Using Group-Work to Optimize Learning Opportunities for Grade 1 and 2 English Language Learners in the Classroom

By

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ABSTRACT

One of the effective strategies teachers may use in their classrooms to enhance student learning is group work. Through group work, students have opportunities to collaborate and rely on each other to work out the assigned tasks. The benefits of working in a group are immense as it allows both high and low academic students to learn from each other, as well as listen and compare different perspectives, ideas, and thoughts. Although it is the teacher’s role to prepare and set up the environment for successful group work, the students participate and take ownership of their own learning throughout the process of working with their peers. All students can benefit from group work. One of the groups of students who benefit greatly from group work is English language learners (ELLs). By comparing data from two semi-structured interviews with two elementary teachers and a literature review of the information on this topic, the use of group work was explored in terms of identifying how social, intellectual, and linguistic growth occurs with ELLs in the mainstream classroom.

Keywords: teaching strategy, group work, collaboration, peer-learning, cooperative learning, English language learners (ELLs), learning strategy, social interaction, oral language development, social-emotional development, diversity
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Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Research Study

There are numerous studies that demonstrate the benefits and the positive effects of implementing group work within the school classroom (Nair & Alwee, 2012; Tuan & Nhu, 2010; Genesee, 1994). Students participating in group work with their peers have the opportunity to develop and enhance both social and intellectual skills. Nair and Alwee (2012) note the positive qualities of group work include:

- tolerance, team spirit, giving and taking, establishing a direction in learning,
- developing imaginative and creative thinking, developing a critical and informed mind, developing an ability and sense of enjoyment in life-long learning. (p. 4)

In order for students to fully benefit from group work, every member of a group needs to be an active participant in the associated activities. However, every student in the classroom is different. Whether it is their learning styles, personalities, hobbies, academic level, interests, or even culture, students who sit alongside each other are varied. Amongst these differences, one of the groups who may be participating in group work are English language learners (ELLs). ELLs compose a significant number of students in classrooms in a multicultural city like Toronto. The Ontario Ministry of Education finds that through information gathered in 2005/2006 from standardized testing, 20% of students in English-language elementary schools in Ontario are ELLs (Coelho, 2013). With these students, there may be various and individual reasons as to why they may fear group work, and even though group work provides students opportunities to develop and enhance various skills, ELLs may be an exception. Furthermore, although every ELL may vary, many ELLs are dismissed from group work opportunities mainly due to the language barrier existing between themselves and the other members - their peers.
Therefore, in English speaking classrooms, teachers need to accommodate group work for ELLs so that all of the students in the classroom are included in the learning process.

In addition to the benefits of group work for all students, ELLs who participate in the associated activities have the opportunity to develop and enhance their oral language skills along with other essential skills. Group work is paramount for ELLs within the classroom and it is an effective way to encourage ELLs to have conversations in the classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). The purpose of learning a language is to communicate with others, and through group work, ELLs have the opportunity to interact, socialize, and communicate through verbal and non-verbal forms with their peers (Tuan & Nhu, 2010). Group work fosters classroom interaction, which is an important aspect of acquiring and learning the English language for ELLs. When ELLs are included as members of a group, they have the opportunity to listen to their peers speak English at their level and observe the non-verbal communicative methods such as facial expressions. ELLs need opportunities to interact and practice with their peers because using English as a language for learning, like their peers, takes much longer than a year or two for many ELLs (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Therefore by participating in the same activities as their English-speaking peers, ELLs have the opportunities to talk with more proficient English speakers (Coelho, 2004).

Tuan and Nhu (2010) further explain that language learning is done through the collaboration and exchange of ideas between two or more people and this can be done through classroom group work. Therefore, the connection between language acquisition and group work is interconnected and the qualities that ELLs gain from participating in group work, in turn, allows them to learn the language. However, many teachers and parents seem to be foremost concerned about ELLs learning English only through writing,
speaking, and reading tasks that are practiced individually. Although individual work allows ELLs to concentrate on their own work and to practice, for example, writing out the same words in their notebooks, they need the social interaction within group work so that ELLs can converse about what they know, as well as, listen to how their peers speak in the English language.

Most teachers have taught ELLs in their classrooms, and although some schools may have far more or less number of ELLs, every school has ELLs who teachers need to incorporate the pedagogy of group work so that they have opportunities to interact and communicate with their peers. Teachers’ perspectives on group work and the ways in which they accommodate group work for ELLs help develop and enhance students’ language, and overall, learning skills. For ELLs in the classroom, learning the language goes beyond excelling in school subjects. English language learners learn English for social integration in schools and community, and for their well-being throughout their later years in life (Genesee, 1994).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to examine how group work benefits Grade 1 and 2 English Language Learners in the classroom. Despite the benefits related to group work for all students, ELLs face various challenges in participating in the activities, including language barriers and lack of self-confidence to take part in group work. As one of the important and effective instructional methods used in classrooms, group work, including pair or partner work, has great potential in helping ELLs improve and learn the language (Long & Porter, 1985). Therefore, recognizing the effectiveness of group work, teachers
need to include ELLs as participants in group work with their English speaking peers and try to lessen the feelings of exclusion and isolation of ELLs in the classroom.

Furthermore, I will utilize the information that experienced teachers have to share to find out about how they are implementing group work with ELLs. By exploring their classroom experiences, I will be able to provide rich data about how group work benefits ELLs in the mainstream classroom. The two different interviews will allow me to investigate further of how elementary teachers using group work identify the growth of social, intellectual, and linguistic growth of ELLs through using this strategy.

This study is important to the education community because one of the growing members in classrooms in Ontario is ELLs. Educators need to organize and plan lessons to include ELLs as active participants in the classrooms. All students should receive equal opportunities to learn in the classroom and teachers have the responsibility to make this happen in their classroom.

**Research Questions**

Through my research study, I investigated how group work provides various learning opportunities for Grade 1 and 2 ELLs in the classroom. In pursuing this study, I asked questions regarding group work, English language learners, and the benefits and challenges of implementing group work in the classroom. My main research question is: In what ways does group work benefit Grade 1 and 2 ELLs in the Classroom? The following sub-questions support my main research question:

1. How do teachers use group work in their classrooms?
2. How can teachers successfully incorporate ELLs in group work in their classrooms?
3. What are the benefits of using group work with ELLs?

4. What are the challenges of using group work with ELLs?

Background of the Researcher

As an immigrant from South Korea myself, I too experienced the difficulties and struggles of an ELL during elementary school. Coming to a new country and community full of strangers and not understanding one word in the English language, I felt isolated and different from my peers. However, in my Grade 1 class, I remember feeling included and welcomed by being part of an assigned group for one of the activities that I was doing in class. Throughout my Grade 1 year, group work made me feel less embarrassed to try to speak English and because I was a part of a smaller group, as opposed to the whole class, I felt I had better opportunities to build relationships and interact with my peers in English.

