teachers who have worked with ELL students. In order to do this, this study will examine the first hand accounts of three experienced Ontario teachers. It will consider some of issues that many teachers often experience when attempting to successfully integrate English Language Learners into their mainstream classrooms as well as some of the processes of teachers who have been successful in integrating ELL students into mainstream classrooms. The study will also seek to provide its readers with realistic and successful practices for integrating these students both through an examination of the current literature on the subject and through personal interviews with three extremely experienced ESL teachers.

**Research Question**

In order to better answer the larger question of this study, “What are some practical strategies for teachers hoping to better assist their English Language Learners in mainstream classrooms?” I will examine and expand upon the current literature on the subject of English language education for non-native English speakers by exploring the current attitudes held by teachers of ELLs; by looking at what training is available for pre-service teachers; and by providing suggestions for some promising strategies that successful ESL have applied in their own classrooms. In order to answer this larger
question and offer suggestions, I will examine several sub questions. First, I will address the level of preparation of classroom teachers expected to teach English Language Learners within a traditional classroom setting. It will primarily look at the kind of pre-service training teachers who do not take additional ESL education courses receive and comment on how this affects their teaching. Second, I will examine questions about the kinds of resources that are available to classroom teachers, looking at what resources may be available but not always utilized. Third, it will examine the attitudes of mainstream classroom teachers who work with English Language Learners. It will comment on the ways in which the attitudes of teachers influence the way they teach their students. Fourth, it will examine questions about whether or not teacher collaboration is a beneficial and necessary step in the creation of lessons that will successfully integrate non-English speaking students into mainstream classroom settings. Finally, this study will explore questions about how teachers have attempted to integrate English Language Learners into mainstream classrooms and whether or not those attempts were successful.

**Background of Researcher**

As a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto, I was required to think about what areas in education that I wanted to study in more depth. In order to do this, I first thought back to my entrance application to the program and what areas I had initially expressed interest in studying. The first area I wanted to explore was differentiated instruction, but in a very broad sense. I knew that differentiated instruction was important to me, but I did not know how much the topic would need to be narrowed down. The second area I wanted to examine were certain marginalized groups in education. Although I had not
determined which groups in particular I would later focus on, I knew that looking at marginalized groups in education was something that I was interested in. It was through this re-examination of the topics that first drew me to the program that I eventually developed my current topic: English language education of non-native English speakers. I ultimately decided that I wanted to examine the treatment of English Language Learners in education and look at reasons for that treatment. I also wanted to propose some promising strategies that may be used to assist English Language Learners within mainstream classroom settings through the use of differentiated instruction.

I first really began to understand the importance of differentiated instruction when I was in my last year of high school. I took a peer tutoring class as one of my final credits for the year. Throughout the course, I had the opportunity to complete a series of personality tests and eventually I discovered what type of learner I am and how I learn best. This was an enlightening experience for me since I had never before considered just how different the learning process is for each individual or the fact that each individual learns best in a different fashion. This really made me realize that the “one size fits all” approach to education was just not an acceptable way to teach students; especially when those students come from such diverse backgrounds. How can we expect different and unique individuals with varying traits to be able to learn in one set (“cookie cutter”) way? It cannot be done. Just as our students are individuals, the ways in which they learn need to be individualized as well. So many factors need to be taken into consideration when teaching diverse groups of students and one of the most important factors is language.

For the most part, Canada strives to be a country that encourages the diversity and multiculturalism of its citizens. In 1971, Canada became the first country in the world
to adopt multiculturalism as an official policy, affirming “the value and dignity of all Canadian citizens regardless of their racial or ethnic origins, their language [my italics], or their religious affiliation” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2013). According to this policy, all citizens, regardless of their background, should be valued and receive the same opportunities as every other citizen. The same policies should be applied to education as well. All students should be valued, treated with dignity, and receive the same opportunities to succeed as other students. This is why I believe teachers need to be able to differentiate instruction in order to accommodate students with limited English proficiency. As the non-English speaking population grows, teachers need to be able to modify lessons in order to adequately integrate English Language Learners successfully into mainstream classrooms, providing them with the same opportunities and education as native English speakers.

Although I, personally, grew up speaking English and therefore did not struggle with English language acquisition (as a new language) myself, I know from my father and from other relatives just how challenging learning English as an additional language can be. I also know how challenging being immigrant to a new country can be and how drastically it can affect a person’s education. My father and his family moved to Canada in 1960 from Italy at a time when immigrants were not really valued or given the assistance they required in order to successfully integrate into English-speaking classrooms. None of my family members spoke any English and they struggled a great deal to integrate into Canadian classrooms. So, from listening to the stories of my relatives, I realize the importance of giving all students the opportunity to achieve success in school and realize how important it is to accommodate English Language Learners in
the classroom. It is with this understanding that I have been led to this study. This paper will explore English language acquisition and why differentiating instruction is essential to the success of students. It will examine certain failures within the ESL/EAL system and provide practical suggestions for educators when it comes to better assisting English Language Learners in mainstream secondary classrooms.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Traditionally, English Language Learners have been treated with a lack of respect within parts of North America. In the earlier half of the twentieth century, immigrants to the United States and bilinguals were not held in very high regard and any effort to support English Language Learners was considered the needless “pampering” of immigrants rather than a necessary part of the integration process (Hakuta, 2011). Interestingly, bilingualism was not greeted with much encouragement either and many people saw bilinguals as members of the lower classes of society. In the 1920s and 1930s there was even a negative stigma associated with bilingualism; people believed that bilingual children suffered a language handicap and that these children were not as intelligent as non-bilingual children (Hakuta, 2011). This opinion presented a stark contrast to the predominant opinions in Canada. Canadians saw the value in bilingualism and encouraged the immersion of English Language Learners into Canadian society (Hakuta, 2011). In spite of this sponsorship, however, there were (and still are) many failings in education systems when it comes to the successful immersion of English Language Learners (ELLs) into mainstream classrooms. This paper will examine some of those failings in greater detail later.

English Language Learners are becoming a more and more prominent fixture in today’s schools, with numbers rapidly increasing each year. Several researchers have attempted to estimate ELL population growth and have come up with somewhat varied results. Theoharis and O’Toole (2011) estimate that overall approximately 20% of all public school students do not speak English as their first language. They note that, as a
result, many ELLs are now currently enrolled in classrooms and schools that have not needed to serve such linguistically diverse learners in the past (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011). The problems that may arise as a result of this will be discussed later in this paper. The authors then go on to estimate that by 2050, the current (as of 2011) ELL population is expected to double. In this time, they expect that most, if not all, teachers are likely to teach ELLs. In some regions, like Toronto, the ELL population is already much greater than this. As previously mentioned, the Toronto District School Board estimates that as of 2014 over 50% of its students speak a first language other than English (Toronto District School Board, 2013).

Linan-Thompson and Ortiz (2009) do not provide a glimpse into future ELL populations but do examine past growth patterns. They explain that between the years of 2005 and 2006, there were approximately 5 million ELLs in United States public schools. That, they claim, illustrates a 58% increase from 1995-1996 (Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2009). In just one year, the ELL population increased by 2.9 million people. Helfrich and Bosh (2011), describe growth trends of English Language Learners both past and present. They note an increase of 118% between 1979 and 1999 and estimate that the ELL population will increase by 8% between 2006 and 2018. According to information that the authors received from Development Associates, 43% of teachers reported that they had worked with ELLs during the 2001-2002 school year (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). Many teachers have already worked with ELLs today and many more can be expected to do so as well in the future.

Although the results are somewhat varied when it comes to estimates and population growth, one point is clear: the ELL population has grown and is still growing,
and it will continue to grow in the years to come. It is for this reason that it is so important that teachers be adequately prepared to effectively teach these students in mainstream classrooms and why this paper will explore some effective strategies that have been implemented successfully by classroom teachers when assisting and integrating English Language Learners into their classrooms.

**Differentiated Instruction**

It is clear that the English Language Learner population is growing and that it will continue to grow. This means that there is a high likelihood that both present and future teachers will eventually see an increase in English Language Learners in their own classrooms and it also means that they will need to be prepared for this increase. So, how does one successfully accommodate and integrate these students into mainstream classrooms? I, like many others, believe that the first step to answering this question lies within differentiated instruction. The main approach to implementing differentiated instruction, according to van Garderen and Whittaker (2006), is to systematically plan both curriculum and instruction to meet the needs of academically diverse learners. In order to do this, a teacher needs to honour each student’s individual needs by maximizing every student’s learning capacity. They expand by saying that differentiated instruction can occur within one of five possible classroom elements. These elements include: content, process, product, affect, and learning environment (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). Instruction may then be differentiated further based on three student characteristics. The first, readiness, is determined by assessing a student’s current knowledge, skill, and understanding in relation to what is being studied. The second characteristic, interest, is determined by examining where a student’s interests lie in
relation to what students prefer to learn about, think about, or do. The final characteristic, learning profile, refers to a student’s preferred model of learning (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006).

These definitions and examples provide readers with an explanation of what differentiated instruction is and what factors need to be considered in order to implement it in the classroom. It is important to have this background knowledge and to realize that English Language Learners are a very diverse group of learners and that their individual needs should be considered as much as the needs of other diverse groups. Diverse learners will require differentiated methods of instruction (Helfrich and Bosh, 2011), so teachers need to be familiar with the ways in which they may differentiate their instruction. Lewis and Batts (2005) sum up their approach to differentiating instruction in three simple words: adjust, adjust, adjust. They suggest that educators need to be able to adjust the curriculum, not change it. The three areas they list for adjustment include: content, process, and product. The content refers to what is being taught; the process refers to the thinking activities that teachers complete with students; and the product refers to the result or the end product, which will show what a student has learned (Lewis & Batts, 2005). One example they offer is having the teacher choose a specific theme for students to study and then having each student select a novel that they believe to be within their own reading level. Teachers would then monitor these choices to ensure that they are appropriate, but for the most part students will be able to read what they feel comfortable with, which ensures that they are confident and successful in their task (Lewis & Batts, 2005). This is just one of the many possible ways in which teachers may adjust activities in order to suit the individual needs of a diverse group of students. This
type of activity helps to ensure that teachers are effectively adjusting the activity and materials to meet student needs initially, rather than later (Lewis & Batts, 2005), which as van Garderen and Whittaker (2006) suggest is a more appropriate approach to modifying an activity.

