Instructional Response to the Socio-Emotional Needs of English Language Learners

By

Melissa Kimberly Menon

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

Copyright by Melissa Kimberly Menon, April 2015
Abstract

With the rapid increase in English Language Learners (ELL) in the school system, it is crucial for teachers to help these students not just academically, but also socio-emotionally. This study looks at how a sample of elementary teachers instructionally respond to the socio-emotional needs of ELLs. Two teachers from the same school in the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board were interviewed in regards to the observations they made from their ELL students’ socio-emotional needs, how they responded to these needs, and what outcome they noticed these responses had on their ELL students. The findings showed that both participants used a variety of visuals, implemented grouping strategies to encourage peer interactions, and provided emotional support for their ELL students.

**Key words**: English Language Learner (ELL), socio-emotional needs, elementary teachers, instructional response, peer relations, visuals, grouping strategies, communication, emotional support
Acknowledgements

There are a number of people who have had a great impact on my journey through this two-year Master of Teaching program. First and foremost, I would like to thank all of the professors at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education who taught me everything I need to know and have shaped me into the wonderful teacher I had always dreamed of becoming. I would especially like to thank Professor Larry Swartz for guiding me with my research throughout these past two years; first as my literacy professor, and then as my supervisor. You always reassured me with positive comments and advice and took the time to check up on me regularly to ensure that my research process was going smoothly, and for that I thank you.

I would also like to thank the wonderful teachers who were willing to be interviewed for this study. The both of you shared such informative and thoughtful responses. Thank you for finding the time out of your busy schedules to take part in my study. Without you, this study would not have been possible.

Throughout this program I have been fortunate to have such amazing colleagues who I can truly say are my friends. You have all been there for me both personally and academically. Thank you for sharing your insights and providing advice on how to better improve my research.

Lastly, and most importantly, these past two years would not have been possible if it were not for my family; especially my parents. Mom and Dad, you have both consistently believed in my ability to get to where I am today. You both encouraged me to take part in such an amazing program and guided me throughout the entire process. You were there when I needed you the most, and always told me exactly what I needed to hear. Thank you for believing in me.
Table of Contents

Abstract 2
Acknowledgements 3

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION 6
   Overview 6
   Background of the Researcher 9
   Research Design 10

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW 11
   Academic Achievement 11
   Teacher’s Preparedness 13
   Peer Relations 17

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY 19
   Nature of this Research 19
   Procedure 20
   Ethical Procedures 22
   Limitations 23
   Strengths 23

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS 25
   Communication 26
   Peer Relations 30
   Teacher Preparedness 33
   Behaviour 35
   The Self 36
   Summary 37
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

What are these teachers’ observations about the socio-emotional needs of ELL students? 39

What range of instructional strategies do these teachers use to respond to the socio-emotional needs of ELL students? 41

What impact do these teachers observe their instructional responses having on ELL students’ socio-emotional needs? 44

Implications/Recommendations 45

Limitations 47

Further Study 47

References 49

Appendices 54

Appendix A: Interview Questions 54

Appendix B: Letter of Consent Form 57
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In Ontario today, 8% of students in elementary schools, and 4% of students in secondary schools are English Language Learners (Language Support, 2013). It is clear that the English Language Learners (ELL) program is crucial in today’s day and age, especially in such a diverse country as Canada. The ELL Program is expected to enhance a non-native English speaker’s learning in school. However, it is also important to note the impact that this program can have on a student, whether it is positive or negative. The ELL program is expected to help a student succeed academically, but unfortunately this disregards the impact that the program may have on students in other aspects such as their emotional and social well-being. All children, including ELL students are the posterity that will influence our lives and that of our children. As a result, it is crucial to consider the socio-emotional needs of not only the native English speaking students, but also those in the ELL program.

The English Language Learners program provides students with the opportunity to learn English in order to excel academically and enhance their social interactions with others. As a result, students report being happy that they can take part in this program since they are aware of the advantage of having ELL classes (Charbonneau, 2009). In order to provide the best learning environment for ELL students, it is important that teachers present students with the opportunity to express their feelings and allow them to interact with others in order to meet their socio-emotional needs (Charbonneau, 2009). Learning to speak a new language can be intimidating and difficult. For this reason, ELL students need to feel comfortable knowing that their culture and identity is welcomed and respected in an inclusive classroom environment. This should allow students to feel open about expressing their emotions and encourage successful
interactions with peers, just as Charbonneau suggested. There are other factors of the ELL program however that may negatively impact a student’s socio-emotional needs. For example, this may include pulling a student out of their mainstream class. In her research, Charbonneau (2009) found that ELL students who were pulled-out from their mainstream class had a tendency to feel unhappy because they were being taken out of the class when others were not (Charbonneau, 2009; Hernandez-Chavez, 1984; Spencer, 1988). These students also reported having more work to catch up on for the lessons they missed in their mainstream class, which caused them to feel more stress and unhappiness (Charbonneau, 2009).

A study found in the New York Times Magazine discusses the importance of teaching social-emotional learning to students in order to help them regulate their own emotions (Kahn, 2013). Kahn (2013) quotes Marc Brackett, a research scientist at Yale University, who says that emotions impact our attention as well as our memory, and if we try to learn while our emotions are at a high, we will not be able to successfully learn anything. ELL students may emotionally respond to academic stress or peer relations in a way that negatively impacts their ability to successfully learn English or the curriculum. Therefore if the teacher spends time conducting social-emotional learning activities with all students in the mainstream class including ELL students, ELL students may have the opportunity to learn how to better regulate their emotions and in doing so form a better learning environment in the classroom.