As I further reflected on how I grew up as an ELL and after observing other ELLs in classrooms during my teaching blocks at OISE, I noticed how some ELLs were rotated between teachers or pulled out from their homeroom classrooms during lessons to learn English. I recognize this as a potential concern because I believe an important aspect of acquiring a language is through social interactions, and, although pull-out sessions and participating in separate groups with other ELL students may be beneficial in teaching ELLs the language, I believe they should have more opportunities to share, participate, and observe their peers.

In a classroom environment, group work is beneficial for all types of students. Realizing the positive effects of group work for non-ELLs, I began probing around how teachers are implementing this strategy with the ELLs. As I thought about this concept, I
questioned how participating in group work would help ELLs directly. Although group work encourages students to participate in the activity and learn from their peers,

   English language learners may feel excluded due to the lack of inability to participate because of the language barrier. This is a problem because by working in groups, ELL students have the additional benefit to learning the language along with other social and cognitive skills. Along with the many challenges of incorporating ELLs in group work, the dominant one may be the language barrier existent between ELLs and non-ELLs in the classroom; therefore, I would like to pursue this study to find out how teachers can break down the barriers for ELLs so that they can participate and learn through group work with all the rest of the students.

Overview

   Chapter 1 includes a brief introduction to the topic and study, my research questions, background of the researcher, and the purpose of the study. Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature relevant to my research topic. Chapter 3 provides the methodology that will be conducted in this research study including descriptions of the participants, procedures, ethical review procedures, and limitations of the study. Chapter 4 includes various themes and subthemes that were founded through the conducted interviews. The findings in Chapter 4 provide explanation and descriptions of the benefits and challenges of using group work with Grade 1 and 2 ELLs in the classroom. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the findings including implications, recommendations for practice, limitations of the study, and for future research. A list of references, and the Appendices, including the interview questions, and the participant letter of consent, follows these chapters.
Chapter 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Types of Group Work

Collaborative group work.

Group work, or collaborative group work, is a teaching and learning strategy that can be utilized for all types of students and can take various forms in the classroom. Using group work as a pedagogical tool can be useful in numerous ways. It can be used to organize activities or tasks in the class where an assignment is given by the teacher and students are expected to work as a group to solve the group task (Chiriac & Frykedal, 2011). Through group work, students can develop social skills, build a sense of community, support and depend on each other for their learning experiences. Furthermore, also called Learner-learner interaction (Tuan & Nhu, 2010), during group work, the learners or the students are the main participants in the learning process while the teacher plays the role as the monitor allowing students to take ownership of their learning. Therefore, the teacher provides students with the opportunity to take ownership of their own learning.

In collaborative group work, every group member is involved in working on a given task to produce an outcome that they all agree upon (Chiriac & Frykedal, 2011; Kutnick, Ota, & Berdondini, 2006). This allows all types of learners, including English language learners, the opportunity to be in an environment where they can work together to discuss their ideas, share and listen to their peers’ thinking process. Nair and Alwee (2012) state that opportunities are provided through group work for students to talk freely with their peers, which ultimately allows all students to practice and improve their oral language skills.
**Pair work.**

Another form of group work, only involving two participants, is pair work. This type of group work fosters two students to communicate with each other as they teach and learn from each other. To enhance language skills, ELLs need opportunities to practice with English proficient students. Through pair work, students are able to share in more talking time to freely communicate in the classroom (Nair & Alwee, 2012; Tuan & Nhu, 2010). In pairs, Tuan and Nhu (2010) argue, students can practice their oral language skills more efficiently than in a whole-class setting or with the teacher. Creating a more intimate and relaxed environment, two students working together in a group has more benefits than allowing the whole class to participate in a discussion. For example, a group strategy called ‘think, pair, share’ (Schwartz & Pollishuke, 2013, p. 50; also in Bennett, Rolheiser, & Stevahn, 1991; Kagan, 1990) involves two students turning to talk to the person beside them before participating in a whole class discussion. This helps students articulate their thinking with a peer partner before having to contribute in the large group, and works well in encouraging those reluctant learners to rehearse before speaking.

Furthermore, when two students are grouped together with one being more competent than the other, also called peer tutoring, Cheong (2010) state that it is more likely for the novice peer to freely express his or her thoughts and ask questions to his or her peer than to his or her teacher. Research also supports that tutors benefit from this process by “develop[ing] social and leadership skills, feel[ing] a sense of accomplishment, and enhance[ing] their own understanding of concepts after explaining them to someone else” (Coelho, 2004, p. 41). Conversely, Helfrich and Bosch (2011) state that by pairing two ELLs, with one student more advanced in English than the other, both students benefit equally through observations of one another and self-expression.
This shows that ELLs can benefit from participating in group work and have opportunities to enhance their oral language skills.

**Cooperative learning.**

One of the specific adaptive approaches of group work is cooperative learning. In their research study, Kutnick et al. (2006) found that small cooperative and collaborative learning is more effective for students to share their cognitive perspective and problem-solving skills than students working individually. However, cooperative group work is different from collaborative group work because it must include, and students need to demonstrate five specific principles for cooperative group work to be successful (Cheong, 2010; Chiriac & Frykedal, 2011; Gillies, 2003; Sachs, Candlin, & Rose, 2003; Schwartz & Pollishuke, 2013). According to Gillies (2003) and Chiriac and Frykedal (2011), in structuring cooperative learning, it must include these five key elements: positive interdependence, accountability, social and cognitive development, and interaction.

Cooperative learning is an effective way to encourage students to “want to learn more, like school better, like each other better, have higher self-esteem, and learn more effective social skills” (Johnson & Johnson, 1991, p.15). In cooperative learning groups, each student has a specific role and students are able to produce work based on everyone’s input. By assigning roles in group work, ELLs in the class will be able to contribute as well as gain from other members in their group. Mixing cooperative learning groups with ELLs and non-ELLs, ELLs will be able to listen to their peers speak English and also observe their social behaviours. Furthermore, some of the benefits of cooperative learning include: academic gains across different subjects, increase in participation in classrooms, and more social interactions with peers (Gillies, 2003). Therefore, cooperative learning is an essential strategy for supporting ELLs in the
mainstream classroom. For the strategy to be effective, it must be purposeful and meaningful for the students (Coelho, 2004). In cooperative learning, ELLs will benefit by working with peers with more proficient English skills who will provide oral feedback and be language models for the ELLs in the classroom (Coelho, 2004).