Collaboration

One very common suggestion in the current literature on how to successfully integrate English Language Learners into mainstream classrooms includes teacher collaboration. Theoharis and O’Toole (2011) devote a large portion of their study to an examination of the role of the principal in teacher collaboration, citing strong leadership as an important attribute of successful schools with effective ELL programs. They credit the principal as the most influential person when it comes to the long-term success of these types of collaborative programs (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011), indicating the importance of administrators in the collaborative process. The authors later go on to explain that although the principal may be a key player in the success of these programs, the most successful programs for ELLs involve a schoolwide effort involving both principals and staff (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011). While the principal may act as a leader, the success of a program really relies upon the collaboration of the entire team. The teachers and principals in any school need to work together as a team in order to create a learning environment that will meet the individual needs of all English Language Learners based on the diversity of their needs (Theoharis & O’Toole, 2011).

Both van Garderen and Whittaker (2006) and Clair (1995) further examine the role of teachers in the collaborative process. Clair (1995) emphasizes the importance of critical reflection by teachers in order to understand the complexity of their situations.
She suggests that teachers take part in ongoing study groups. In this way, they will be taking responsibility for their own professional development by generating and responding to questions within their groups. Clair (1995) underlines the importance of these types of study groups but worries about teacher resistance based on the fact that these groups are a break from the norm (Clair, 1995). Regardless, she maintains the importance of collaborative groups and offers these study groups as an alternate approach to solving the issue of determining how ELLs might be successfully integrated into mainstream classrooms (Clair, 1995).

Like Clair, van Garderen and Whittaker (2006) also highlight the importance of teacher collaboration but instead suggest the use of Unit Planners to make collaboration more successful. They suggest that Unit Planners can help teachers remain organized and will therefore more effectively allow teachers to plan lessons that meet the needs of all their students. This is possible because teachers will be able to recognize that both the strategies and materials that are required by students with special needs can also be helpful to other students (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). Teachers can then collaborate and exchange these Unit Planners to help each other create effective strategies for integration whiledifferentiating their instruction.

One key factor about collaboration is that it needs to be ongoing. It is not enough, explain Linan-Thompson and Ortiz (2009), that teachers and principals get together one time to develop a plan that they believe will meet the needs of their English Language Learners, instead programs need to provide ongoing opportunities for collaboration. The most successful programs provide continuous opportunities for all those involved (Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2009). Another aspect of this collaborative program, according to
the authors, is that each individual plays a unique role and has a unique contribution to make. They also extend the collaborative roles to include other educational professionals such as educational psychologists or content-area specialists. The collaboration of teachers and principals with these individuals will increase the success of programs like these (Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2009).

Finally, Roessingh and Douglas (2012) take a somewhat different approach and offer an alternate suggestion for collaborative partners. They discuss the importance of academic language a great deal throughout their article and suggest that post-secondary institutions (including universities, colleges, and technical schools) need to work more closely with feeder high schools in order to ensure smoother transitions for English Language Learners entering into these post-secondary institutions (Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). This is a possibility that certainly warrants further examination.

*Teacher Attitudes Towards Mainstreaming English Language Learners*

An important theme to consider when examining English language education of non-native English speakers is teacher attitudes. The attitudes towards the mainstreaming of English Language Learners are somewhat varied amongst teachers, with some teachers viewing it positively and others expressing some uncertainties or even negativity. These attitudes need to be examined further in order to better understand potential causes for the failings in ESL education. However, there is currently little literature specifically available on the topic. Some researchers touch upon the topic briefly, but few make teacher attitudes the basis of their studies. This is unfortunate since teacher attitudes can have a large impact on the way English Language Learners are taught in mainstream schools. Reeves’ study (2006) attempts to compensate for this rather notable gap in
literature in regards to the integration of English Language Learners into mainstream classrooms by basing much of her study on the topic. According to her study, teachers react either positively or neutrally to the idea of accepting ESL students into the classroom or working with ESL students in general. However, most seem to feel unprepared to do so. Not only this, but while most teachers seem to feel comfortable with the idea of welcoming English Language Learners into the classroom, some felt that they lacked the time it requires to do so effectively (Reeves, 2006). Another interesting point raised by Reeves’ study is that teachers were very particular about the kinds of modifications they provided students. Most felt that it was acceptable to provide ELLs with extra time when completing assignments, but many felt that coursework should not be simplified or reduced. There were concerns that these types of modifications would threaten the integrity of the work (Reeves, 2006). This belief is closely aligned with Hakuta’s (2011) opinion that language-minority students should have equal opportunities to complete challenging and meaningful work (Hakuta, 2011). Student work should not be watered down for students just because English is not their first language. All students should be able to derive the same value out of class work.

*Need For Further Preparation*

As was briefly mentioned previously, one major challenge that teachers face when teaching and integrating English Language Learners is a lack of training and many teachers are of the opinion that they have not been adequately prepared to effectively teach these students (Clair, 1995; Reeves, 2006; O’Brien, 2011; Cummins, 2006). Lack of training, according to O’Brien (2011), is among the greatest of challenges that educators face when teaching English Language Learners. Many educators believe that
the limited training they did receive was of poor quality (O’Brien, 2011). Reeves (2006) further describes this lack of training by explaining that approximately only 12.5% of U.S. teachers received 8 hours or more of training to teach English Language Learners (Reeves, 2006). Other teachers, according to Cummins, had to obtain most of their knowledge “on the job” (Cummins, 2006).

Clair (1995) places some of the blame for the lack in teacher training on the teaching institutions themselves. She believes that teacher education programs do not adequately prepare teachers to work with linguistically and culturally diverse students (Clair, 1995). The teacher training programs where the training to work with diverse students should begin, but institutions often ignore this area of study altogether. Clair suggests, therefore, that due to this lack of initial teacher training, in-service professional training needs to take place. Mainstream teachers need to be free to ask questions and gain new knowledge in relation to English Language Learners and they need someone who can provide answers. Even experienced teachers can often be ineffective when it comes to teaching English Language Learners. This is why Clair stresses the need for ongoing professional development (Clair, 1995).

What is perhaps most concerning about the lack of training is that many teachers also show lack any interest in receiving further training. According to Reeves’ study, although many teachers felt as though they were under-trained, many were ambivalent about any further ESL training (Reeves, 2006). This is certainly a cause for concern since it seems to imply that some educators have a lack of interest when it comes to being adequately prepared to each students of limited English proficiency. Just as teachers need
to take part in ongoing collaboration with other educators, they need to take part in ongoing English language teacher training.

**Suggestions: Integration Techniques**

There are several different suggestions for integration techniques that arise throughout of the current available literature. The following section will offer some promising suggestions for integration that have been suggested by current researchers on the subject of ELL education. As discussed earlier in greater detail, differentiating instruction is the key to successfully integrating English Language Learners into mainstream classrooms. Teachers need to be able to adjust their practices in order to suit the needs of all students, and in order to do this it is necessary to design activities that meet the needs of all students right at the beginning as opposed to later on (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). This will ensure greater success for students, as they will more immediately be able to complete tasks effectively, rather than continually struggling.

The first suggestion for successful integration comes from van Garderen and Whittaker’s (2006) study of multicultural education. In addition to differentiated instruction, the authors suggest that multicultural education is an essential aspect of education for English Language Learners. This type of education is unique in that it “encompasses curriculum and instruction but extends beyond them to consider the restructuring of all aspects of schooling. Its major goal is to allow students to acquire the knowledge, attitudes, and skills they need to succeed in an ethnically and racially diverse nation and world” (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). This form of education goes beyond the limits of the curriculum to include all aspects of schooling. It is focused on the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that students need in order to succeed in the world
rather than just the content expected of the curriculum. The authors summarize J. A. Banks’ definition of the five major components of multicultural education, which include: content integration, the knowledge construction process, equity pedagogy, prejudice reduction, and the creation of an empowering school culture and social structure (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). Content integration refers to the extent to which educators provide examples and content from various cultures and groups in order to illustrate concepts, principles, and theories. The knowledge construction process focuses on the extent to which teachers help students understand and investigate perspectives, frames of reference, and biases within a discipline and how these factors influence the ways in which knowledge is constructed. Equity Pedagogies come into play when teachers modify their teaching to facilitate the academic achievement of students from diverse backgrounds, including using a variety of teaching styles. Prejudice reduction centers around students’ racial attitudes and how they are altered by teaching methods and materials. Empowering School Cultures and Social Structures refer to components of the school culture that allow students to experience equality and which empower students from diverse cultures (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006). There is emphasis on equity and the creation of a global society (van Garderen & Whittaker, 2006).

The second suggestion for integrating English Language Learners into mainstream classrooms is through sheltered instruction. This method, described by Hansen-Thomas (2008), is specifically designed to ensure that English Language Learners receive work that is both as academically challenging and of the same quality as the work received by native English speakers. This is achieved through a blend of
academic language development and what expert educators deem ‘good teaching’
techniques. Teachers trained in sheltered teaching practice this technique throughout all
disciplines (Hansen-Thomas, 2008). This approach integrates both language and content
instruction and is implemented in two types of mainstream classrooms: classrooms with a
combination of ELLs and native English speakers, or classrooms with only ELLs
(Hansen-Thomas, 2008). What is unique and significant about this form of instruction is
that teachers need to be aware that it is unacceptable to pick and choose whichever
modifications they wish, instead, all features of this type of instruction must be
incorporated (Hansen-Thomas, 2008). The five primary features of sheltered education
include: the use of cooperative learning activities; a focus on academic language and
content vocabulary; use of the student’s first language when appropriate as a tool to assist
the student; the use of hand-on activities; and the explicit teaching and application of
learning strategies (Hansen-Thomas, 2008). Research suggests that teachers trained in
sheltered instruction are more effective and successful overall when teaching ELLs. Not
only is success greater, but students taught in these classes tend to outperform students
not receiving sheltered instruction (Hansen-Thomas, 2008).

The third, and perhaps most obvious suggestion for integration is that teachers
acknowledge the differences of their students. Teachers need to be able to acknowledge
the fact that individual students have individual very needs and that these needs must be
considered throughout instruction. Teachers also need to acknowledge the important role
that the literacies of a student’s culture can play in second (or multiple) language
acquisition. This recognition of multiple literacies, or multiliteracies is based upon the
work of the New London Group (New London Group, 1996). The authors strongly
believe that there is need for a broader view of literacy than that which is provided by traditional ‘language-based’ approaches to linguistic education. To this end, they suggest multiliteracy as a more effective approach to teaching students. Multiliteracy recognizes the need for multiple means of communication and allows students to draw upon their prior literary knowledge and it encourages them to bring this prior knowledge into the classroom and use them as tools to help them acquire English (New London Group, 1996).