A variety of current research emphasizes the importance of improving the teaching techniques used in ELL programs in order to reduce the achievement gap between English Language Learners and native English speakers (Marlow, 2008; Guglielmi, 2012). However, little research to date has focused on how teachers instructionally respond to students’ socio-emotional needs. Most research that I have come across through the course of conducting this
study has a tendency to focus on high school or adult ELL students, and mainly on their individual academic success. It is more difficult to find specific research on the teacher’s perspective of their ELL student’s needs, and how the teacher instructionally responds to it. Because of the lack of research in this area of study, this research paper should be an additional resource in addressing this issue in hopes of opening the door to future research on how to ensure academic, emotional, and social support for students throughout the ELL program.

Central Question

How does a sample of elementary school teachers instructionally respond to the socio-emotional needs of their ELL students?

Sub-Questions

1. What are these teachers’ observations about the socio-emotional needs of ELL students?

2. What range of instructional strategies do these teachers use to respond to the socio-emotional needs of ELL students?

3. What impact do these teachers observe their instructional responses having on ELL students’ socio-emotional needs?

At this stage in the research, the ELL program will be generally defined as a program that helps students who are learning English as a second language. Many studies have found that the terms ELL and English as a Second Language (ESL) are used interchangeably, even though ESL and ELL are two very different terms (Ontario, 2007). ELL is a general term in which ESL and ELD (English Literacy Development) fall under. ESL refers to students who are learning English as a second language in addition to their native language, and have had the chance to develop literacy skills in their native-language (Ontario, 2007). ELD on the other hand refers to students who are learning English as a second language in addition to their native language, but
have not had the opportunity to develop literacy skills in their native-language (Ontario, 2007). In my research I will use the term ELL to include both ESL and ELD, however the term ESL may be used when referring to a study that used this term in their findings.

Teachers and certified ELL teachers can benefit from this study by becoming aware of the importance of supporting ELL students toward a variety of ends that are not limited to their academic success. Additionally, this research paper can assist the Faculty of Education in North America to realize the importance of ELL students’ well-being, and as a result pass on the information to Teacher Candidates. This should hopefully ensure that future ELL students will be accommodated both academically and socio-emotionally with the help of well-educated and qualified teachers.

**Background of the Researcher**

Growing up, I did not experience working with many ELL classmates; however there is one experience that I can think of. When I was in elementary school there was a young girl who had just moved to Canada with her family during the school year, and was introduced to our class. Although I do not remember much about that year, I do remember not knowing how to communicate with her. From my recollection, my teacher never did class activities that allowed my peers and I to communicate or interact well with this young girl. She seemed very timid, which I assumed was due to her personality. Being much older today, I now realize that there is a possibility that she was timid due to her limited ability to communicate with her peers or because she was not given the opportunity to interact with her peers often.

Because of the experience I had with that one ELL student, it has unfortunately impacted the way I imagined ELL students to be; or at least until recently. During my practicum I was informed by my Associate Teacher that one of the highest achieving students in the class was an
ELL student. I was told that the same student in the previous year only knew a few words of English. This astonished me. I could not understand how the student who excelled at spelling in the class was actually an ELL student. I felt horrible for being surprised by this information. Every student has the right to succeed academically. This made me wonder if other individuals, whether it is students or perhaps even teachers, also react in the same way that I did. This additionally led me to question the extent to which peers of ELL students might judge the academic ability of their fellow ELL classmates based on factors such as their removal from the mainstream class for ELL lessons. I questioned what impact these perceptions may have on the socio-emotional needs of students who are English Language Learners. I began to question: How do ELL students evaluate their self-worth? Do these students assume that others are judging them for being a part of the ELL program? If so, how does this impact the student? I was determined to gather answers to these questions and use this study as a way to educate myself more about ELL students while also learning about how teachers currently respond to their students in order to prevent the needs of ELL students, such as the young girl in my class from being forgotten.

**Research Design**

This qualitative study will involve my interviewing 2 teachers. In chapter 2 I discuss the literature in areas of the academic achievement of ELL students, the teachers’ preparedness to teach ELL students, and peer relations with native English and non-native English speaking students. In Chapter 3 I elaborate on the details of the research design that will be used. In chapter 4 I report the findings of this study, and in chapter 5 I analyze and discuss these results and their significance for teaching and my own instructional practice as a beginning teacher.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Although there are not many studies that focus on how teachers instructionally support the socio-emotional well-being of ELL students, this chapter will discuss a variety of studies that focus on a range of considerations affecting ELL students. These studies can be grouped into three sections: the academic achievement of ELL students in comparison to native English speaking students, the teacher’s preparedness to teach ELL students, and the interactions that ELL students have with their peers. These three categories all relate to the socio-emotional needs of ELL students, which will be further explained throughout this chapter.