**Student Interaction**

One of the greater benefits of implementing group work in the classroom is that students have the opportunity to communicate and interact with each other. Interaction is paramount for ELLs to acquire the English language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). By allowing ELLs to interact with other students in the classroom, ELLs can listen and have conversations with their peers. With limited interruptions by the teacher during group work, students can form discussions amongst themselves about the topic or problem being discussed. By participating in group work, all students are able to collaborate and have opportunities to exchange feelings, ideas, and thoughts (Tuan & Nhu, 2010). Therefore, within group work, student interactions are encouraged and fostered between students, which allows all students to develop and practice their social skills. Student engagement and interaction is especially important for ELLs because as Tuan and Nhu (2010) further state, one of the ways in which ELLs acquire the English language is through their environment and the interaction occurring between the students.

However, the challenge, as Long and Porter (1985) state, is that ELLs are not given sufficient amount of time to practice their oral language skills they are learning. This is a problem because ELLs need opportunities to have conversations and use the language with English proficient peers to develop and enhance their communicative skills. By incorporating group work, it naturally sets up the classroom environment for student interaction, which allows ELLs to have opportunities to acquire the language
through listening and observing their peers. Furthermore, peer interactions may lead to peer relationships between ELLs and non-ELLS, which is critical for ELLs allows opportunities for ELLs to develop social skills and learn attitudes, values, and skills of the culture (Johnson & Johnson, 1991)

Small group peer interactions are paramount for ELLs to acquire the language and research has shown that ELLs feel less pressure to be accurate at all times working in groups (Long & Porter, 1985; Tuan & Nhu, 2010). Wong Fillmore and Teale (as cited in Helfrich & Bosh, 2011), report that through opportunities to interact with native or native-like speakers, there was an increase in the language of instruction with ELLs. According to Tuan and Nhu (2010), “interaction is a key of second language acquisition and exists as the central feature [,] it facilitates language learning and engages students in participating language learning activities” (p. 39). It is evident that through group work, ELLs are provided with opportunities to engage in social interactions and conversations, which contribute to enhancing their oral language skills.

**Classroom Environment**

Providing all students with a safe and an inviting environment will encourage students to explore their learning. When students participate and are engaged in group work, Long and Porter (1985) state that because it allows students to communicate face-to-face, it sets up a natural setting for conversation. Kutnick, Ota, and Berdondini (2006) further support that this natural environment in the classroom fosters students to communicate in a higher quality than during independent or teacher directed work period. Furthermore, Tuan and Nhu (2010) also note that group work also creates a more relaxed atmosphere in the classroom, which increases the quantity and quality of language use in students. When ELLs work in groups, they feel that they are not hurried to create and
produce sentences or answers as they would in a whole-class discussion (Long & Porter, 1985). Furthermore, “ELLs are more likely to participate orally in class when they [feel] supported by [their] teachers and peers” (May Roots, 2005, p.19). Therefore, for ELLs, group work will help create a safe and accepting environment, which will encourage ELLs to participate and feel less anxious about not being able to speak or understand the language well.

**Role of the Teacher**

Although group work is led by students and is created for student learning opportunities, it is the teacher’s responsibility to organize students and prepare tasks for group work. As there are great benefits to implementing group work in the classroom for all types of learners, teachers need to use this strategy to maximize each student’s learning opportunity to speak and listen to the English language (Tuan & Nhu, 2010). Teachers often fear implementing group work in the classroom because of either previous negative experiences with classroom management challenges or lack of ability to hand over control to the students (Chiriac & Frykedal, 2011; Kutnick et al., 2006). However, Helfrich and Bosh (2011) and Chiriac and Frykedal (2011) state that the role and attitude of the teacher during group work is integral for student learning purposes. Students will perceive group work as a positive learning opportunity if their teacher fosters that kind of attitude; however, without the teacher’s support, students will more likely depend on their teachers and feel insecure or lack of trust in their peers during group work (Kutnick et al., 2006).

Using group work as a pedagogical tool will empower all types to students to participate and enjoy learning in the classroom. Therefore, within the classroom, teachers need to integrate ELLs as fully as possible and not underestimate the role of peers in the education of ELLs (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). All students, including ELLs, should be
given the opportunity to contribute and all group members should be able to use each other as resources for the assigned group work. When grouping students together, teachers should also consider partnering native and non-native English-speaking students to work together so that they can learn from their different perspectives (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011). Therefore, although ELL students benefit from teacher-led activities, these types of activities should be implemented along with peer-focused activities so that ELLs have the opportunity to practice their oral language skills with their fellow peers (Helfrich & Bosh, 2011).

Chapter 3: METHODOLOGY

Procedure

This research is qualitative in nature and it includes a literature review exploring the related topics of group work and English language learners in the elementary classroom. I conducted face-to-face interviews with two elementary teachers in Ontario to gather my data. There are three aspects that I investigated. First, this research explored how teachers use and incorporate group work in their classrooms. Second, this research examined how teachers integrate and include ELLs during group work. Third, this research explored the benefits and challenges of accommodating group work for ELLs for teachers in the classroom.

In this research, I searched for and selected participants that fit the criteria suitable for this study and used the readings in the literature review as my background understanding prior to the interview. When I selected my participants, I sent them the set of questions prior to the day of the interview so that they were aware of the types of questions they would be asked during the interview. Upon completion of the interview, I transcribed the interviews, making note of important themes and discoveries.
**Instruments of Data Collection**

The main instrument of data collection was a semi-structured interview method. I provided my participants with the questions prior to the interview because I believed that providing them with the questions better enabled them to think of examples and experiences related to the questions. My participants had the time to think about what they would be asked and it also helped me to accumulate the appropriate data based on their thoughts and experiences. By providing the questions, my participants were able to attend the interview with prepared notes that outlined key facts and information they needed to help them to remember their experiences and beliefs. The goal of my research was to find out how teachers are using group work to enhance English learning opportunities for Grade 1 and 2 ELLs in their classroom. Therefore, allowing my participants to read through what they would be asked during the interview was, I believe, reasonable for the purpose of my study. Please refer to Appendix A for the full list of interview questions.