It is important that teachers actively work to apply the above strategies and that they integrate these different aspects of a student’s culture into regular instruction. Teachers should also develop an awareness of the fact that the assessment of a variety of literary skills is necessary and they must be flexible when it comes to assessing these skills (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). It is of the utmost importance that teachers recognize the differences of students and the diversity in the classroom and that they work to incorporate aspects of each student’s culture into classroom assignments and assessments. This final suggestion for successfully integrating English Language Learners into mainstream classrooms is achieved through the acknowledgement of and respect of a student’s previous literary skills (Siegel, 2006; Linan-Thompson & Ortiz, 2009; Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). Siegel (2006) explains that part of the problem for educators of English Language Learners is that the child’s native language is not used as a starting point to build further literary skills. Instead, a student’s original language is frequently ignored (Siegel, 2006). Helfrich and Bosh (2011) take this even further stating that in order for English language instruction to be effective, teachers should allow ELLs to learn English while still preserving their native language. Hakuta (2011) supports this
line of thinking even arguing that instruction in a student’s native language results in greater success for English language acquisition (Hakuta, 2011). However, this might not always be a realistic approach when attempting to integrate students into mainstream classrooms. In summary, teachers need to embrace rather than oppose a student’s native language. As the evidence has proven, students tend to experience more success in English language acquisition when their own native languages are respected.

What each of the above strategies has in common is that they take the backgrounds of the students into consideration. The first method takes the cultural and racial backgrounds of the students into consideration and attempts to provide examples that are relevant to a diverse group of students through all aspects of education. The second method calls upon the background knowledge of students, including first language knowledge, which may then be used as a learning tool. Finally, the third method really takes into account the diversity of students and asks them to apply previous literary skills in their English language acquisition. Rather than discrediting what students already know, as is sometimes the case, each of the above methods encourage students to use their past knowledge as a tool for future language acquisition.

Overview

As the number of English Language Learners in mainstream schools increase, it is important that teachers be adequately prepared to successfully integrate non-English speakers by differentiating their instruction so that they are able to meet the needs of a diverse group of individuals. In order to successfully develop approaches for instruction, it is important that teachers collaborate with each other so that they may learn from and help one another. Collaboration with other professionals in education can be beneficial as
well. Teacher attitudes in regards to the inclusion of ESL students in mainstream classrooms are important to the understanding of potential pitfalls of this form of education and some findings may even suggest that there may need to be a shift in attitude when it comes to being more open to further training. Further and continuous training in regards to teaching students with limited English proficiency is an essential aspect to the professional development of teachers who will be teaching English Language Learners in their classrooms. Each of the above methods has been proven to be successful in the teaching of English Language Learners at one time or another and, therefore, teachers should be open to taking them into consideration before beginning English language education. The more that teachers know about integration techniques and strategies, the better they are likely to be at assisting their students.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This qualitative research project focusing on successful integration techniques for teachers hoping to differentiate instruction for ELLs in mainstream secondary school classrooms was primarily conducted in two ways. First, a literature review concerning the topic of English second (or additional) language education was conducted using a variety of sources. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with three teachers who specialize and/or have experience working with English Language Learners. Third, the data from the interviews was analyzed and the results were compared in an effort to find links between each interview. This chapter will outline in detail the methodology of this study, including: procedures, participants, instruments of data collection, data analysis, ethical review procedures, and limitations.

Procedure

Literature Review

The first stage of the research process for this project was a literature review of some the current literature surrounding English language acquisition and the teaching of English Language Learners. This process was carried out prior to the primary data collection and its purpose was for me familiarize myself with some of the current opinions regarding English Language education for non-native English speakers. After becoming more familiar with the subject, I was able to formulate a series of questions that I had on the topic. I then used these questions to narrow down my search further and began to familiarize myself with some of the effective strategies that ELL teachers have used in order to better support their students. Many of the sources I used for the literature
review came from academic journals and were written by researchers who have actual experience teaching English in a classroom setting. I also referred both to government websites and school board websites through my research to gain a broader perspective of the opinions surrounding the education of English Language Learners in Canada both inside and outside of the classroom. Each of the resources I employed directly focus on multicultural education in some regard.

Data Collection

The second stage of my research involved the conducting of three one-on-one interviews with three very experienced ESL teachers. I used what knowledge I had gained from the literature review and composed a series of interview questions based upon my findings and any additional questions that I had on the subject (Please refer to Appendix A for the list of interview questions). I interviewed three teachers all of whom have many years of experience working with English Language Learners and each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to an hour. Each interview was conducted in a location that was comfortable for the participant and each interview was recorded. I chose to follow a semi-structured style of interview because I wanted to essentially as my participants the same questions, but I also wanted the freedom to ask follow up questions or allow participants to contribute additional information that they believed to be relevant to my study.

Most interview questions were developed early on in my study and underwent several changes in the way that they were worded. The final list of questions was approved by my research supervisor before any of the interviews were conducted (Appendix A). Many questions were designed in the hopes that the responses would
either support or oppose the findings of the literature review. Several interview questions focused on the types of experience each teacher has had working with ELLs both within mainstream classrooms and outside of them. The other interview questions address the many findings of the literature review, including some of the concerns and difficulties experienced by ELL teachers and the teaching strategies and methods that they have found successful. I focused on areas in ELL education that I believed would directly relate to this study.

Data Analysis

After each interview was conducted it was promptly transcribed and meticulously analyzed for common themes and ideas. I organized my data by highlighting common themes and visually grouping data for each theme together in chart form. Since the literature review was used as a guide when constructing interview questions, it was also used as a guide when identifying recurrent themes in the interview data. Many themes that arose in the current literature were also evident in the findings of my interviews. There are five themes or ideas that continued to appear throughout the interviews. The first theme is a lack of preparation when it comes to pre- (or post-) service training for ELL teachers. The second theme is a lack in available resources for ELL teachers. The third theme involves the strategies suggested by each research participants. The fourth theme focuses on the importance of teacher collaboration. The final recurring theme is that teacher attitudes or ideologies have an impact on that teacher’s effectiveness when working with English Language Learners. After thoroughly analyzing the above data, I began selecting quotations from each of my participants to use as supporting evidence throughout the final chapter. When all quotations had been selected, I began writing.
Participants

I interviewed three ELL teachers as a part of this research study. Each of my participants was found with the assistance of my research supervisor since they all work with him in some capacity. I am fortunate that he was able to give me the names and emails of several people who work with English Language Learners and are currently academically involved in English language education. Although none of my participants are currently teaching in high schools at present, I decided to interview each participant due to their rich backgrounds and experiences teaching non-native English speakers. I believed that, although they are not currently teaching in high schools, their unique and specialized experiences with English Language Learners would make them ideal candidates for this study. Having worked with ELLs for so long, I believed that they would likely be more familiar with promising integration strategies than most teachers within mainstream classrooms may have been. I also decided that each participant would be appropriate to interview because of their continuing involvement within a faculty of education at a major Canadian university. To me this indicated their continuing commitment to professional development, which I felt was extremely important in my participants.

The backgrounds of each of my participants are quite diverse. Two of my participants were born outside of Canada and one was born in Canada. Of the two participants who were born outside of Canada (Leyla and Aryan), both learned English as an additional language. John, although he was born in Canada does speak several additional languages as well. In addition to speaking multiple languages, each participant also teaches or has taught English as an additional language both to students both within
Canada and in English language schools outside of Canada. Both John and Aryan are currently pursuing doctoral studies and Leyla is a post-doctoral fellow. They were all willing to share some of their own personal research interests with me throughout their interviews. Each of the participants has several years of experience working with English Language Learners.

I met up with my first participant in a very casual setting at a busy café across from his place of work where we decided it would be best to conduct the interview. John has several years of experience working with ELLs and is currently working as a literacy teacher at a college in Toronto. In the past, he has worked with college English students and has also worked at several English language schools outside of the country. John is not currently employed with any Ontario school board but is OCT (Ontario College of Teachers) certified. He is currently continuing his studies in education as he completes his Ph.D. He was very willing to share his knowledge and practices of teaching ELLs and offered me insight into his own pedagogical practices and beliefs.

I met with my second participant several weeks later at the place where he is completing his education. Like John, Aryan is also completing is Ph.D with a focus on English language education. He currently tutors several students and taught at a language school outside of the country for 8 years. He has worked both with adolescent and adult learners of English. Aryan is OCT certified, but does not currently work for any Ontario school board. We had a lengthy and insightful discussion about his own research interests and his personal philosophies when it comes to teaching English Language Learners.

Finally, I met with my third participant, Leyla, several months after meeting with my first two participants. I had originally intended to include only two participants in this
study, but after participating in a workshop held by Leyla, I decided that I would really like to interview her. So, I ended up interviewing my final participant much later in my research process than I would have liked, but it ended up being worthwhile. Unlike my other two participants, Leyla is not OCT certified but she has received ESL education both inside and outside of Canada. She has taught English both as a foreign language outside of Canada and as an additional language in Canada. She currently teaches at a Canadian university and is a multilingual assessor for a major Canadian school board.

**Ethical Review Procedures**

Upon my initial contact with each of the subjects of my interviews, I informed them how the interview process would take place: they would be asked a series of questions that they could look over before the interview began and their responses would be recorded and then transcribed by me personally. I made it clear that anything discussed throughout the interview would remain absolutely confidential and that their identities would remain a secret. I also informed my participants that pseudonyms would be used any time a participant’s responses were referred during my study in order to ensure each individual’s identity remained confidential. When we met in person, I then made sure to reiterate the conditions of the interview again, ensuring that each participant still felt comfortable continuing with the interview. I made it clear to each interviewee that they were free to withdraw from the study at any point if they so desired. After making terms clear, participants were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix B), confirming that they understood the terms and were comfortable continuing with the interview.
Limitations

Although I believe that the findings of this study will help contribute to the overall literature on the subject of English Language Learners and English language acquisition and that it will provide useful integration strategies for ELL teachers, it is important to recognize that there were certain limitations associated with this study. First, perhaps the most significant limitation was the limited sampling of interview participants involved. Due to time constraints and somewhat limited access to participants, I was only able to conduct three interviews. Regardless, the purpose of this study was to examine some of the issues that arise when teaching English Language Learners, and to provide some practical strategies that teachers may implement in their own classrooms and I believe that the participants I was able to interview contributed several worthwhile strategies.

Another limitation of this study is that each of my participants was located in Toronto at the time of my interviews, so my findings are restricted to only one region. However, it is a positive that each of my participants has experience working in other regions and in other countries with a very diverse group of learners. So, although I met with each of my participants in one limited region it does not necessarily mean that my participants’ experiences are limited.

Finally, a third limitation of this study is that I did not interview any current English Language Learners themselves to get their opinions on the effectiveness of integration strategies, so I did not hear from students whether or not they find current strategies effective. Even though I did not interview any students as a part of this study, two of my interview participants were in fact English Language Learners at some point in
their lives, so they would have been quite familiar with effective strategies from a student’s perspective.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Introduction

The following chapter will outline the overall findings of the data collected from the three interviews conducted with John, Aryan, and Leyla. The chapter will informally discuss some effective strategies for assisting ESL students and will conclude with a more formal discussion of strategies as outlined by the participants. Due to the nature and focus of this research, there are sections that overlap quite a bit. I attempted to expand upon each point within the section that I believed it to be the most relevant.