Academic Achievement

Many studies regarding ELL students tend to be geared towards the academic achievement of these students, rather than on their socio-emotional needs. Nevertheless, there are a few studies that examine the socio-emotional needs of ELL students through their academic achievement. According to Doll (2010), ELL students’ socio-emotional needs are sometimes negatively affected due to their academic achievement. For example, Doll (2010) reports that mainstream teachers believe “ninth-grade ELL dropouts profoundly struggled with language proficiency, lack of effort, and lack of belonging, suggesting that cumulative challenges of ELLs resulted in dropout” (p. IV). This is important to note, since it is the teacher’s responsibility to encourage all students to feel a sense of belonging in the classroom, regardless of their native language. Unfortunately, according to the research conducted by Doll (2010), teachers fail to provide this welcoming feeling for students, therefore resulting in a greater dropout rate in high school.
**Academic Achievement Gap**

There are a few studies that focus on the academic achievement gap in different contexts. One study found that there are not only achievement gaps between ELL students and native English speaking students in mainstream classrooms, but also within types of ELL programs such as the Language Arts/ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) program, and the One-Way Developmental Bilingual Education program (Marlow, 2008). The Language Arts/ESOL program consists of modifying instruction/program in order to teach students with limited English proficiency (Marlow, 2008). In the One-Way Developmental Bilingual Education program on the other hand, students receive instruction in both their native language as well as English (Marlow, 2008). Marlow (2008) noted that students had better scores on Florida’s Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) in the Language Arts/ESOL program compared to the One-Way Developmental Bilingual Education program (Marlow, 2008). This suggests that it is more beneficial for ELL students to receive modified instruction in English rather than instruction in both their native language and English.

In another study, Guglielmi (2012) noticed that in order to academically succeed in a second language, the student must be proficient in his/her native language which will in turn positively influence a student’s academic achievement in his/her second language through sustaining self-esteem. These two studies suggest that the achievement gap may be reduced if students have the opportunity to become proficient in his/her native language. This may explain why the students in the One-Way Developmental Bilingual Education program in the first study by Marlow (2008) had lower scores than those in the Language Arts/ESOL program since the students were learning their native language and second language simultaneously rather than first ensuring proficiency in their native language.
These studies begin to elucidate how the teaching methods used can play a great role in whether the student will academically succeed, and therefore influence their socio-emotional needs. In order to support a student’s social and emotional well-being, teachers should consider the student’s proficiency in his/her native language. Thus it is equally important for ELL programs to take this into account not only in hopes of reducing the achievement gap, but also to support the social and emotional needs of students through increasing their views toward their own proficiency in a language.

**Teacher’s Preparedness**

As noted previously, Doll (2010) states that ELL students’ socio-emotional needs are sometimes negatively affected due to their academic achievement. This statement suggests that it is a teacher’s role to ensure academic success in ELL students while also responding to their socio-emotional needs. Teachers should encourage ELL students to continue to speak their first language while also learning English. This allows the student to become confident in his/her first language providing a safe and comfortable environment when learning a new language. At the same time, the teacher should ensure that there is a safe and inclusive classroom environment by also planning interactive activities allowing ELL and native English speaking students to communicate with one another and form a respectful relationship. These are examples of how teachers may attend to both, the students’ academic achievement as well as their socio-emotional needs. For ELL students to succeed academically through proficient knowledge of the English language, it can take up to five to seven years of being enrolled in the ELL program (Hakuta et al., 2000). As a result, it is crucial for both mainstream teachers as well as ELL teachers to be prepared to teach ELL students so that they may academically excel (Ballantyne et al., 2008).
**Teacher Qualifications**

Students spend an entire school year with a single mainstream classroom teacher. Therefore, it is important that every teacher hired has the best skills and training to provide to each and every student in order to ensure more than just their academic achievement, but most importantly their well-being. Moreover, it is important that these teachers are capable of attending to their students’ social and emotional needs.

As students enter a new community, one of which is very different from the culture that they are accustomed to, it is crucial for those around them to support their culture (Cummins et al., 2012). These new students sometimes face societal power relations with those who are originally from the new community which leads to failure in school and a decrease in self-esteem for these students (Cummins et al., 2012). Cummins et al. (2012) suggests that in order for ELL students to avoid the societal power relations, teachers should provide students with the opportunity to learn the language and culture of their new community while still holding onto their own culture. It is the responsibility of the teacher to give students the opportunity to share their own cultures in the classroom, while also learning about the new culture and language. By providing great exposure to different cultures within the classroom, all students should become more welcoming of diverse cultures, and rather than creating societal power relations with new ELL students, they should become more hospitable towards one another.

Not only should teachers be aware of their students’ interactions with one another (i.e. societal power relations), they should also have positive emotional intelligence. Teachers should have emotional intelligence in order to attend to all students’ needs, including ELL students. Nizielski et al (2012) suggests that if teachers have positive emotional intelligence and are attentive to student needs, this will result in students feeling attended to and as a result do not act
out as often, resulting in less misconduct. Therefore it is important to hire teachers who are skilled in emotional intelligence for the well-being of all students including ELL students.

*Students’ Perspective*

The way in which students perceive their teacher’s preparedness to teach them is very important not only for the student’s academic achievement, but also in terms of the student’s experience in the classroom. There are not many studies that focus on this in terms of ELL students’ perspectives. A study however that did focus on this topic used questionnaires and found that the views ELL students have towards their ELL teachers are not based on whether the teacher is native English speaking or non-native English speaking, but rather on factors that define the teacher as an individual, such as “personality, individual experience and background, and pedagogical skills” (Moussu, 2010, p. 761). This displays the importance of qualifications and skills that a teacher should have regardless of whether they are teaching native English or non-native English speaking students. This is important in order for students to have more positive views of their teacher, and therefore allow them to enjoy their experience (and perhaps increase their self-concept) in the classroom and/or ELL program.

*Teachers’ Perspective*

Although one would expect teachers who work with ELL students to be confident in what they do, that is not always the case (Mellor, 2009). Mellor (2009) for example administered questionnaires to teachers which focused on their views on the effectiveness of helping ELL students in three middle schools located in Rhode Island (Mellor, 2009). The results suggested that more middle school ELL students were entering schools, but there were less qualified mainstream and ELL teachers to help these students (Mellor, 2009). Consequently, Mellor argues that the achievement gap between non-native English speaking students and native
English speaking students is growing larger since ELL students do not receive the ideal help they may need. O’Neal, Ringler, & Rodriguez (2008) interviewed teachers in regard to their preparedness to teach ESL and found that teachers in their study indicated that regardless of when they received their teaching certificate, they still had a tendency to feel unprepared teaching ELL students in the classroom. If a teacher does not appear confident and is not well prepared/qualified to teach ELL students, the students may not benefit as much as they could academically which may impact his/her well-being.