**Participants**

The participants in my research study included two elementary teachers in the public school system in Ontario. I pursued my research study with participants from an English speaking school where the language of instruction is in English. This was important because my research study was intended to find how English language learners benefit and learn in group work using the English language. Furthermore, regardless of the school board, I found two teachers who have been teaching for more than 10 years in Ontario so that they would be able to provide experiences teaching ELLs in their classrooms. Toronto is a multicultural city and so I believe every teacher will have had at least one experience teaching an ELL within the five year time period. I interviewed
elementary teachers who use group work as one of their teaching strategies because I would like to find out how they define the strategy, what they find are the benefits and challenges, and how they use it in their own classrooms. Therefore, in finding my participants, I used the following criteria to select the appropriate candidates for my study:

1. They must be currently teaching in an Ontario elementary school in an English speaking school.
2. They must have taught in an Ontario public school for five years or more.
3. They must have experience teaching ELLs.
4. They must have used or believe in using group work in their classroom as a teaching strategy.

Arly is in her tenth year in an elementary school in Toronto. She currently teaches at a community public school and is in her second year teaching Grade 1 and 2 split class.

Kathy has been teaching for twelve years in Toronto and is currently teaching a Grade 1 and 2 split class. She has taught this split Grade class for the last five years.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

After completing the two interviews with my participants, I uploaded the interview recordings onto my computer to listen to the data collected. After listening to my participants’ experiences and responses to the interview questions, I began my transcribing process. After transcribing each of the interviews, I went back to each one of them to edit any unnecessary comments or expressions irrelevant to the topic being discussed. After I organized the interviews under each of the questions, I read the transcribed data to find common themes between the two interviews as related to the
literature. Focusing on themes that were mentioned in the literature review, I examined the two interviews to find out if the participants’ responses support the themes I outlined or if there were any new themes relevant to the research topic.

I organized and found commonalities and differences between the two transcribed interviews after I printed them out on paper. I used highlighters and coloured pens to coordinate the similarities and differences between the two collected data. I narrowed down the findings into the themes that emerged, which included: collaboration, development of diverse skills, application in various curriculum areas, opportunities to communicate more, build friendships, establish a sense of belonging, opportunity to share knowledge, development of oral language skills, role of the teacher, challenges of group work for ELLs – language barrier, disengagement, and feeling pressured, and strategies to create successful group work activities for ELLs. I further analyzed the data for individual experiences, opinions, and beliefs on group work as a pedagogical tool used in the classroom.

Ethical Review Procedures

I followed the ethical review approval procedures for the Master of Teaching program. Prior to the interview, I reviewed the participant consent form with the participant, thoroughly explaining the details of the interview procedure. I clarified any questions or concerns my participants had via email before conducting the interviews. The participant consent form can be found in Appendix B. Furthermore, I was open to answering any questions my participants may have and they had the right to stop the interview procedure at any point in time.

After the interview, my participants had access to the findings I accumulated through their interviews, and their responses in my research paper were stated using
pseudonym names. All of the recorded data and information was kept in my own computer, which was always safely locked under a password.

**Limitations**

With the allotted time given to conduct this research study, the data collected may not represent the entire findings for the research question. Since this research examined data collected from two teachers in elementary schools in Toronto, Ontario, other teachers may have different views and beliefs regarding the use of group work as a pedagogical tool for Grade 1 and 2 ELL students in their classrooms. If more teachers, students, and administrative staff could be interviewed, there could be more in-depth and rich amount of data that could be used to conduct this study. However, the purpose of this qualitative research is not to provide a general overview on how teachers use group work effectively to optimize learning experiences for Grade 1 and 2 ELLs, but rather to interview individual participants to gather their opinions and experiences regarding the topic, and is adequate for the purposes and expectations of this study. Therefore, with the limitations of this research, the study could have been further explored and conducted with more time and participants.

**Chapter 4: FINDINGS**

The interviews with Arly and Kathy were transcribed and analyzed to find common, as well as, different themes. All themes that arose in both of Arly and Kathys’ interviews were further compared with themes from the literature review. Throughout the following themes, some are categorized into sub-themes and some may overlap between different sections of this research paper.
Theme 1: Group work allows all students to have the opportunity to collaborate and develop a diverse set of skills.

Collaboration

Both of the interviewed participants had slight variations in how they defined group work in their classroom. Although the amount of time of group work implemented in the classroom varies, Kathy and Arly both support the use of this teaching strategy to promote collaboration between ELLs and non-ELLs. Arly expresses that in her classroom, group work occurs “80%” of the time. Although in Kathy’s classroom group work occurs “20%” of her day, she also says that it “depends on the day but [she] tries to do it everyday, in some way.” Regardless of the time put into using group work for ELLs, both participants emphasize the reasons of implementing group work for all students in the classroom. Kathy explains,

…gives students a chance to share their own ideas and their prior knowledge so just capitalize what they already know. I would say it’s a positive social experience that reinforces ideas that are presented in the class. Basically, [students] take some of those ideas that I’m doing maybe through direct teaching [and group work] gives the kids the chance to apply them in small group situation, [and] bounce ideas off each other.

Supporting this reason, Arly says,

group work means working collaboratively as a team in order to come up with a solution or idea... I do think kids learn better being able to talk with each other and sharing ideas and working as a team as oppose to just working by themselves.

Development of Diverse Skills

The participants praise the teaching strategy of group work as it provides a plethora of opportunities for students to develop a diverse set of skills. For ELLs, group work provides the students with the environment to learn and observe essentials skills that are beyond the learning of a language. For this reason, Kathy and Arly both speak about
the extent to which group work helps all students develop, practice, and enhance various skills. Arly explains,

..in terms of their listening skills, oral skills, [and] how they communicate with one another, [group work] offers the opportunity for [students] to step up as leaders… [students] who are more supportive will encourage [students who do not speak English] to actually say or actually draw to communicate their ideas.

Similarly, Kathy reinforces the idea that by working with their peers, ELLs develop other skills that are vital in living in a new country. She says,

[Group work] obviously helps [ELLs] develop their oral language skills. It helps them also to learn things like social interaction and etiquette. Even things like sharing an eraser or maybe etiquette that they’re not used to from wherever they may or may have not come from. Maybe things are different, maybe there’s a different way of doing something whereas, [in Toronto] it is expected that you hold the door for somebody, [so] these kinds of etiquette things that they may not normally pickup [and] they get a chance to see kids their own age doing it.

Both participants express how shocking it is for ELLs to quickly learn and absorb language and other skills from their peers from group work. Kathy states that “[teachers] always have to remember in these group work situations, that these [ELLs] are just little sponges, they’re taking in every movement, every word, [and] everything.”

**Theme 2:** Group work can be implemented in a variety of curriculum areas.

Group work is a teaching strategy that can be utilized in various subjects. Although both participants have different ways of coordinating the use of group work in their classrooms, they both find this strategy helpful for young learners develop concepts and skills. Arly states,

I use group work in pretty much everything…I pretty much use group work in all subjects. The best thing is group work, in order to get through the curriculum and with some fun. As long as it’s a useful activity that they’re doing and they’re engaged, all students, including ELLs, will learn, a lot.