Both John and Aryan were given identical interview questions and Leyla was given a similar list but with some exclusions. The reason for this is that some questions simply were not relevant to Leyla because of her educational position (please see Appendix A for a list of interview questions). Each of the interviews took approximately 45 minutes to an hour. The participants of this study were each an experienced teacher with several years of experience teaching English Language Learners, either in an ELL classroom environment or within a mainstream classroom (sometimes both). The three participants have experience working with English Language Learners both inside and outside of Canada. In addition to this, each participant also has experience with other areas in education, including: curriculum development, Multilanguage research, and policy experience. Leyla in particular has quite a bit of experience working with board policies since, as was mentioned earlier, she works as a multilingual assessor for the Toronto District School Board. This ensures that each participant is extremely qualified to discuss the teaching of English Language Learners in Ontario school boards. Through the interview coding process several distinct themes emerged or ideas emerged.
Themes:

- Level of Preparation
- Resources
- Attitudes and Pedagogy
- Collaboration
- Strategies

**Level of Preparation**

*Training Received*

All participants in this study were asked what kind of pre-service teacher training they received to help them teach English Language Learners (ELLs) and each responses varied somewhat. John explained that he had received no formal ELL training in his pre-service teacher-training program but that he did take an ESL additional qualification (AQ) course after he had completed his teacher education program. He explained that he found this course to be useful to some degree but expressed his surprise at the fact that he did not examine any student work as a part of that class. Instead, the course was largely based in theory and therefore lacking in other regards. As John explained: “so beneath all these theories, there’s people, and I think that ESL AQ didn’t prepare for that.” He felt that although he was theoretically trained to work with English Language Learners, he was not really prepared to work with them as people.

Like John, Aryan did not receive any pre-service teacher training to work with English Language Learners. Instead, as he explained, much of his ‘training’ came from his own research, which centered on academic writing in English in a multicultural context. Any training he did receive was based upon his own interest and his own pursuit
for knowledge rather than what the ‘system’ (as he calls it) was able to teach him. He expressed his concern that teacher training programs do not focus on ELL education, especially in such large city where he completed his degree. He explained that this is a major failing of school boards, as well since, as a result, many educators are not formally trained to work with ELLs. He described his experiences in Toronto:

What I saw in the schools in Toronto is they’re really far behind what is happening in language schools outside [the city]. Because, I taught ESL in Toronto in private language schools as well, and I think they are doing a much better job than what is happening in Toronto school boards. And, I think most of that is because of training and I think some of that might be because of attitude that ‘these are ESL kids anyway,’ and teaching, for example History, is considered more prestigious than teaching ESL.

Aryan believed that many of the issues that the Toronto District School Board experienced in regards to ELL education are directly linked to the lack of training received by teachers prior to entering the classroom. In order to account for any lack of training he personally received, Aryan has regularly attended conferences that emphasize ELL education for his own professional development. He has attended conferences like these not because he is required to, but because he has a personal interest in teaching English Languages Learners.

Leyla’s experience was somewhat different to that of John and Aryan’s experiences. Both Aryan and John were trained at Ontario teacher’s colleges and received certification from the Ontario College of Teachers (OCT), but Leyla was specifically trained to work with English Language Learners both inside and outside of Canada. She is experienced in working with students in many settings, from an elementary school level to college or university level. This has allowed her to better understand the transitional needs of ELLs. She was first trained to teach English as a Foreign Language
(EFL) and then trained to teach English as a Second Language (ESL). So, unlike the other two participants, Leyla received much more pre-service ELL training, but only because she specifically pursued studies in additional language acquisition. She did not attend an Ontario teacher’s college that failed to teach about additional language acquisition, as was the case with the other two participants.

The above findings indicate that there may be some concerns associated with pre-service teacher education programs in Ontario when it comes to preparing teachers to effectively teach linguistically diverse students. Unless additional education was sought out, the educators in this study did not feel that they were adequately trained to teach English Language Learners effectively. It was only when taking programs designed to specifically teach English Language Learners, or when taking additional qualification courses, or when completing ELL research that the participants of this study received any kind of adequate information about teaching English Language Learners.

**Preparedness**

All of the research participants were asked questions about preparedness when it comes to teaching English Language Learners. John and Aryan were specifically asked how prepared they personally feel when it comes to teaching ELLs and Leyla was asked questions about preparedness in general. When specifically asked if they had ever felt unprepared or underprepared to teach ELLs, both Aryan and John explained that they never feel prepared.

John explained the feeling of being unprepared saying: “I don’t know if I’ll ever be prepared. That’s the ongoing nature of inquiry—of our jobs. It’s an impossible profession”. He explained to me that he has various levels of preparation, but that he
never feels fully prepared. This is due to the ever-changing nature of a teaching position. Every student experiences a class differently and the students in a class change each year, so it is impossible to entirely prepare for a class. Aryan explained this further saying: “the students change, so you fail repeatedly as well. So, I always look at it as, I always feel I’m unprepared and I’m always ready to learn from my students”. He explained to me that since the students change each year, he experienced failures each year as well. The same strategies that worked with some students may not work with others. He explained that although he always feels unprepared, he relies on the help of students. As his students learned from him, he learned from them as well.

When asked questions about preparedness, Leyla addressed issues of a lack of preparation in Ontario school boards, including the Toronto District School Board. She explained the realities of many Toronto schools saying that although some schools are more than adequately prepared to support ELLs, others are not. Schools are not required to have ESL teachers on staff, so many do not. Other times, one ESL teacher will be responsible for more than one school. This means that they will only be at any given school part time, making it difficult to do their jobs.

Leyla also addressed the fact that teacher-training programs in Ontario do not provide ELL education. She explained that a recurring issue in schools is that many mainstream classroom teachers do not know how to support their ELLs. They believe that because they were not trained as ELL teachers, it is not their job to help ELLs. Since they were not trained, they believe that it is not their responsibility to help that student. As a follow up, Leyla explained: “Every teacher needs to be given tools in order to better integrate language instruction and language awareness in all of the subjects that they’re
teaching.” In order to successfully complete their jobs, teachers must be given the resources they need to better assist their students.

The findings of this section indicated that teachers are not given the support, resources, and/or training that they require to effectively teach their English Language Learners. Many teachers feel so unprepared to teach English Language Learners that they believe it is not a part of their job to do so. The above findings also indicated that a lack of training could sometimes make teachers feel as though they were unprepared or underprepared to effectively teach their students.

Resources

Availability of Resources

One common concern that arose throughout each of the interviews was that necessary resources required by teachers of English Language Learners are not always available to them. A major problem identified by both Leyla and John as a cause for the lack of resources available to teachers was that the funding intended for English language programs in schools often goes into other areas of the school. For example, John explained: “oftentimes the funding that’s supposed to go into these [ESL] programs are allocated to other resources. And, because they’re not mandated to use it particularly for that funding…it’s often used for other things.” Leyla gave a similar statement. She described the way in which finding for IEP students is regulated and compared it to ESL funding, saying:

So, it’s [the IEP funding for students] on paper and the school and admin has to make sure that that amount of funding has to be allocated for the needs of that student, but with ESL we don’t have those requirements. So, some schools receive that money for ESL support but they never use it for that, they get books for the library [instead].
Since ELL funding is not regulated the way that IEP funding is, schools often choose to spend that money elsewhere, putting funds towards the school’s other needs which might support the needs of all students, but not specifically ELLs as was intended. What little support ELLs receive is reduced even further by the misuse of funding.

In addition to not using ELL funding as it was intended, many schools also lack the personnel required to assist teachers of English Language Learners. Leyla explained that in addition to schools not always using funding correctly, they are also not required to have ESL-trained teachers on hand to assist mainstream classroom teachers or students. As explained earlier, many specifically trained ESL teachers are responsible for more than one school at a time, so they simply are not able to be everywhere they need to be at one time. Other times, the school will have no support in place at all. Leyla gave an example of when this became a serious problem for a student:

I was in one school the other day, and I was doing an ESL assessment for one of the students...he came to Canada recently and was in grade two and did not receive instruction in SK and grade one in ESL because there was no ESL support, or no ESL classes for them...Now the school was worrying that the student had a learning problem. So, I think the school was not obliged to provide that student an ESL class and I find that problematic.

This student was never granted the English language assistance he required when he arrived in Canada, so later, when his language skills became an issue, the school believed that his struggles were based solely upon a learning disability (it was never disclosed whether or not a learning disability was indeed a factor as well) and not on the possibility that his struggles were based upon his lack of language support.

Another issue identified by Leyla was the lack of communication between schools and parents. She explained:
They [parents] don’t know what is required from their kids so that they can continue to college or university after graduation after completing high school. And, that question comes up again and again, and they don’t know who to go to to receive information. So, I don’t know, I thin there’s really a little bit of a disconnect in terms of the school admin to inform the parents as well as the student about those options.

Many parents do not know what kinds of supports are available to them or their children because they are never told. An even greater issue, perhaps, is that even when parents are aware of the kinds of support they are entitled to, sometimes they still do not get that support. For example, Leyla explained in her interview that getting a translator could sometimes be difficult for parents. Even when they are aware of the fact that they are entitled to a translator, they do not always get one. According to Leyla:

Most parents say that they ask for a translator in order to go to parent-teacher interviews, [but] not all schools provide them. It’s stated in the documents that they should provide them, but they’re usually given the reason that, ‘oh, we couldn’t find a translator for that day’ or ‘there are no translators in your language that can serve our schools’. So they’re given excuses even when the parents are knowledgeable enough to ask for a translator.

Again, this is very concerning. Even when parents are aware of the kinds of services that are (or should be) available to them, excuses are made and they are not provided for. Once again, there is a lack of available resources to assist parents and their children. When there is no positive communication between schools and parents, it also works to isolate the parents of English Language Learners, and when parents are made to feel isolated, the school effectively loses another resource.

*Types of Resources*

In spite of the obvious deficit when it comes to available resources for mainstream classroom teachers who work with English Language Learners, the participants of this study did, however, describe the other sources that they draw upon for
support. Each participant addressed the idea of using the students themselves as resources. They all strongly believed in the idea of using what each student can bring to class as a valuable tool and resource that can then be used to help support that student.