**Teaching Methods**

Although research indicates that teachers are not well prepared to teach ELL students (Webster & Valeo, 2011), others argue for the use of a range of teaching methods and instructional strategies toward that end. Daly and Sharko (2010) for example investigated the impact that children’s literature can have on a student’s motivation and ability to take part in written assignments. The participants were students in a kindergarten class and a third grade ELL class, both from different schools. The findings suggested that when students are given the opportunity to share meaningful written assignments they have completed, they begin to believe in themselves and in their abilities, therefore increasing their motivation to write (Daly & Sharko, 2010). Another teaching method that may be used is discussed in a study conducted by Silver (1999). Silver (1999) found that play can affect grade five ESL students’ independence and self-esteem because of the socialization and communication with others. Just as it is important to do so for all students in mainstream classrooms, these studies demonstrate the importance of having unique and motivating lessons/assignments for ELL students in order to enhance their experience and as a result their well-being in terms of their ability to excel academically. These teaching methods should be used for the entire class, regardless of how
many ELL students are present. By conducting fun learning activities with the whole class, it is helpful for all students including ELL’s, and decreases the chance of negatively impacting ELL students’ self-esteem by not pulling these students out of their classroom, but by teaching the whole class through the same interactive lessons.

**Peer Relations**

Interactions with peers are an important part of a student’s experience in school which may have an impact on the child’s social and emotional well-being (Visconti & Troop-Gordon, 2010). Baker (2013) conducted interviews and observations with former ELL students who had academically excelled and left their ELL programs, and found that when students were asked to describe their thoughts of school, most of them described it in terms of their interactions with peers. This supports the fact that peer relations are significant for students.

The research conducted by Ricklefs (2012) sheds insight into how peer relations impact student well-being. She explored how the language ideologies of elementary ELL students impact many aspects of the student’s life, including social and peer interaction (Ricklefs, 2012). Ricklefs found that different language ideologies between native English speaking and non-native English speaking students lead to a few types of social interactions including “repairing pronunciation, establishing the legitimate source of knowledge, disqualifying a linguistic minority, and excluding antagonistic classmates” (Ricklefs, 2012, p. 237). When native English students corrected ELL students, it was usually through an aggressive and dominant manner (Ricklefs, 2012). Even though there are ELL programs in place, students still have differing language ideologies such as pronunciation that can negatively impact their social interactions with peers, and as a result may also impact their socio-emotional needs based on the outcomes of their social interactions. Thus, it is the teacher’s responsibility to provide opportunities for all
students, including ELL’s, to interact often in a way that allows for positive social interactions between native and non-native English speaking students, therefore considering ELL students’ socio-emotional needs.

Using these studies as a foundation from which to draw meaning from what I learn by the participating teachers in my study, I hope to contribute meaningful insights into how teachers can support the socio-emotional well-being of ELL students.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

Nature of this Research

This is a qualitative research study which “is a systematic approach to understanding qualities, or the essential nature, of a phenomenon within a particular context” (Brantlinger et al., 2005, p. 195). According to Brantlinger et al. (2005), this type of research involves many important factors including empiricism, knowledge production, particular research skills and tools, production of scientific evidence, and coherent articulation of results. Rather than simply using one specific approach throughout this study, parts of two types of approaches have been utilized. These two approaches are phenomenological research and grounded theory research.

Qualitative research is ideal for this study in order to gather information on how elementary school teachers instructionally respond to the socio-emotional needs of ELL students. To begin, I gathered and analyzed past and present studies that supported and challenged different aspects of the research question. The literature review looked at the academic achievement of ELL students, teacher preparedness, and the ELL students’ interactions with peers. Once the literature was analyzed, the information gathered was then used as a guide toward what questions I might ask the participants during the interviews. Using a qualitative study allowed me to gather relevant information from teachers who were working with ELL students and who could provide the most useful information needed to further study this phenomenon. Consequently, to collect data, face-to-face interviews were conducted. Meeting with the participants in a quiet and comfortable setting allowed the teachers to feel open about sharing their thoughts and experiences.
**Procedure**

*Instruments of Data Collection*

The selected participants took part in informal semi-structured interviews which consisted of questions that related to the main purpose of this research paper; to study how elementary school teachers instructionally respond to the socio-emotional needs of ELL students. The interview protocol that was utilized is located in Appendix A. In order to ensure thoughtful and detailed responses from participants, they were provided with the questions prior to the interview in order for them to reflect on each question and prepare their responses ahead of time.

*Participants*

There was a purposive sample of two elementary school teachers working in the same school within the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board (DPCDSB). In order to take part in the study these participants had to have taught for at least five years in total, with experience working with ELL students in their classroom. It was crucial that these teachers had working experience in this field for at least five years in order to ensure that they gained multiple skills working with ELL students.

In order to maintain the participants’ confidentiality, each participant will be given a pseudonym which will be used throughout this paper. The first participant, Lily, has been teaching for 14 years. She has taught grades 4, 5, 6, and is now teaching grade 2. It is her first year teaching a primary grade. Lily has not taken any ELL additional course qualifications however she has experience working with over 10 ELL students, but is currently working with a stage 1 ELL student in her class for the very first time.