Kathy also speaks to the idea of incorporating group work throughout the curriculum.

However, she tends to use it more in the following subjects: Language Arts, Science, and
Social Studies. She explains that by using group work in the classroom, “it helps ELLs to participate in grade-level activities and integrates them into the grade level curriculum.”

Both Arly and Kathy have found using group work for guided reading to be successful where they use the method of ability grouping where kids are grouped based on reading level to be helpful in assessing ELLs. However, Kathy explains that she chooses reading materials for guided reading from various topics related to the subjects being taught; making this activity cross-curricular. Furthermore, other activities Kathy states where she uses group work include: group conference for writing and research projects for various subjects.

Kathy expresses her excitement for a new initiative at her school called “Accountable Talk”. The school that Kathy is at is taking charge in putting place this new teaching method of applying group work in mathematics, throughout all grades. Kathy explains,

> when you present these [math] concepts, what happens is sometimes with direct teaching, the kids don’t get the chance to interact and use the terminology or have the opportunity to explain their thinking. So within these small groups of accountable taught groups, which will be changing all the time, the kids are going to have the chance to share ideas, answer questions, work together to sort of develop their math vocabulary and their problem solving skills.

She looks forward to using of using small groups to create opportunities for young students to collaborate and to share their knowledge regarding the concepts being taught. Kathy also comments that the reason for doing Accountable Talk this year at her school is “only because the EQAO results across the province have indicated that math is an area of need”. However, she believes that “it could’ve been accountable talk with a focus on language or [any other subject].”
Theme 3: Group work enables ELLs to communicate more, build friendships, establish a sense of belonging, and share their own knowledge.

Arly and Kathy both state the most important aspect of group work for ELLs is that fact that they have the opportunity to engage in social interactions. Both participants explain that by listening, observing, and practicing English through social interactions with their peers, ELLs have a much more positive experience learning the language. It is important for ELLs at such a young age to have time to socialize with their peers. Arly and Kathy explains that there are some things that the teacher is not able to teach in the classroom, therefore, ELLs need the opportunities to interact with their peers to build social skills and to make presence in the classroom.

Communication

Arly believes that group work encourages ELLs, as well as non-ELLs, “to speak out more because they are more comfortable speaking to their friends than they are with adults.” By having the opportunity to be apart of a smaller group, she explains that “[students] may be less embarrassed to say something out loud.” Smaller group work encourages all students to feel more comfortable because not everyone is looking at you while you’re talking or waiting until you’re finished your turn. Arly says “in smaller groups, you’re able to talk more, express more than you would when everybody’s vying for the teacher’s attention.” Therefore, as Arly explains, since there is less pressure in smaller groups, students feel more safe and able to engage in conversations.

Furthermore, both Arly and Kathy agree that through communicating with peers, ELLs are encouraged to have social conversations with English speaking students. Arly says,
for sure, that’s when you get them to stop talking about Pokémon because they can all relate to like the Yugioh or Pokémon or whatever is popular. That’s where the connection is…[The common interest] force[s] [ELLs] to learn English from other students who talk about it. So they share interests and it forces them to talk because whatever it is, whether it is manga or Pokémon or whatever the current thing is, they talk about and they share an interest.

All in all, it is important to note that group work encourages ELLs to engage in many types of conversations. Through conversations within group work, ELLs learn about school-related content, but also about their friends and their interests.

**Friendships**

Through the social conversations encouraged within group work, Arly and Kathy express that ELLs learn to build friendships with other ELLs and non-ELLs. By sharing common interests, and being able to talk about them in groups, Arly says “eventually they all want to be friends and share their food and so on.” Similarly, Kathy notes, [group work] is really important because it also helps them to develop friendships and something that starts off in a group work project travels outside to recess and becomes a game of tag.

She also explains that one of the main advantages of incorporating group work with ELLs and non-ELLs is that “new friendships” emerge as students collaborate and work together as a team.

**A Sense of Belonging**

Clearly as friendships develop and ELLs are encouraged to communicate with their peers through group work, ELLs have the opportunity to connect with their peers. Kathy comments on what group work does for ELLs and the first thing she says is “I think it makes them feel like they’re part of the group. It gives them a chance to feel like they belong and they do belong.” By developing a sense of belonging to their peers and
new friends in the classroom, ELLs are able to feel more comfortable speaking and participating in group work activities.

**Sharing of Knowledge**

Arly and Kathy explain that one of the strengths of including ELLs in group work with non-ELLs is creating opportunities for both groups of students to share and exchange their knowledge. According to the participants, both groups of students are able to engage in this type of collaboration in numerous ways through group work. In terms of learning the language, Kathy says “ELLs [experience] a broader vocabulary exposure because if they were grouped together or with a teacher, it might be a very specific set of [teacher-focused language].” Furthermore, for non-ELLs, both participants comment on the opportunity to learn different languages. Kathy explains that “kids have much broader, richer vocabulary and ELLs can teach their own language in return.” Speaking further to that, Arly says “I love when [non-ELLs] pick each other’s language up. So they’re learning languages like Spanish and Portuguese from their friends; they’re learning from each other.

Both participants believe that all students benefit from group work in so many ways. Arly believes that “there aren’t just the ELLs benefits, the benefits are beyond language.” She adds,

> these [ELLs] are kids who are bringing these special skills who can teach the other kids how to do it and math, for example, is kind of universal to a point. So [non-ELLs also] benefit in [group work] in terms of learning different ways of how to come up with solutions in math or whatever the subject may be.

Kathy also gives an example of an ELL student who used his first language to state the words during a word challenge. She explained that during this word challenge, students in each team had to come up with words that began with “ch” or “th” and as students
drew pictures of things that started with those letters, the ELL student called out, for example, “chair” and “chocolate” in Slovak. As a result, both groups of students, ELLs and non-ELLs, had opportunities to teach, learn, and share their knowledge.

Kathy and Arly also believe that through group work, students are able to learn and understand each other’s cultures and the diversity that exists in our society. Arly states that “the fact that they’re learning about each other’s cultures and they bring so much to the table is a great bonus to using group work.” Furthermore, Kathy says,

we have a pretty diverse group of kids that come from different home situations, different cultural backgrounds, and so when [the students] have the opportunities to engage in group work, for example last year, when we were learning about holidays, student A had a different background and she has a fantastic wealth of knowledge about Jewish traditions around Hanukkah time and so she was able to share those...So in group situations, all of those ideas are being shared with all of the kids and eventually through presentations and stuff in the whole class.