John frequently expressed using the students themselves as resources, saying that the resources should come from the students’ lives and identities. Aryan was of a like mind but expanded further on this concept. He asked students to share parts of their backgrounds, interests, and cultures with him. He explained:

I think my main resources were my students…you have a student from a different culture and language and you just approach them. You tell them that you’re interested to learn about the poets [that they’ve read] and my students always did that. I think they were more than happy to bring resources and went beyond that.

Aryan frequently used his students’ prior knowledge and literacies and had them bring literature that they were familiar with to class. When he realized that his students showed an interest in poetry, he asked those students to share with him the poetry that they had read. He gave them the opportunity to bring their own resources into the class. This approach will be discussed in greater detail later in this study. Aryan believed that the students were the best resource and often did not wait for the ‘system’ to help him find resources. Instead, he used what was available to him: his students.

Like both John and Aryan, Leyla believed that the students and their literacies (e.g. New London Group, 1996) were the best resource when it came to assisting them. She strongly expressed the importance of using a student’s past literacies a resource in her classroom. She suggested the practice of having students try to respond to a problem (for instance, a Math word problem) in their own language first before attempting to respond to it in English. When they had mastered the problem in their own language, it
would be easier to later respond in English. She explained: “So, trying to see what they’re bringing to the classroom as something that enriches the teaching and learning would be the best methodology I think.” She believed it was better to allow students to use their first languages as a resource and tool that can help them in the classroom.

Another resource suggested by Leyla was other students. She expressed the importance of student collaboration and of having students work together. She described situations in which a native English speaker could be paired with an ELL student so that they could work together on projects. She also suggested having other non-native English speaking students who were perhaps more familiar with the language act as translators to other students with the same first language. This way the first student could explain the problem they are trying to solve or question they are trying to answer to the second student in their first language. The first student could then help the second student to articulate a response in English. Overall, she believed that the use of first languages could be a very valuable resource when teaching English Language Learners.

**Attitudes and Pedagogy**

*Pedagogy*

The participants of this study were later asked questions about the kinds of attitudes they encountered while teaching English Language Learners, and from these questions emerged certain glimpses into their own pedagogies and the kinds of pedagogies of teachers who work with English Language Learners. All participants have the same positive attitude when it comes to working with ELLs, haven specifically chosen to work with these types of learners, but some of the pedagogies that emerged from the conversations were unique. Although not specifically asked what their
individual pedagogies were, their beliefs were evident from the conversations. Each participant seemed to take a somewhat different approach to their work. These practices or pedagogies seemed to have informed many of their strategies (to be discussed later) for teaching English Language Learners.

John, who has worked as a literacy teacher at a major Canadian college described in detail what his definition of an English Language Learner was. He said:

I would tend to think that all our students are English language Learners, because they’re encountering new vocabulary. And once you see it that way, I think you don’t take a deficitized view of people who come from second languages and I’m not saying in any way that ELL as a term takes that view, but I do like to think of all my students as language learners.

He expressed his strong belief that all students should, in his opinion, be considered language learners since they are all working with language in some capacity. Although they may be working with a language that is their first language, they are still in fact working with language, and as such should be considered language learners regardless of whether or not that language is their first, second, or third language. Everyone, no matter where they originate, has a different set of “linguistic repertoires” (as he put it), and that is something that needs to be taken into consideration when teaching a language. It is important to work with the rich linguistic backgrounds of all students.

Aryan seemed very modest in his approach to working with English Language Learners. As explained earlier, he stated that he always feels unprepared to work with English Language Learners and is open about recognizing his ‘failures’ (though I would not call them this) with students. It is evident that he capably recognizes when certain practices do not work, and he is open to changing his approaches. He spoke at length about what he considered his failures when working with ELLs, saying that this happened
when he made assumptions about his students and who they are. This is what really stood out about his pedagogies throughout the conversation, his belief that teachers need to recognize that their own assumptions about students may not always be right. This is important because teachers do not always realize this, and sometimes it shows. When they are too proud to recognize which strategies do not work, teachers often lose site of their real goal: assisting their students. This is an important lesson that many of the teachers with negative attitudes (as will be discussed later) fail to recognize. Aryan’s recognition of strategies that do not work and his willingness to adapt seems to have informed many of his teaching practices when working with English Language Learners.

The main pedagogical approach and attitude that was continually evident throughout the conversation with Leyla was her belief that students need to use their first language on a daily basis. First languages should be used to supplement learning rather than ignored. Many of her teaching strategies (to be discussed later) seem to have been formulated with this idea in mind. Likewise, her belief in having students work through solutions to word problems (as discussed earlier) by using first languages supports this belief. She discussed the importance of having students use their first language both individually or with others as a tool to assist them in their English language acquisition.

The findings of this section demonstrated the attitudes and pedagogies of teachers who have chosen to work with English Language Learners willingly and, therefore, have positive attitudes about ELL education. Although it was not openly discussed in the interviews, it is evident that each teacher’s pedagogy has informed the kinds of strategies they use when teaching English Language Learners. It is important to examine the attitudes of teachers who work with English Language Learners because the success of
ELL education seems in some way linked to the attitudes of the teachers who teach those students. The section that follows will examine some of the negative attitudes that the participants have encountered from other teachers.

*Encounters and Teacher Attitudes*

Each interview participant was asked questions about the kinds of attitudes they have encountered with other teachers when it comes to teaching English Language Learners. In some cases they seem to have been met with positive attitudes from some teachers, but many of the situations described in the interviews were negative. The evidence suggested that some teachers are not overly keen when it comes to teaching English Language Learners, which raises questions about their effectiveness in assisting those students.

When asked about the kinds of attitudes he had encountered, John described situations in which assumptions were made based on race. He completed one of his pre-service practicum placements at a highly academic private school in Toronto and found that some of the teachers he worked with made assumptions about students and their abilities based on race. He noted certain undercurrents from teachers who seemed to believe that many of the Asian students at the school were good at Math, but that they lacked creativity and were not good with English. Even when students were not necessarily non-native English students, labels were placed on them because of race. It is interesting that even when language is not necessarily a barrier it is assumed to be a barrier because of a person’s race or background.

John also described a situations (not at the same school) in which students were placed into remedial classes simply because they had an accent. He explained that some
of them had the same writing skills as native English speakers but that because of their accents, they were believed to have difficulties with the language. These examples demonstrate how far the failings in ELL education extend; they seem to indicate a broader sociological and political problem as well. Not only are students who are described as ELLs affected by the lack of training and resources and the negative attitudes of teachers, but students who ‘look’ like they may be non-native English speakers are affected as well. Unsubstantiated assumptions were made about students and their abilities based on factors like race, rather than need. In the examples described above, teachers did not take the time to learn about the students in question and simply made assumptions based on appearances.

Like John, Aryan encountered some very negative opinions about teaching English Language Learners as well. He described a conversation he had with an Associate Teacher he had in the Toronto District School Board:

I told him that…I’m an ESL teacher—I want to teach ESL. He said that, no, you don’t want to do that because it’s the lowest rank you can have in a school. I think that’s really the mentality, which is a really big problem. Because of this mentality, I think teachers who…are deemed not very skillful in other areas are sent down to teach ESL. So, they are not really specialists at times.

Based on the response of his Associate Teacher, it seems that ESL teaching jobs are regarded as the lowest of the low when it comes to teaching jobs. This Associate Teacher made his attitude towards ELLs very clear by telling Aryan that he should not want to teach ESL. Clearly he believed that no one should aspire to become an ESL teacher, but instead they fall in to teaching it, in some cases, almost as punishment. As Aryan explained, this mentality suggests that only those who are not skillful or those who have been unable to prove themselves in other areas are sent to teach ESL classes. This attitude
is concerning since, as Aryan mentioned, that potentially means that many teachers who are teaching ESL classes are not experts and potentially not qualified to be teaching English Language Learners.

Another negative attitude that Aryan encountered towards English Language Learners is that they are not literate enough and that they are a burden to the whole system. One teacher he worked with basically wrote off one English Language Learner, telling the parents that he had done all he could for their child so they would just have to find a tutor. This teacher’s attitude was that he could not do much to help this student, so he told the parents to find additional help themselves. Rather than working on a solution with the parents, he distanced himself from the issue by sending the parents elsewhere.

Similarly, Leyla also encountered situations in which ELLs were considered a burden rather than a part of the classroom community. She explained:

We [Leyla and her collaborative group] also heard a lot of negative comments from other teachers, right, who considered those ESL students in their classes as a burden. ‘Oh, if I just didn’t have those ESL students I could do so much more work!’ Or, more “my class would be perfect if I didn’t have those kids…I heard those comments more and more from those teachers… I think there are less of those teachers [those trying to integrate ESL pedagogy] and more of those teachers who consider the ESL students as burdens.

The teachers Leyla spoke about had a very negative view of the English Language Learners in their classrooms. Rather than being supportive of them and truly considering these students as members of their classes, these teachers believed that they would be able to achieve more success in their classes without them. These teachers did not demonstrate equitable treatment of their students, but instead treated them as a nuisance in their otherwise ‘perfect’ classes.
The findings of this section are troubling to say the least. Each of the teachers that the participants of this study described exhibited very negative attitudes towards their English Language Learners. The overall opinion seems to be that English Language Learners are a burden to mainstream classrooms and that only those who have been unsuccessful elsewhere end up teaching them. It seems as though the education of ESL students is not held in as high regard as the education of native English speakers. Not only this, but the prejudices associated with English language education were extended further so that stereotypes were made even about Canadian-born students based upon superficial reasons.

**Collaboration**

*Opinions*

One common theme that continued to emerge both throughout the literature review and the interviews was teacher collaboration. The participants were directly asked questions about teacher collaboration, but each interviewee made reference to collaboration prior to being asked about it. Each participant agreed that teacher collaboration was essential and each participant shared positive experiences that they have had with collaboration.

John believed that although teacher collaboration could be challenging at times, it was absolutely crucial for several reasons. His first reason was that collaboration is important because of the sense of solidarity it creates. Especially when pushing against cultural norms, he said, having the support of colleagues could be valuable. His second reason was that collaborative groups could provide a system of support. He explained:

> [When] you’re pushing against some traditional norms, then you need the support of colleagues and that has been crucial… while I think bringing
your ideas into a public forum is always daunting, it’s so rewarding because you get to teach, and learn, and experiment along and amid your colleagues concerns and their insights…I think collaboration is one of the most important things that teachers can do.

Having the support and insights of colleagues allowed all of those involved to do things that they otherwise may not or could not have done. The third reason he gave was that he was able to learn about his students from his colleagues. On occasions when he did not feel as though he knew much about a student, he was able to learn more about them from colleagues who had worked with those students before. Colleagues are a great resource when it comes to learning about the needs of students.