The second participant, Joanna, has been teaching for 24 years. She has taught grades 2 and 4, and is now teaching a grade 1/2 combined class. Prior to her grade 1/2 combined class,
she taught ELL classes as well as grade 6-7 special education. Therefore it is evident that Joanna had a background in ELL education: she completed her part 1. The undergraduate degree that she completed also allowed her to teach English as a Second Language to ELL students.

Data Collection and Analysis

After the interviews were conducted, the transcriptions from both interviews were typed without help from any software. The transcriptions were read one at a time slowly in order to become familiarized with the participant’s responses and the overall flow of the interview. During the first read-through anything that stood out as important information from a paragraph was given a code which was written in the left margin on the transcription. This was done with the two interview transcriptions followed with a break. It was important to take a break for a day in order to let the information sink in before looking over the transcriptions again.

The very next day the transcriptions were looked over again, this time focusing on every sentence, trying to code more frequently than the first time. If a specific term was used well by the participant to describe their response that word was kept as an invivo code in order to avoid rewording the participant’s thoughts/views. To organize the coding, each code per paragraph was numbered. A number was placed both in-text, and on the left margin beside the code in order to easily locate it within the text. For every response by the participant, the numbers would start from one, rather than continuing the numbers for each code throughout the entire transcription. Again, once a second round of coding was completed for both transcriptions, another break was taken.

On the final day of coding, the codes from both transcriptions were reviewed in order to be aware of any overlaps and/or missing codes in either transcription. Once familiar with the codes, the transcriptions were read through again, constantly going back and forth between them
to note any overlaps/differences in the participants’ responses. During this last coding session, every sentence if possible was given a code in order to gather as much data as possible.

It truly is important to take the time to reflect on the transcriptions and coding both consciously and unconsciously before moving along in the data analysis process. For this reason, I waited for a few days prior to organizing the codes. Once I thought it was time to analyze the codes, I wrote each code onto a square piece of paper (2” x 2”) and colour coordinated it: codes from the first interview were written in green pen and the codes from the second interview were in blue. I then worked on a large open area and grouped these square pieces of paper based on similarity. This process took a while to do, but eventually I was able to consolidate them into 5 themes.

**Ethical Procedures**

This study followed the Master of Teaching program’s ethical review approval procedures which ensure that the participants were aware of the purpose of the study, and their rights at all times. Therefore, prior to each interview the participants were provided with a consent letter that informed them about the purpose of this study, and of their rights which included the right to not participate, or to withdraw at any moment whether it was during or after the interview. The participants were aware that the information they provided was confidential, and that they had the option to receive a copy of the transcription to ensure accuracy of the information they presented throughout the interview. Once the participants read through the consent letter, they were asked to sign a consent form agreeing to have read and acknowledged the purpose of this study, and their rights at all times. The consent letter and form is located in Appendix B.
Limitations

Unfortunately there are a few limitations to this study. Due to the time constraint, only two teachers were interviewed, therefore causing the results to be limited. These teachers were also from the same school which could be problematic since their experiences may have been similar due to the shared resources and school environment. In order to have had a more rich collection of participants, there should have been a large number selected from a variety of schools.

In terms of this study’s design, face-to-face interviews were used, which may not be completely reliable to some extent. Some questions may have caused participants to feel embarrassed or timid, and may have resulted in the participant being hesitant to share their response to that particular question. Additionally, these participants presented a limited amount of information since only two participants were interviewed. The information given by the participants is also based on how they interpreted situations due to their own personal beliefs and experiences. This may be evident in questions that were asked, such as, “What needs do you believe your ELL students have emotionally/socially?” Based on the participant’s past experience, he/she may have had differing views when determining a student’s socio-emotional needs than someone else who also works with the student. Rather than depending solely on the perspectives of teachers with differing views, this study could have been much stronger if ELL students were observed, and/or if parents of these students were interviewed.

Strengths

Although there are some limitations to this study, there are strengths that should not go unnoticed. Perhaps the greatest strength in this study was being able to interview teachers who were actually in the field and working with ELL students on a daily basis. These teachers were
able to share their meaningful experiences and thoughts about working directly with these students. This allowed me to not only learn about the experience that ELL students have in a classroom, but also about the teacher’s personal experiences as well.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, the findings collected from the data analysis of the two interviews will be described. These findings all fall under five main themes. Because a large amount of data was gathered from the two interviews with some overlap between participant responses, many sub-categories were formed under each theme in order to better organize the data. Below the heading of each theme these sub-categories will be further discussed by comparing the responses of each participant. The five themes and sub-categories that will be carefully explored throughout this chapter based on the findings are:

- **Communication**: this theme focuses on the quality and quantity of communication between ELL students and their teachers or peers, as well as parent-teacher communication
  - ELL Student
  - Teacher
  - Native English Speaking Peers
  - Parents
  - Gestures
  - Grouping Strategies

- **Peer Relations**: peer relations amongst ELL students and native English speaking students is mentioned in this section along with teacher support for enhancing peer relations
  - Interactions
  - Friendship
  - Teacher Support
RESPONSE TO SOCIO-EMOTIONAL NEEDS

- **Teacher Preparedness:** the participants describe their view on how prepared they feel to teach ELL students, they reflect on the resources available to them, and how exactly they go about teaching these students
  - Resources
  - Teaching ELL Students
  - Amount of Attention Needed
  - Visuals
- **Behaviour:** this theme looks at how ELL students (particularly those in a lower level) may react due to the new environment they are in
  - Resistance
- **The Self:** there are other factors that need to be considered when working with ELL students
  - Personality
  - Correlation to Additional Diagnosis
  - Cultural Adaptation

**Communication**

*ELL Student*

ELL students can be found within any stage and therefore their levels of communication may differ accordingly. Within the two interviews conducted, both Lily and Joanna refer specifically to a stage 1 student who they either currently teach or taught in the past. They were not asked to solely focus on students at this particular stage, however when reflecting on questions they consistently refer to the students at this stage.