Clearly, all students are able to learn beyond the language through group work. Whether it is a different strategy to finding out solutions, language, or culture and traditions, all participants believe that both ELLs and non-ELLs are provided with the opportunity to share their own experiences and knowledge through group work.

Theme 4: Group work provides a non-stressful environment for ELLs.

Kathy speaks about the facilitation of a stress-free environment of group work for ELLs in the classroom. She explains that, especially for ELLs in primary grades, it’s really important for them to have the chance to share their ideas in a non-stressful way. She says,

I feel like with me, if I’m asking them a question directly in front of the class, it puts [ELLs] in a spot and they may feel self-conscious about responding whereas with their peers in smaller groups, it’s more of a stress-free environment. It gives them a chance to speak more freely with their peers.
Overall, as important it is for ELLs to practice speaking with their peers, it is evident that they also need the opportunity to do it in a safe and comfortable space. Through group work, ELLs are encouraged to speak more in a stress-free environment where they feel less pressure from their peers.

**Theme 5:** Group work allows ELLs to practice and develop oral language skills.

Both participants believe that developing oral language for ELLs is extremely important in learning the English language. Arly strongly feels that oral language should be the foremost in programs. She believes that “oral expression is the most important – writing and reading is important too – but, kids need to learn to express themselves first.” Kathy also adds that

> it’s really important [to develop oral language skills] because they’re in a social environment all day, everyday at school where they have to function. Kids are asking questions, teachers are asking questions, they’re being confronted with language and if they can’t respond, it’s frustrating.

She believes that oral language skills give ELLs the freedom to really express themselves and to “take a much more active role” in the classroom.

Furthermore, Arly and Kathy believe that group work immensely helps develop and enhance oral language skills for ELLs. Arly says, “[group work] gives [ELLs] more opportunities to actually speak.” She also explains that group work encourages ELLs to participate because some ELLs tend to “hide – nobody’s going to see me, don’t make eye contact, or don’t call on me.” She believes “group work, if done on regular basis, [ELLs] will pick up the language faster, it has to be a routine.” Kathy also states

> group work is naturally a social situation so they’re not just talking about curriculum, they’re all just talking. It’s a social conversation… I think [group work] enhances their use of vocabulary that we’re teaching, that’s curriculum related, and it also enhances vocabulary for everyday interactions on the playground, or whatever.
Overall, each participant strongly believes that group work provides ELLs with the opportunity to develop oral language skills that are necessary in order to express oneself as well as to interact with others in a social surrounding.

**Theme 6:** The role of the teacher in group work is to facilitate it so that everyone is learning.

Arly explains that through group work, she is able to observe her students in how they work together, their leadership skills, and in general how the students learn. She believes her role is “to create a balance [between] the ones that can talk with the ones that don’t and ones who are more supportive and willing to help other kids with those who don’t speak English.” She tries to motivate her students within groups to help each other and to encourage ELLs to actually say or draw to communicate their ideas.

Kathy feels that working with young children, they sometimes need specific roles within their groups. She believes by “giving students specific jobs they [will be able to] develop specific skills.” However, she makes sure that her students have the options of figuring out their jobs within their groups and tries to suggest from time to time about taking turns in the group. Kathy values the idea of having different roles such as scribe and illustrator in group because this way everyone, including the ELLs, has a specific task to fulfill and they’re all contributing to the group task.

**Theme 7:** Some of the factors that make group work challenging for ELLs include: language, disengagement, and feeling pressured in social situations.

**Language**

Despite the participants’ efforts to include ELLs in all group work, Arly and Kathy explain how they face difficulties in communicating with the ELLs due to the language barrier. Arly also says that with the 4 ELLs in her classroom, since they are at
all different levels of English, she finds it challenging “to accommodate [her] lessons and instructions for all students.” She expresses her concerns regarding two of her ELLs of whether or not they understand the Grade curriculum content. When she goes over picture books and songs with the class, she has difficulty finding out if all of her ELLs are actually following or just acting the part.

Kathy also describes her experience with an ELL where she had difficulties teaching the concept; she says,

In math…we were doing something on geometric solids…and I was trying to explain the difference between a corner, which also a vertices and an edge and a face and that completely [got] lost, it was just not happening at all.

She further expresses that “sometimes the curriculum or the concepts are beyond [ELLs’] language development.” It is evident that Arly and Kathy feel there are challenges to explaining the Grade curriculum and concepts in English to the various levels of ELLs in the classroom.

**Disengagement**

Kathy explains that one of the problems she’s encountered in trying to integrate ELLs in group work activities is disengagement of the ELLs. She notices that since ELLs sometimes have troubles understanding the content being discussed during group work, they easily lose focus in the activity the rest of the kids are engaged in. She says, with regards to one of her ELL student,

I think he was getting bored because he didn’t understand and he was getting disengaged…he was just becoming disruptive…[ELLs] can get frustrated because they don’t understand so that can manifest itself in poor behavior and disrupt the rest of the students

She also shares her experience of when an ELL student chose to play with blocks instead of participating in the group work because he did not understand, all the other kids were
attracted to that activity rather than the group task. Therefore, it is clear that with ELLs feeling bored and disengaged, they need motivations to participate and keep trying so that they learn through their peers in group work activities.

**Pressure of social situations**

Kathy raises the point of how group work incorporates young learners to be in a natural social setting. She says,

> For [all types of learners], group work is a social situation so it’s a time for fun [and] they’re not used to having to be in a group in order to complete a task…Their experience with groups is on the playground playing games, playing tag, and not in a classroom doing a specific academic task. They want to play in groups, but are now introduced to new type of group work where they are expected to work. They have to fight that urge and change their mindset.

The pressure for all students to meet the expectations of group work in the classroom is very different from how they view group play outside on the playground.

Furthermore, both Arly and Kathy express that ELLs may feel pressured in group work situations because they may be intimidated by the social situation they are placed in. Arly believes,

> It does stress [ELLs] out in the beginning because it’s a new situation, [they’re] being forced to work and they might feel a little intimidated by that. But I think the more they get used to it, especially if it’s like a routine, then they know that this is what they have to do and it helps them learn better and faster.

However, Arly further notes that group work is essential for ELLs as it “forces them to learn, for the most part and they need to because they need to survive.” Kathy speaks further to that note and says, “[ELLs] sort of feel intimidated being in a group of peers and having to interact within a social situation.” Therefore, the social setting that group work creates pressures all learners to change their focus to academics and for ELLs, the social situation itself may have a daunting effect, depending on their personality. It is
important to be mindful of not only of the group work activity itself, but of ELLs’ personalities when incorporating them in group work situations.