Aryan also expressed the necessity of collaboration by describing how it has helped him in the past. Like John, Aryan learned more about a student from what his colleagues could tell him. He explained that one of the newer students to a class he taught in the past refused to speak a word of English in his class. At this point he was teaching English as a Foreign Language, and this particular student refused to speak in any language but his native language (Italian). What he discovered through conversations with his colleagues was that this student was somewhat of a prodigy when it came to Italian. He explained:

So, my conversations with other teachers, particularly the Italian teacher, then told me that he’s a prodigy, practically, in Italian. So, his Italian was so good that he wouldn’t really risk his English at all. So, it wasn’t until I … just asked him to give me his writings, his published work particularly, and when he felt that I know how clever he is, he started to talk in English as well.

Aryan realized that the reason the student would not speak English in class was because he did not want to appear as though he was not clever. After Aryan made it clear that he recognized the student’s intelligence, however, he became more involved in class. Had Aryan not spoken to his colleagues about the student, he may have never discovered why
the student did not want to participate in class. He was directly able to find a solution to an issue he was having simply by speaking to another teacher about the student.

Leyla also expressed the importance of collaboration several times throughout her interview. She directly stated the importance of collaboration between mainstream classroom teachers and ESL teachers saying that each teacher could learn from each other as a result. The mainstream teacher could learn about some effective strategies for teachings ELLs and the ESL teacher could learn more about who the students are, since they likely do not get to spend as much time with students. She also stated that collaboration is important for all teachers, not just those who work with English Language Learners. Any time teacher collaboration takes place it can beneficial to all those involved because teachers are able to work through challenges together rather than face them alone.

All of the participants agreed that collaboration was an absolutely necessary aspect of teaching English Language Learners. They all agreed that much could be learned from collaborating with colleagues, both about students and practice and that continuing to collaborate with colleagues is essential to the success of teachers and students.

**Experiences**

As outlined above, each participant has had very positive experiences with collaboration and each interviewee was willing to share collaborative experiences that they have had in the past. As already stated, John expressed the importance of collaborative groups because he was able to learn more about his students from a colleague who had already worked with them. He was also able to learn new strategies to
work with specific students from those within his inquiry community. He has found discussion an important aspect of the collaborative process, but has also enjoyed examining student work with other teachers. What he has found helpful is examining a piece of student work with his colleagues by reading the piece line-by-line and looking for ambiguities and getting as many interpretations as possible. This helps to make assessment more consistent because teachers are able to discuss their grading practices and work through the piece together to determine how to reasonably assess the work. Not only is grading more consistent, but it is more fair.

As explained earlier in this study, Aryan conceded that he had received no formal training to teach English Language Learners. In addition to completing his own research on the subject, what he believed to have helped him in the ESL education were collaborative conversations with other teachers and the school’s principal. At one of the schools he worked at he found that he really broadened his education by being able to have open conversations with the principal and his colleagues. He explained:

I didn’t have any kind of formal training in that sense, but I think the kind of collaborative approach we had at that school was some sort of training for me. So, if I hadn’t had this chance to talk to the principal or if he hadn’t encouraged me to sit down and talk about this, probably I wouldn’t have employed the knowledge of my students as much as I did.

He directly credited the support his colleagues, and specifically his principal, as being a major part of his education in regards to teaching ESL students. Where his formal training was lacking, he was able to make up for it through collaboration with colleagues who were both able to teach him and learn from him. This strategy is especially important for teachers who do not receive any formal ESL training in pre-service teacher education programs.
As discussed earlier, Leyla expressed the importance of having students collaborate with one another in order to assist them with English language acquisition, but she also expressed the importance of cross-curricular collaborations as well. This will be discussed again later in greater detail, but Leyla described the benefits of infusing language education into all subject areas and taking a multi-literacy pedagogical approach to education as whole. She found that collaborating with teachers in other subject areas was beneficial to students’ English language acquisition.

**Strategies**

Although strategies for assisting English Language Learners have been addressed informally throughout this chapter, the following sections will take a closer look at some specific strategies that have both failed and worked for the participants. They will address strategies that have been ineffective either for themselves or for others whom they have observed. The chapter will then conclude with specific strategies that the participants have found particularly helpful.

**Ineffective Strategies**

Aryan described some failed attempts at engaging ESL students in quite a bit of detail by focusing on two examples. First, he explained the importance of not making assumptions about where your students come from, which he said he himself has been guilty of. He explained that on these occasions he is aware that he has failed to connect with a student when he brings up a topic in class that he the student seems to be sensitive of. He said:

> When I assume that I know where my students come from and I’m wrong. When they suddenly appear to be sensitive to a topic that I’ve brought up because I thought that would connect to my students’
backgrounds and I failed. I think that’s really the biggest challenge that I’ve had.

It is at times like those that he is reminded that he cannot assume that he knows everything about a student’s background. In his second example he reiterated the importance of not making assumptions when describing one of the experiences of an associate teacher his: “My AT [associate teacher] gave these students a novel about China, and he assumed it was connected to their culture. But, the novel depicted the way Chinese culture oppressed Chinese women.” In this instance, his Associate Teacher assumed that the novel would be of interest to his students because it connected to their culture. But instead it came across as offensive because it addressed a very sensitive issue that the students probably did not feel comfortable exploring in class in that context. Had the issue be brought up in another way, perhaps the students would be more open to discussing the topic. Instead, the issue was addressed very insensitively.

Leyla described what she found to be the most ineffective strategy for assisting ESL students to be segregation. She explained that in some classrooms she has witnessed, the teachers chose to segregate their English Language Learners rather than integrating them. In one example, the ESL students and the rest of the class were physically separated from one another with the ESL teacher working with the ESL students and the mainstream teacher working only with the other students. There was no interaction between the two sides. In another example, the ESL students were instructed to select a book to read while the other students in the class were given another book. Where the mainstream classroom students were completing exciting projects around their book, the ESL students were tested on their reading skills. The ESL students spent much of their time reading silently or reading aloud with the other ESL students. The ESL students
were not given meaningful projects to work on. Instead, they were treated as children, which would be very embarrassing.

1. Effective Strategies: Considering Student Identities and Cultural Representation

The participants offered many good strategies that they have found personally effective in their classrooms. John expressed the importance of taking notions of identity into consideration in teaching English Language Learners. His strategy in doing this is to have his students write biographies of their parents or other family members if they are comfortable doing so. Another option is for them to write a genealogy. He invites them to look into the histories of themselves and their families and allows them to explore their own identities. He has used this as an opportunity to learn more about his students and because it also gives the students an opportunity to learn more about themselves. It also gives students the chance to learn about one another and the identities of their classmates. He has used this approach so that students have the chance to describe their own identities. Rather than being given a certain identity, students choose their own identity. John’s practice of allowing students to create their own identities is based upon the work of Jim Cummins. According to Cummins (2001):

Educators define their own identities through their practice and their interactions with students. Students likewise go through a process of defining their identities in interaction with their teachers, peers, and parents. However, this process of negotiating identities can never be fully controlled by forces outside of the teacher-student relationship itself (p. 654).
Just as educators are free to determine their own identities, students are given opportunities to choose their own identities as well. These identities are constructed through interactions with other people and have the unique opportunity to arise within the classroom setting.

Aryan has employed similar techniques, having students create ‘identity texts’ (Cummins, 2001) through cross-curricular assignments. He had students consult with other teachers in the school in order to complete their assignments. They would collaborate with the arts teacher, the Spanish teacher, and the IT teacher and they would create videos using the poetry they were studying. The intent was to invite the backgrounds of the students into the assignment. They were encouraged to bring themselves to their work.

In addition to this, Aryan would also encourage students to bring in pieces of literature that were familiar to them. In one example, when teaching poetry, he had a number of Chinese students in his ESL class bring in examples of Chinese poetry, which he then used as a tool when teaching poetry in English. The students taught him about Chinese poetry and he taught them English poetry. He also tried to draw connections between the culture of his students and what they were learning in their History class. When teaching about the King’s Daughters of 17th century French Canada, rather than just teaching the students the facts, he tried to draw connections between what his ESL students experienced immigrating to Canada and what it must have been like for the King’s Daughter’s to immigrate to Canada. One of his most prominent strategies is to bring the cultures of his students into the classroom wherever possible, and in all subject areas.
Leyla also emphasized the importance of drawing on the identities and backgrounds of her students when teaching English Language Learners. She believes that drawing on a student’s prior knowledge is essential to teaching them effectively. She strongly believes in the application of multicultural literacies in her classroom, explaining that students should see themselves represented in the texts they read. She elaborated saying:

I think that we should try to honour all of those voices and identities in our classroom. Unless we do that, I don’t think that we can teach any student, and certainly we can’t reach our ESL students that way. So, yeah, I try to usually have the voices and identities of the students represented in the pedagogies or resources that I use with those students. They love reading materials that were developed by people like them. They want to see role models. But, if the role models are always white models, or only Anglophone-speakers then it’s really hard to motivate them because they don’t see themselves being represented, and they lose interest and they lose motivation.

She expressed the necessity of ensuring that all students are represented in the literature that they read because having a role model in the characters we read about is so essential. When students do not feel that they are being adequately represented they begin to lose interest, and when they lose interest they start to fail. So, it is important for English language instructors to ensure that they do represent the voices of all of those in their classes.

2. Effective Strategies: First Language Use

Just as it is important to bring the diverse cultures of students into the classroom, it is also important to bring the diverse languages of the students into the classroom. Like Leyla (as described earlier), Aryan is a strong advocate of first-language use in ESL classrooms. He stood by this practice even when it did not make him very popular. In one
example, Aryan described what happened when he invited his students to write in his first language:

I was teaching paragraph writing in English, and all my students were Chinese, so I asked them to write a paragraph in Chinese for me, and you should have seen my Associate Teacher and Faculty Advisor… The only thing they didn’t do to me was hang me! I think this is really indicative of a serious problem in the system. After all these conferences, publications, why is it you still cannot get your students to write one paragraph in their own languages? I think that can enormously empower them when it comes to recognizing themselves as writers.

Both his Associate Teacher and Faculty Advisor did not agree with this approach, and neither did some of his classmates. When giving a presentation on allowing students to use their first languages in one of his teacher-training classes, several of the other Teacher Candidates in his program expressed their surprise in his arguments. He expressed his concern in this since he feared these teachers would implement ‘English only’ policies in their classrooms. So, although he found this strategy to be quite effective, he was faced with some contention.

He expanded upon his use of first languages in ESL classrooms by providing examples of how he applied first language use when teaching Shakespeare’s *Macbeth* to his ELLs from China. He explained:

I think the wisest thing is to encourage them to go home and read Macbeth in Chinese… because, this is what they’re going to do anyway, but they can bring those books in to the classroom and that can really speed up their understanding of Macbeth and if they understand Macbeth, definitely you’re going to see that they have opinions about the role of women, for example, in that period of time of history… If you let them read Shakespeare in Chinese and have an understanding of the story, they can start communicating with you about these ideas in English.