Lily frequently describes the difficulty ELL students face when it comes down to communicating. Comprehension for these students is also a problem Lily mentions. She
describes ELL students as simply staring at her almost as if they do not understand what you are saying to them, which she finds is very difficult. Not knowing a language or not being able to communicate thoroughly with others can be a very intimidating task according to Lily, and therefore she describes this as something difficult to imagine going through herself. According to Lily, when a person becomes comfortable with a language, such as native English speaking individuals, they tend to speak much quicker causing it to be more difficult for someone new to the language to understand what is being said. For this reason, Lily often finds her ELL students observing peers to see what they are saying and doing and perhaps try to imitate accordingly.

Joanna’s experience working with ELL students is very similar. Through her observations she notices that these students often become frustrated whether while trying to communicate their thoughts and feelings, or through academic activities. Joanna also believes that one of the primary needs of ELL students is to be able to build vocabulary and have extra time to think through activities depending on the stage they are at.

Within the two interviews, both participants stress the challenge ELL students face when communicating with others. When referring to a specific student in her current classroom, Lily says, “The biggest challenge for him is to communicate to me what his needs are. He’s slowly picking it up, for example he’s able to say ‘washroom’” (Teacher Interview, November 2014). In this case it is clear that the teacher may find it challenging to assist the student in any way due to his difficulty in communicating his needs to her. Not only is it difficult for these students to communicate their needs to their own teachers, but it can also become frustrating to express their emotions to others. This is evident when Joanna describes an ELL student’s experience by saying, “…she would go out for recess and then there were some conflicts that arose and she
came in and she didn’t have the means to fully express herself” (Teacher Interview, November 2014).

**Teacher**

When communicating with ELL students it is significant as a teacher to alter the way that you communicate in order to help the student’s comprehension. Both Lily and Joanna touch upon this. Along with using visuals to communicate, Joanna says that communicating with ELL students is about “simplifying instructions, simplifying speech, giving them some close passages sometimes with references” (Teacher Interview, November 2014). Another strategy that Lily and Joanna both agree is important to make use of is translators in order to help ELL students communicate when needed. These translators may be teachers or students from higher grades who can speak the same language as the ELL student’s first language.

**Native English Speaking Peers**

Lily is the only one who briefly touches upon peer communication. She believes that ELL students need to be able to engage with peers through communication. Lily says, “but the kids are really good, they will speak louder which is really funny because I think I tend to do that” (Teacher Interview, November 2014). It becomes evident that the native English speaking students carefully learn from the teacher in order to enhance their communication with ELL students. The students around the specific ELL student in Lily’s class are also very encouraging and enthusiastic about helping to keep him on track and demonstrate to him what needs to be done.

**Parents**

When working with ELL students, it is important to involve parents in order to better understand the student’s abilities at home and in their previous schools according to Lily.
Parents are also there to assist their child through their journey in a new school. Joanna shares a story of an ELL student she had in her past who refused to speak or move due to conflicts that arose with peers. In order to help this student Joanna thought it was crucial to bring the child’s mother into the school so that the student could feel comfortable and relaxed.

Similar to communicating with ELL students, communicating with parents of ELL students may also be difficult depending on their familiarity with the language. Lily mentions that when speaking with the parents of a particular student in her class, she is able to communicate with them. Lily also described how these parents sometimes gesture once in awhile if they do not know how to say a particular word.

*Gestures*

Communication by and for ELL students is often done through visuals including gestures as described by Lily. This includes teachers, native English speaking peers, and the ELL students themselves. With one particular ELL student in her class, Lily notices that he often has difficulty communicating with his peers, and therefore uses gestures such as pointing. Pointing is the most common gesture she refers to the student and peers using. Lily does note however, that although this particular student struggles to communicate with others, “he was trying to motion and point and gesture, but now he’s able to say washroom, so now that’s easier for him” (Teacher Interview, November 2014). This suggests that once the student is able to pick up simple terms such as ‘washroom,’ it becomes much easier to communicate with others rather than having to constantly rely on gestures and being hopeful that the other person will understand.
**Grouping Strategies**

According to the responses by Lily and Joanna, grouping strategies can be used to help ELL students in terms of their communication, learning, and socio-emotional needs. In terms of communication, Lily describes how she tries to put her ELL students in groups or pair them with a peer who can speak the same language as the ELL student’s first language in hopes of creating a connection and friend for the ELL student. She also believes it is important to work with ELL students one-on-one or have them work with a partner to provide them with academic support.

On the other hand, when Joanna expresses the importance of grouping strategies, she focuses solely on the socio-emotional needs of ELL students. Joanna uses small groups or pairs to work on specific activities for the ELL student’s socio-emotional benefit. When pairing the ELL student with a peer, she believes it is important, “pairing them up (with) the appropriate empathetic students” (Teacher Interview, November 2014). This is significant because if an ELL student is paired with a peer who may not be very empathetic, the grouping strategy may be more detrimental than beneficial for the ELL student. Joanna notices her ELL students appear to be much happier both during and after this opportunity to interact with their peers through engaging activities, which she believes is positively impacting their socio-emotional needs.