**Theme 8: Strategies to create successful group work activities for ELLs.**

Arly and Kathy have distinct ways in which they incorporate ELLs in group work in their classrooms. Although their style varies, both participants emphasize the importance of including ELLs in classroom activities so that they learn with their peers. They also believe that no matter what the content of the activity entails, it needs to be fun and engaging so that ELLs learn, not just the English language, but other skills that are encompassed in the learning in group work activities. Arly says, “if you can keep [ELLs] engaged and they’re doing something fun, they will learn. Don’t make activities so serious and heavy with a language-focus”. Kathy also adds, “make sure that there’s an element of fun or creativity, it’s got to be fun for young ELLs or you’ll lose them.”

Some of the activities and strategies Arly suggests to incorporate as group work ELLs include: singing songs, watching videos, and doing hands-on activities. She explains that it is important to create opportunities for ELLs to relate to the content being learned in class. Furthermore, she also encourages to “use lots of visuals for ELLs and get them involved in projects so they have roles not only in the group but presence in the whole classroom.” Young ELLs need learning opportunities where the content is relevant and meaningful so that they are not lost in the language they do not understand.

Kathy also encourages teachers to “make group task very simple and very clear, especially for early primary ELLs.” She says that it is important to “outline your steps very clearly so everyone knows exactly what to do.” Furthermore, in planning group work activities, she strongly believes that “the tasks don’t need to be modified that much
for ELLs.” The reasoning for this is, Kathy believes, with reference to Gardiner’s multiple intelligences theory, everyone has different skills. She says,

ELLs are no different so giving a kid an opportunity to show a skill kinesthetically or creatively or musically, it’s the same thing for ELLs. They have these skills as well and it’s not always a paper and pencil task and I think we always have to remember that it doesn’t have to be always a paper and pencil task. In that way, they are no different from any other student.

Finally, in implementing group work with ELLs and non-ELLs, it is essential to create the task, most importantly, fun, engaging, hands-on, interactive, and to also be mindful of the fact that ELLs are more than able than teachers assume. By having a strong belief and faith in ELLs in group work, they will be able to show their skills in various ways; it is paramount to create opportunities for ELLs to explore and share their knowledge and skills. With group work activities that are relevant and meaningful to ELLs, they will be able to foster and develop life skills that are beyond learning just the English language.

**Chapter 5: DISCUSSION**

This research study was conducted to attempt to find out in what ways group work benefits Grade 1 and 2 English language learners in the mainstream classroom. From this research I have found numerous benefits of using group work for young ELLs, including, but not limited to, increase in their social, oral, and intellectual skills. As a teaching strategy, group work provides all learners with the opportunity to collaborate and utilize each other’s knowledge and experience to find solutions and solve problems. Through this research, I learned that young ELLs gain much more than language skills when provided with group activities that invite them to interact with others.

Both of my participants emphasized using group work as to providing an opportunity for ELLs to engage in social interactions. The environment that is fostered
through group work allows, naturally, for ELLs to communicate and interact with non-ELLs in the classroom. Furthermore, given the social situation, my participants expressed how ELLs learn colloquial language, mannerisms, and body language that would not be necessarily taught through a lesson by the teacher. Moreover, through group work, young ELLs develop and strengthen relationships that extend beyond the classroom – outside during recess and lunch. Kathy also emphasized throughout her interview that group work is a “positive social experiences that reinforces ideas presented in the class”. Therefore, group work, for young ELLs is an opportunity to socialize, and within the social interactions, they acquire not only language skills but also other skills that are essential for cognitive, social and emotional development.

Interaction is paramount for ELLs to acquire the English language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2005). Through group work, regardless of the topic or the assigned task, ELLs are placed in social situations where they interact with their peers. With diverse peer interactions, ELLs have opportunities to develop social skills and learn attitudes, values, and skills of the culture from the non-ELLs in the classroom (Johnson & Johnson, 1991). The effects of social interactions and relationships are immense in that it provides ELLs to practice, develop, and enhance language skills within the social situations.

Therefore, from this research, I found that there are many rewards of incorporating young ELLs in group work in the classrooms, the benefits, outweigh the challenges of building social growth, building and recognizing that English language use may be limited. Group work is an effective strategy for all learners across all subjects. Teachers who provide opportunities for students to work in groups recognize the importance of students learning with and from each other. Furthermore, I have come to understand that
group work is one of the strategies teachers can use to provide ELLs with the space to acquire academic language while learning the content with their peers (Zahner, 2012). Overall, group work is very useful in allowing ELLs learn, practice, and improve diverse life skills with their peers.

**Implications:**

The findings from the interviews with participants and the literature suggest that group work is beneficial for young English language learners in numerous and diverse ways. Both participants’ responses and experiences with using group work with ELLs in the classroom can be applied in schools of current and future teachers. The teachers provide effective as well as practical strategies that can be implemented with any grade level ELLs in the mainstream classroom. Many of the topics and issues addressed by the teachers were also confirmed in literature on group work and ELLs.

Since group work provides the opportunity to develop a plethora of life skills for ELLs and non-ELLs, teachers should pay attention to how they can organize groups and the specific tasks involved in the group work. To benefit both ELLs and non-ELLs, teachers need to be cautious of how they group the students – ability, same or different language, personality, and skills. Participants have expressed the benefits of organizing ELLs with non-ELLs and grouping them together as ELLs. However, depending on the task and ability of grouped students, this may differ. By grouping ELLs together, they have the opportunity to talk to each other and to teach one another using their home language. By grouping ELLs with non-ELLs, both groups have opportunities to learn different languages. The general recommendation is to mix the high-, medium-, and low-achieving students in each group (as cited in Zahner, 2012). In essence, both ways of grouping ELLs and non-ELLs provide the two groups to engage in learning from one
another. Therefore, whether it is with students who speak the same language, different language, higher or lower ability, teachers need to make sure that groups are organized so that students have the opportunity to learn through and with their peers.

In efforts to creating an inclusive environment where culturally and linguistically diverse students feel a part of the classroom, teachers should introduce diverse cultures and languages in the classroom. Many ELLs feel less welcomed or accepted by their peers in the mainstream classroom (Xu, Gelfer, Sileo, Filler, and Perkins, 2008). Therefore, teachers should incorporate books, pictures, and activities that reflect the classroom population. Furthermore, provide opportunities so that ELLs also have the opportunity to teach their own culture, language, and traditions. By doing so, non-ELLs will be educated about the diversity that exists in their classroom as well as in the world they live in. Teachers can share their own languages, backgrounds, and embed culturally diverse topics in the school program.