When teaching complex texts like Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, Aryan believed that it was first important for his students to be able to develop an understanding of the text in their
own language before trying to understand it in English. When they were able to understand the play in their own language, it was easier for them to understand it in English. Not only this, but they were able to start communicating their opinions and understandings. If they had not been able to read the text in their own language first, they would have spent their time simply trying to understand the play and would have had less time for discussion. Allowing students to use their own language first contributed to their overall understand and allowed them to contribute to conversations that they may otherwise not have had.

3. Effective Strategies: Cross Curricular Connection

In her interview, Leyla described a school that she had visited while completing her own research. At this school, she found that the teachers were applying the framework of teaching all students through the ESL pedagogical lens. She found this interesting because, as the teachers at the school argued, this approach can be helpful to all students because it “pays particular attention to the language needs of all students.” Leyla is a supporter of this approach because English language use is so evident in all subject areas. She explained:

When we look at our Math curriculum now it’s very much language focused. Science curriculum or History… There is no, I think, content subject area that is not focused on language. So, if we’re trying to include language instruction and language awareness in all of those content areas that would be very helpful for all students. I think all students will excel. And it’s not surprising that we still see high school students who can’t read, and they’re not all ESL students. They can’t write. And I think we need to change certain things. We need to change the way that we’re teaching language instruction. I think it should be integrated into every subject area.

She argued that because of the frequent use of language in all subject areas, all benefits
would benefit from this kind of instruction because it focuses on making language easier to understand for all students.

Leyla also provided some examples of how she personally employs cross-curricular connections, speaking about her use of Drama and Dance in ESL classrooms. The appeal of the Arts and of Drama and Dance is that they readily embody the language of text. Drama and Dance easily bring to life what is written on the page. She believes that students are more likely to remember a text or a metaphor if they act it out and embody it themselves. She believes that the best approach is to develop a blend between the way language is traditionally taught—through reading and writing—and the application of the Arts. She argued that not only would this be an effective strategy for English Language Learners, but it would be an effective strategy for all learners.

Aryan’s use of ‘identity texts’ (Cummins, 2001) would also fall within this section, because as a part of that project his students were required to tie in various subject areas when completing their videos. Students were required to apply other subject areas, like Technology and the Arts to complete the assignment.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Introduction

The following chapter continues the discussion of the previous chapters in several ways. First, the chapter begins with a further examination of both the literature review (Chapter 2) and the findings of the interviews (Chapter 4). Both chapters are compared and contrasted with one another in order to determine any connections between the two. Second, the findings are summarized and I present the reader with several promising teaching strategies. Third, the implications of this study towards the educational community and the researcher are discussed. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this study and potential areas for further examination.

Reflections: The Literature And The Data

Preparation

There are many interesting correlations that can be noted between the findings of the literature review (Chapter 2) and the findings of the data collection (Chapter 4). Both the literature and data collection made it clear that teachers often do not feel prepared to face the challenges of teaching and supporting English Language Learners within mainstream classrooms. Many teachers, Like Aryan and John, feel that they are “never prepared.” Although they willingly meet the challenge each day, they did not receive the initial education that could have potentially helped to make them feel as though they were a little more prepared. Instead, they are able to excel in their careers based on their own professional development: research for Aryan and additional qualification (AQ) courses for John. Had they not taken the time or made the effort to pursue their own personal
development, there is the possibility that they would not be as effective at teaching English Language Learners.

The lack of ESL teacher training also became evident through the discussion with Leyla. She believes (and provided evidence to prove) that this lack of preparation of teachers who work with ELLs is evident throughout school boards as well. Not only do teachers believe that since they have no been trained to teach ELLs, it is not their job to do so, but school boards do not properly support its teachers. Many school boards clearly do not provide the kinds of resources that they should to their teachers. As a result of this lack of support and lack of training, teachers feel entirely unprepared to teach English Language Learners.

Leyla believes that the teaching institutions themselves are (at least partially) to blame for this. In Ontario, ESL courses are not required or taught in teacher-training programs. Instead, teachers are forced to pursue these interests on their own time, by completing their own research or completing AQ courses.

The literature review supports the above findings. Studies show that many teachers do not feel adequately prepared to teach ESL students and that they did not receive enough training to teach them effectively. What limited training they did receive, many teachers do not feel was of the greatest quality. Like Leyla, Clair (1995) places the blame for this lack of preparation on the institutions themselves since they do not prepare teachers to teach linguistically diverse students.

These correlations would suggest that there is a definite need for further pre-service teacher training from Ontario teacher’s colleges. Many teachers do not feel that they are adequately prepared to teach English Language Learners and many schools do
not do enough to support their teachers. These correlations would also suggest that more needs to be done in order to better prepare teachers to effectively teach linguistically diverse groups of students.

**Collaboration**

There were also a number of correlations in regards to teacher collaboration between the data and the literature review. In both the literature review and the data study, it was clear that many teachers of English Language Learners believe in the importance of collaboration. All participants of this study believed that collaboration was a “crucial” or “necessary” part of their jobs and one participant, Leyla, stressed its importance for all teachers. She also emphasized the need for collaboration between high schools and universities and colleges, saying that there needs to be more communication between the two. Too often, she explained, students who are linguistically unprepared to face the challenges of university are accepted to those schools only to struggle endlessly or fail. She believes that there should be more communication and collaboration between high schools and universities to prevent this from happening. This sentiment was also reflected in the literature review. Roessingh and Douglas made the same argument in their 2012 study of English Language Learners’ transitional needs. They argued that universities and colleges need to work with feeder high schools to ensure a smoother transition for English Language Learners.

These findings make it clear that collaboration is essential in the teaching of English Language Learners (and all students). Teachers need to be able to collaborate with one another so that they can learn from one another both about their students and about their own teaching strategies. Not only is teacher collaboration essential, however,
but collaboration and communication between secondary and post secondary institutions is as well. It is clear from these findings that teacher collaboration needs to continue so that English Language Learners may be more effectively accommodated. It is also clear that greater collaboration needs to take place between secondary schools and post secondary institutions to ensure greater ESL student success.

Attitudes

There are some correlations between the data in the literature review and the findings of the interview data in regards to teacher attitudes and the availability of resources. The findings of both the literature review and the data demonstrate that teacher attitudes towards teaching English Language Learners have been both negative and positive, with most of the examples provided being negative. The findings of the data collection (interviews) suggest that many teachers feel negatively towards having English Language Learners in their classrooms. Through the interviews it was discovered that many teachers feel as though these students are a burden or that they are not literate enough. Many teachers also seem to feel as though being an ESL teacher is generally a “low ranking” position. These findings seem to suggest that more often than not, teachers feel negatively towards teaching English Language Learners.

The findings of the literature suggest that most teachers either feel positively or neutrally about having ESL students in their classrooms. However, due to their lack of preparation, many teachers feel that they do not have the time it would take to assist their English Language Learners. They blame a lack of preparation for the unsure feelings they have when it comes to teaching ELLs.
The findings in regards to teacher attitudes are somewhat inconclusive. All that can be said about teacher attitudes, based upon the findings of the data and the literature review, is that teachers have a range of different opinions when it comes to integrating ELLs into their classrooms. Some teachers feel positively, some feel negatively, and some are neutral on the matter. More research would need to go in to the study of teacher attitudes in order for the findings to be more conclusive.

Strategies

There were several links between the findings of the literature review and the data in regards to effective teaching strategies of English Language Learners. Both the researchers in the literature review and the participants of this study agreed that it is important to recognize the diversity of students. In their 2011 study, Holfrich and Bosh emphasized the importance of flexibility when it comes to working with English language learners. They argued that it is important for educators to recognize the differences of their students and that it is necessary for them to integrate the backgrounds and cultures of students into assignments. It is also important that teachers recognize the previous literacy skills of their students. When previous literacies are recognized, it is easier for students to achieve greater success in English language acquisition.

The findings of the interviews also supported these claims. Both Leyla and Aryan strongly emphasized the need to allow students to use their native languages in the classroom. They both believed that native languages should be welcomed and encouraged as tools to assist students in English language acquisition. Aryan strongly encouraged students to bring the literatures of their own cultures into the classroom, and Leyla expressed the necessity of allowing students to use their first languages in the classroom.
Furthermore, all three participants strongly believed in the necessity of recognizing and using the identities of their students in the classroom. They all believed that, in one way or another, the voices of their students needed to be represented. How those voices should be represented may have differed somewhat from one participant to the next, but they were all very clear in their beliefs that student representation was absolutely essential.

Another interesting strategy that arose in the literature review, as suggested by Hansen-Thomas (2008), is sheltered instruction. This method focuses on the importance of providing English Language Learners with the same level of meaningful work as native English speaking students. The approach blends language instruction and content instruction in order to produce assessments that are actually meaningful to students. When students feel that the work they are doing is meaningful, they are more likely to achieve success in those assignments.

Leyla supported this theory when she discussed some ineffective teaching strategies that she has encountered in the past. In the example she gave, English Language Learners were segregated from native English-speaking students and the two groups were given separate assignments. The native English-speakers were given meaningful and interesting assignments that challenged them, whereas the non-native English-speaking students were assessed only on their reading abilities. Their assessments either required them to read silently or to read aloud with other English Language Learners. They did not get to participate in the more exciting assessments that the other students got to enjoy. There was no interaction between the two groups. Leyla did not believe that this was an effective teaching strategy and explained that, in order for
students to succeed, they needed to be given meaningful work. When they are not given meaningful work students are more likely to struggle and potentially fail.

**Recommendations**

There are two primary recommendations for teachers that may be suggested based upon the above findings. First, it is essential that teachers recognize the backgrounds, cultures and literacies of their English Language Learners. They need to recognize that the learning needs of each student may differ and they need to recognize that their students do have prior literacies that can be extremely helpful when used as a tool to assist in English language acquisition. By applying the skills that they have already developed, students will be more successful at learning language. Teachers need to recognize that their students are not clean slates and that they come with a wealth of knowledge and prior literacies that teachers should be taking advantage of in order to help them acquire English.

Second, in addition to recognizing student literacies, teachers need to ensure that the kinds of assignments that English Language Learners receive are as meaningful as the assignments received by native English-speaking students. In order for students to succeed, they need to be given assignments that they are motivated to complete. In order to do this, English Language Learners need to feel as though they are a part of the classroom community. It is important that teachers integrate their English Language Learners into the larger classroom environment, instead of segregating them and giving them assignments that they feel no connection to. While it is important that assignments and be differentiated, it is also important for English Language Learners to feel included. This is why it is important for English Language Learners and native-English speaking
students collaborate with one another and complete meaningful assignments that motivate both types of learners to succeed. Far greater success can be achieved when students feel both included and as though what they are doing is meaningful.