**Peer Relations**

**Interactions**

Peer interactions are essential for all students, including ELL students. Both Lily and Joanna agree with this by expressing the need for ELL students to feel included with their peers. Joanna describes this thoroughly when she says:

“They just want to be successful, they want to feel like they can contribute, they want to feel like they are part of the group in some way, and even if it’s just a little way that they can contribute, they want to feel like they’re part of it, that
they’re included, that they’re recognized and validated, they want to feel like they have something to give to (Teacher Interview, November 2014).

Lily dives even further by explaining that if ELL students do not feel a sense of inclusion with their peers, this feeling of exclusion may be visible. She reflects on her experience with a few ELL students when she says, “I find in the past the kids, especially stages 2 or 3, they won’t approach the other kids so they do look like they feel left out, and I’m sure they feel that way” (Teacher Interview, November 2014). Therefore it is important for teachers to be observant and note if a student feels excluded, especially since most of these students may not be able to communicate their feelings or may be too embarrassed of their own ability to do so.

**Friendship**

Lily and Joanna both believe that it is crucial for ELL students to make friends, which is evident when they refer to the importance of making “at least one friend.” Both Lily and Joanna also discuss how the stage that an ELL student is at may impact the ability to make friends. Lily goes into great detail by saying:

…and I find, ELL students, it’s more difficult for them, and for obvious reasons, especially at stage 1 where he’s coming to a country where he does not know the language, it’s very hard for him to make friends, whereas I think students who are at stages 2, 3, and 4, they can just throw themselves in, and yeah some of the words they may not understand, but based on their understanding of the other words they can put it together and I feel they’re fine (Teacher Interview, November 2014).

This demonstrates the great role that language and communication play in peer relations and creating friendships. Joanna’s beliefs mirror those of Lily’s in this particular case; however Joanna does have a bit more to add. She believes that it is also important for ELL students to make friends because “if they have a friend, then they seem to get along with the day and manage their whole day better, so I think that’s a key component” (Teacher Interview, November 2014). By not having someone to express their thoughts and feelings with, it can become more
challenging for an ELL student to adjust to the English language and the new classroom environment.

**Teacher Support**

It is a teacher’s responsibility to support every student in his/her classroom. ELL students may not always feel included, may feel they are not at par with their peers academically, or may simply need reassurance throughout their day at school. This is where the teacher comes into play. As expected of all teachers, Lily says that her ELL students are modified and accommodated for their needs. Both Lily and Joanna frequently refer to the importance of encouraging inclusion in their classrooms. They actively ask peers to play with or work with an ELL student during a particular activity in order to build an inclusive classroom. Through encouraging interactions between native English speaking students and ELL students, Lily and Joanna believe that it allows these students to find similar interests with one another and/or result in future interactions. Joanna also adds that it is important “even to just validate that they’re feeling worried about something, or scared about something, sometimes just a pat on the back, it definitely helps them through their day” (Teacher Interview, November 2014). Lily explains how through this support she provides for her ELL student, peers now go out of their way to remind the ELL student to stay on task by communicating with him what he is supposed to be doing. It may be difficult for ELL students to feel included with their peers straight away, or to be able to fully express their feelings with their peers. For this reason, it is the teacher’s role to attentively listen and observe an ELL student’s emotions in order to provide him/her with the support needed.
Teacher Preparedness

_Resources_

Lily and Joanna come from two completely different educational backgrounds in terms of ELL course qualifications. Similarly, they both have differing views in terms of resources available to enhance ELL student learning. Throughout the interview Lily consistently mentions the lack of extra resources apart from approaching the ELL resource support teacher. She also believes that for “every teacher now-a-days especially in Canada, it should be mandatory to take an ELL course” (Teacher Interview, November 2014). This suggests that there is an urgent need for every teacher in a diverse country such as Canada to be knowledgeable on how to teach and support ELL students. Lily is also not sure if there are workshops available for teachers who have ELL students, however she believes that if these workshops do exist, they need to be more accessible for teachers by considering the additional responsibilities teachers have outside of school.

Joanna on the other hand has the opposite point of view, and this may be reflecting her credentials. Unlike Lily who frequently mentions the demand for more resources, Joanna simply touches upon this once during the entire interview, however she says that “there are many resources that help facilitate the teaching with highly pictorial and really geared to ELL learners” (Teacher Interview, November 2014).

_Teaching ELL Students_

Again, perhaps because the two participants have very differing educational backgrounds in terms of ELL qualifications, Lily is the only one who reflects on the difficulty she has when teaching ELL students, particularly those in stage 1. She states that she does not feel prepared to teach ELL students. This is the first year Lily has taught a primary grade, which she admits is
already a struggle to adjust to (after teaching junior grades for 14 years), however this year is the most difficult year according to Lily. She says that the reason for this is partly because it is her first year teaching a primary grade, but she does believe that it is more difficult because it is also her first time teaching a stage 1 ELL student.

*Amount of Attention Needed*

Joanna uses the term “frustration” to define how it feels as a teacher when there is not enough time in a day to work with an ELL student and give them the attention they need to help them succeed quickly. This word can be used to describe both Lily and Joanna’s views. Both participants believe that the most challenging aspect of teaching ELL students is the fact that there is not enough time to work with the students one-on-one or in small groups frequently. They both understand that they have full class sizes with a variety of different needs, their ELL students just being one of them. Therefore it is difficult for them to give the ELL students their undivided attention when they are aware of other students with different needs who also need their attention. When reflecting on the amount of attention ELL students need, Lily focuses on the ELL student in stage 1 in her current class. Whenever Lily works with this child one-on-one he is able to focus and do his work, but once she walks away to help another student, this particular ELL student loses his focus. This demonstrates how this child is dependent on his teacher at all times.