Developing social skills of ELLs in the mainstream classroom is another factor teachers should be more aware of. Although there is an urgency and pressure to teach ELLs language skills, for young ELLs, by developing social skills and engaging in social interactions, they will naturally acquire the language with their peers. By developing social skills, students will be able to communicate, understand other people, act according to social environments, make friends, display acceptable behaviours, express oneself, deal with problems, and establish a good relationship with the environment (as cited in Samanci, 2010). During early years, it is crucial students engage in social interactions as it fosters and enhances language, cognitive, social and emotional development (Ivory & McCollum, 1999). Therefore, teachers need to build positive rapports with all of their students so that students learn what positive social interaction
looks, sounds and feels like. By being a positive role model for all students, both ELLs and non-ELLs will observe and imitate behaviours and words exchanged between the teacher and other students. Furthermore, to encourage both groups to engage in social interactions, teachers can incorporate Tribes activities, buddy system during activities, and time for play to provide opportunities for all students to build trust and positive rapport with one another.

In conclusion, group work supports and optimizes learning experiences of Grade 1 and 2 ELLs in the mainstream classroom in various ways. Although this study focused on specific grades in the elementary schools, the benefits of group work extends across all grades and types of learners. By understanding the needs of ELLs and incorporating them into task-oriented group work activities, ELLs, as well as non-ELLs will have opportunities to learn from each other. Group work, foremost, offers students to engage in social interactions which provides further opportunities for all students to communicate, collaborate, build a sense of belonging, friendship, develop and enhance diverse skills. By prioritizing group work in the classroom, all students will benefit and develop essential skills beyond the English language.

As a future teacher I recognize the importance of not only encouraging ELLs to learn the English language, but also providing time and space for them to interact and socialize with their peers. Therefore, within my class, I will prioritize building a sense of community where all of my students feel safe and comfortable to share and speak their opinions. The first and foremost skill that I will help ELLs develop is their oral language skills because the ability to express and speak their feelings, thoughts, and ideas will give them the freedom and presence in the classroom. I strongly believe in the benefits of group work and will embed the ideas of using group work with not only ELLs but with
everyone in my classroom as it provides various opportunities for all students to develop,
practice, and enhance diverse skills with their peers.

**List of Recommendations**

There were a number of strategies that were suggested by the participants
regarding group work and young English language learners. Through current literature, I
was also able to find further suggestions in ways to successfully optimize learning
experiences for ELLs through group work. The following list provides a summary of
these strategies for educators to implement in their practice.

- Create group work activities fun so ELLs take interest in learning
- Use technology (interactive computer games, internet, Youtube videos, etc)
- Include projects with specific roles so ELLs have a job and a responsibility
- Develop peer-tutoring system so that it allows students in the same age or
  grade group to learn from one another (Xu et al., 2008).
- Provide alternative ways for ELLs to show their work (Cipriano, 1999)
- Make group task and instructions very simple and clear for ELLs
- Be aware of the different ways ELLs may have been taught in schools –
  they may not have experiences expressing their own opinions and ideas
  (Cipriano, 1999)
- Connect units of study to ELLs’ cultures and prior experiences by inviting
  them share their knowledge regarding the content (Cipriano, 1999)
- Use pictures or visual illustrations to help ELLs better understand
  vocabularies (Wallace, 2007)
• Modify instructional materials to meet the needs of ELLs (Hite & Evans, 2006)
• Take multiple approaches to placing ELLs and non-ELLs in groups (Zahner, 2012)
• Set up norms for positive and productive group interactions (Zahner, 2012)

Limitations and Future Study

Although this research study can be beneficial for current and future teachers, there still are limitations within this qualitative study. As mentioned previously, due to the time constraints of this research project, the number of participants was restricted to conduct this study. Furthermore, the participants were chosen in a specific city – Toronto, and with diverse locations, the findings could have varied. Both of the participants were from elementary schools teaching Grade 1 and 2 split classes; future studies may be more beneficial if there was a mix of both male and female teachers in various grades from different locations in Ontario, or in Canada. This study was also conducted from interviewing only teachers, hence, findings were limited to what teachers viewed, observed, and thought were the benefits of ELLs in group work. Therefore, this study may benefit if ELLs, across all grades, were interviewed and observed during or after group work activities with non-ELLs in the mainstream classroom.

Moreover, future research could address the impact of social interactions that occurs through group work specifically. Group work provides the environment for ELLs to engage in social interactions and build relationships. Future research could address how ELLs and non-ELLs feel about group work and the complications of teaching social skills to ELLs in the mainstream classroom. There are various aspects and topics of group work that could be explored with not only ELLs but non-ELLs and diverse types of
learners. Group work is a strategy that offers more than learning of the content; it provides a plethora of opportunities for students to develop, practice, enhance their skills with their peers.
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Appendix A: Interview Questions

Background Information
a. What grade do you teach?
b. How long have you been teaching?
c. How many years have you had this grade?
d. How many English Language Learners do you have in your classroom?
e. Tell me about a typical day in your classroom.
f. Have you had training in teaching English Language Learners? If yes, please describe.

Group Work in the Classroom
1. In your own words, describe what ‘group work’ means to you?
2. a) How is grouping part of your program?
   b) How much time of a typical day, would you say involves group work?
3. a) Do you use groups in particular curriculum areas, or in general? Please explain.
   b) Tell about a specific successful activity that involved group work?
4. What do you believe are some of the benefits of group work?
5. What are some of the challenges of including group work in your classroom?
6. How are groups formed in your program?

ELLs and Group Work
1. What are some ways ELLs are integrated into group work? (that is, how do you group them?)
2. What do you think group work does for ELLs?
3. How do you think group work allows or encourages ELLs to have social conversations with English speaking students? Please explain.
4. What are the strengths of including ELL language learners in group work? Consider the benefits for the ELL learners and for the English speaking students.
5. What are the challenges of including ELL learners in the program? Consider the challenges for the ELL learner and for the English speaking students.
6. Can you tell a story about an English Language Learner who grew/blossomed after being involved in partner or group work?
7. What advice would you give to teachers who want to include English Language Learners in group work?
Appendix B: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: December 13, 2013

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying the use of group work in terms of identifying how social, intellectual, and linguistic growth with ELLs in the mainstream classroom for the purposes of a investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Susan Schwartz. My research supervisor is Larry Swartz. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40-minute interview that will be tape-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you. I can conduct the interview at your office or workplace, in a public place, or anywhere else that you might prefer.

The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. I will not use your name or anything else that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the tape recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes to ensure accuracy.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Lee (Researcher)
Jenn.sy.lee@gmail.com
Cell: (416) 873-4332
Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Jennifer Lee (name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: ________________________________________

Name (printed): ___________________________________

Date: ______________________

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