**Implications**

*For The Educational Community*

The findings of this study have great implications for teachers and researchers alike for two reasons. First, it is clear that there are some gaps in English as a Second (or additional) Language education, and teachers need to be made aware of those gaps. Not only do teachers need to be made aware of those gaps, but so do educational institutions. The evidence of this study has proven that there are serious failures in ESL education for pre-service teachers. It is obvious then that something needs to be done to remedy this. Many teachers do not feel as though they have been adequately prepared to teach English Language Learners by their faculties of education and this needs to change.

Teacher’s colleges in Ontario do not provide future teachers with the kind of training that they need in order to be successful at devising strategies to teach their English Language Learners, and this needs to change. Studies have shown that the ESL population has grown in recent years and that it will continue to grow. In cities like Toronto, over 50% of the student population speak a first language other than English. (Toronto District School Board, 2013). If such a large number of students are English Language Learners, why do Ontario faculties of education *not* provide the necessary training required to teach these students? Steps need to be taken in order to ensure that mainstream classroom teachers feel adequately prepared to teach English Language Learners in their classrooms and the logical way to do this is to provide pre-service
teacher training that prepare teachers for this. It is for this reason that I believe this study is important to educators and teacher training institutions. It is my hope that if teachers and institutions become more aware of the issues presented in this study; they will be more willing to push for change.

The second reason that I believe this study to be of importance to the wider educational community is that it provides some practical and successful strategies for teaching to English Language Learners that have been tested by other English language teachers. Each of the strategies that were listed throughout this study was supported by stories of teacher success. Since many teachers have not received ESL teacher training, it is my hope that readers will find these strategies both helpful and informative, and that they will have success in any strategy that they implement within their own classrooms. Since I summarized my strategies by providing two recommendations for teachers, I hope that readers will feel better prepared to devise their own strategies as well.

For The Researcher

This study has been of importance to me as a teacher and researcher, because it has taught me the importance of recognizing gaps and failings in the education system. It has taught me to question the system. As a teacher it will be important for me to be aware of how and where the education system may be failing so that I can work to remedy the situation, if not on a greater scale, at least in my own classroom. Prior to this study I did not realize that there are issues with ESL education today, or what those issues are. I am much more aware now and believe that it will help me to become a better teacher. As someone who hopes to one day teach in a major city, I now know that a large percentage of my students will likely be English Language Learners. Prior to this study, I would
have had no idea how to teach them effectively since I, like two of my participants, did not receive any formal instruction devoted to teaching to a growing ESL community. Although I did examine some authors who do in fact explore ELL instruction, I did not have a course that was strictly dedicated to teaching English Language Learners. That being said, I would have felt completely unprepared to teach ELLs and likely would be unsuccessful at teaching these linguistically diverse students effectively had I not completed my own research. While this study is in no way comprehensive, I now feel much better prepared to teach to a linguistically diverse group of students and have become familiar with a number of strategies that will help me to do so. I now feel much more confident as I move forward into what I hope will be a challenging and rewarding career teaching English Language Learners.

**Further Research and Limitations**

As with any study, there were certain limitations with this study. One of the greatest limitations is that the number of interview participants was limited. Interviews with a greater number of teachers may have provided greater insights into certain areas of this study that were lacking information, like the section examining teacher attitudes. Had more teachers been interviewed it may have been possible to devise greater insights into teacher opinions on English Language Learner integration into mainstream classrooms.

Another limitation is that English Language Learners themselves were not utilized as active participants in this study. First, I did not interview ELLs as a part of my research. Much could have been determined about the level of success experienced by students had they been interviewed as a part of the research. It would also have been very informative to hear student opinions about which teaching strategies they found most
successful. Further, I did not use field experiences as a part of this research; I did not personally observe ELLs in the classroom. Observing and communicating with English Language Learners may have provided further suggestions as to effective strategies that may be used in the classroom.

There are two areas for further study that I would suggest to researchers. First, I believe that it would be important to complete further research in order to determine whether or not there are any correlations between teacher attitudes and the success of English Language Learners. I cannot help but wonder if a negative teacher attitude would result in less success for some English Language Learners. I believe that if there are correlations between the two, there would be need for greater examination still in order to determine what could be done to remedy this situation. Second, I believe that it would be important for researchers to gather student insights into ELL teaching practices. It would be extremely useful for researchers to interview ELLs or observe them in the classroom in order to determine which practices the students themselves believe to be most effective. In conclusion, I believe that an ideal study would include each of the above elements in order to determine which strategies are most effective for ELLs and whether the attitude of the teacher has a direct impact on the success of the student.

Conclusion

This study made evident the many issues surrounding ESL education in traditional secondary schools in Canada. The study explored these issues by examining the current literature surrounding ESL education, specifically looking at the impact of teacher collaboration as an approach to assisting ELLs; the ways in which teacher attitudes may or may not impact the success of ELLs; and the potential need for further
preparation that some teachers believed they would need in order to better assist their ELL students. The study then presented the results of interviews with three very experienced ELL teachers and five very important themes were draw as a result of the findings. First, there was evidence from the interviews to suggest that many teachers do not feel they are adequately prepared to successfully teach such linguistically diverse students upon leaving initial teacher education programs. Second, the findings suggest that although there are resources available to ELL teachers, they are not always used appropriately. Quite often teachers are forced to come up with their own solutions to this problem and sometimes turn to their students for assistance. Third, the findings suggest that many teachers the participants have encountered do demonstrate negative attitudes to the inclusion of ELLs within traditional classroom settings, and that perhaps there is a need for a shift in attitude of some educators. Fourth, the research suggests that teacher collaboration is an invaluable and essential strategy for teachers hoping to effectively accommodate ELLs in their classrooms. The final theme and finding of this research included three primary suggestions that teachers may wish to apply in their own classrooms in order to better accommodate their ELLs. These strategies include: recognizing student identities and representing the cultures of students; allowing and encouraging first language use in English classrooms; and including more cross curricular connections, including English language instruction in all subject areas and allowing students to bring aspects of other subject areas into the English classroom.

It is clear from the above findings that certain areas within ESL education need to be addressed and that there are areas that require improvement if we hope to better assist English Language Learners. First, it appears that many teachers do not feel sufficiently
prepared to teach the growing number of ELL students, so it is clear that more needs to be done to better prepare these teachers. It is important that teacher education programs provide teachers with the skills and strategies they need to better assist all their students by providing ESL training as a part of the program. If initial teacher education programs are unable to better prepare teachers, it is important that schools and school boards be willing to provide ESL-based professional development opportunities for teachers so they may learn more effective strategies for teaching ELLs. Second, the links between teacher attitudes and student success need to be explored. Further research is warranted on how a teacher’s negative attitudes towards ELLs may negatively impact the success of those students. If correlations are found, then more should be done to determine why teachers feel this way and efforts should be made to prevent this type of thinking. Perhaps if those teachers felt more knowledgeable when it comes to teaching ELLs they would not feel an aversion to having ELLs in their classrooms. Third, it is important that resources and integration strategies become more readily available to teachers. Teachers often feel that they do not receive the support they need to assist their students, so it is important that schools employ enough ESL-specialist teachers as that particular school requires and that ESL pedagogical practices and ESL teaching techniques are made readily available to all teachers. Finally, evidence from this study suggests that teacher collaboration has been an effective strategy at making teachers feel as though they are better prepared to teach ELLs. Schools could certainly benefit from the implementation of more collaborative groups that invite teachers to work together to better assist not just English Language Learners, but all students.
References


APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What is your current position and how long have you been in this role?

2. Which school boards (if any) have you worked for in the past?

3. What other educational positions have you held in the past?
   [Prompt: What were some of your roles or duties in this (these) position(s)?]

4. What experience do you have with differentiated instruction for ELLs?
   [Prompt: How have you differentiated your own instruction to suit the needs of your ELLs?]

5. Can you describe your work with English Language Learners within a mainstream classroom setting?

6. What kind of pre-service training did you receive to specifically prepare you to teach ELLs?
   [Prompt: Can you describe the kinds of resources that have been available to you? Do you believe enough resources are available? Why or why not?]

7. Have you ever felt unprepared or underprepared to effectively teach ELLs within mainstream classrooms? Please explain.

8. What additional training (if any) did you receive before you set out to teach ELLs (aside from pre-service teacher training)?

9. Do you believe that ELLs are appropriately accommodated in mainstream secondary classrooms?
   [Prompt: What additional help might be provided to assist ELL teachers to effectively assist their students?]

10. What are some effective strategies you have tried when hoping to integrate ELLs into mainstream classrooms?

11. What are some strategies that may not have been as successful? [Why do you think this is?]

12. What other issues/factors have you experienced when attempting to successfully integrate ELLs?

13. Have you ever tried collaborating with other teachers as a means of creating strategies to better integrate ELLs?
[Prompt: Do you think that teacher collaboration is a necessary (or beneficial) process in effectively integrating ELLs?]

14. What attitudes or predispositions have you noticed amongst other teachers towards integrating ELLs into mainstream classrooms? Have you found it to be mostly positive or mostly negative?

15. Is there anything else that you would like to add to this interview about your experience as an ELL teacher?
Dear Participant,

I am a graduate student currently enrolled in the Master of Teaching Program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). As a part of the program, I will be completing a Major Research Paper that explores the best practice techniques for teachers hoping to differentiate instruction in order to better accommodate ELLs in mainstream intermediate/senior classrooms.

I believe that your involvement in this study would be an invaluable part of my data collecting process. Your participation would include an interview of approximately 30 minutes at a time and location that is most convenient for you. You will be asked questions based on your experiences with English Language Learners and what you believe to be some promising techniques for successfully integrating these students into mainstream classrooms. Interviews will be audio recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by myself in order to further develop my research project. Your responses will remain confidential and you will remain anonymous; pseudonyms will be used in all written and verbal reports that arise from the project. Know that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may decline to answer any questions that arise or withdraw from the study at any time. If you have any questions or require further clarification, please feel free to contact either myself or my supervisor, Rob Simon, at any time.

If you agree to be interviewed, please sign the section below. Please retain a second copy for your records.

Thank you very much for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Jessica Fellin
Principal Investigator
jessica.fellin@mail.utoronto.ca

Rob Simon, PhD
Project Supervisor
rob.simon@utoronto.ca

Consent to Participate

[ ] I wish to participate in the OISE/UT project as outlined above.

Participant’s name (printed): ______________________________

Participant’s signature: _______________________________

Date: _________________________