*Visuals*

According to Lily visuals are usually helpful for all children to use when learning regardless of their background or individual needs. She says that for ELL students however, visuals are not simply an additional tool to use; it is a direct and simpler form of learning since they may lack the language to communicate. Lily goes about providing visuals to her ELL
students by making a visual dictionary and manipulatives available to them. Joanna also believes that it is important to give picture cues and label items to further help these students, while willingly giving extra time for them to complete or work through tasks.

**Behaviour**

*Resistance*

According to Lily and Joanna, ELL students tend to act out and/or withdraw themselves. Lily finds that these students tend to tune out either from the lesson or from their peers, which she believes may be due to the lack of understanding the language/being able to communicate with others. The specific student in her class also tends to occasionally “give up.” Lily will find him watching his peers and trying to copy what they are doing by focusing on his work, but he usually quickly gives up and begins to look at the pictures of a book or finds something else to do. She continues by describing her teaching experience with this particular student by saying, “it’s very difficult to watch him when I’m teaching, and he’s sitting there plugging his ears or looking at the different directions” (Teacher Interview, November 2014). This student is visually showing that he does not want to listen and would rather withdraw himself. Joanna further agrees with this by explaining how:

…sometimes they act out in ways like I said shutting down, or misbehaving or being silly, or you know, yeah it can actually lead sometimes to behaviour issues if they feel so frustrated that they can’t get by, so as a teacher one does need to be aware of that (Teacher Interview, November 2014).

She shares an experience with a previous ELL student who faced a conflict with a peer during recess and because of her lack of communication skills, this child shut down; both emotionally and physically. This young girl refused to talk or move.
The Self

Personality

For Lily and Joanna, an ELL student’s ability to communicate either with the teacher or peers may depend on their personality. They both mention that if the student is shy it can be more difficult to speak a new language or communicate with peers. This is well said by Joanna: “sometimes it takes time, and I do find that it really depends on the individual student and how outgoing they are in terms of fitting in or interacting with their peers” (Teacher Interview, November 2014).

Correlation to Additional Diagnosis

Both Lily and Joanna believe that the stage 1 ELL students in their classes may have additional underlying issues that need to be further explored. However, because these children are still very young (grades 1-2), it is difficult to know for sure at this point. Lily explains her reasoning for believing there are other underlying components by comparing this student to a previous stage 1 ELL student she had who was older (in grade five) yet was able to pick up the language quickly. She says how her current ELL student is only in grade one, and so one would assume he would learn the language much quicker, however she is barely seeing many gains, therefore making her question if there is something else in addition to his ELL needs that is preventing him from succeeding faster.

Cultural Adaptation

Joanna believes that ELL students need to learn “how school functions in Canada and just the routines, and the expectations of schooling here” (Teacher Interview, November 2014). Adapting to the school environment seems to be something that both participants can agree on.
Lily describes the cultural learning experience for the ELL student in her class and his family when she says:

You know it’s cold but we shouldn’t wear our entire snow suit in October, and that was a learning curb for his parents. Yes it’s cold but it’s going to get much colder, so there’s no need to bundle up just yet (Teacher Interview, November 2014).

This particular student is new to Canada and has never seen snow before. Therefore he needs to learn about school rules such as not throwing snow, or even letting him know that we should not eat the snow, as Lily describes.

**Summary**

These two participants come from very different academic backgrounds. Joanna feels much more confident in teaching ELL students, and this could perhaps be due to her undergraduate degree that allows her to teach English as a Second Language. Lily on the other hand does not feel very prepared, and again, this could be tied to her lack of ELL course qualifications. This relates to the article by Mellor (2009) noted in Chapter 2 where he states that there are more ELL students entering schools, however less qualified teachers to help these students. Although there are some qualified teachers to teach ELL students, such as Joanna, there still remain unqualified and unprepared teachers who do not feel confident teaching ELL students especially at stage 1, as Lily often describes. Again, this relates to another article found in the Chapter 2 by O’Neal et al. (2008) who finds that if teachers do not appear confident or prepared to teach ELL students, then these students may not benefit academically. This is evident in Lily’s class with her stage 1 ELL student who, although has been a member of her class for a few months, is not displaying any gains through his communication skills. This could
be due to her lack of preparedness however it could also be due to an additional component that has yet to be discovered due to his young age.

Throughout the interviews Lily and Joanna consistently touch upon the importance of peer relations for ELL students, and forming at least one friendship. Because of this belief, they both try to encourage inclusion in their classroom through numerous strategies. I think this is significant especially since Baker (2013) finds that peer interactions play a main role in the school experience that ELL students encounter. It is great to know that regardless of the qualifications and/or preparedness a teacher feels to teach these students, these teachers nevertheless are aware of the importance of the students’ socio-emotional needs by encouraging peer interaction and inclusivity within their very own classrooms.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

In this chapter the sub-questions that drove this study are answered through the combination of the literature review from Chapter Two, along with the results from Chapter Four. This is followed with the implications and recommendations that this study has had on me as a teacher, as well as recommendations made for educators and pre-service education based on the findings from this study. The limitations of this study and suggestions for future research are described at the end of this chapter.

What are these teachers’ observations about the socio-emotional needs of ELL students?

Lily and Joanna describe a variety of observations that they have made in terms of their ELL students’ socio-emotional needs. These observations have been grouped into three main sections: friendship, student-teacher communication, and adapting to culture. Just as it is the case for all students, if English Language Learners do not accomplish all three of these, their socio-emotional needs may be negatively impacted, possibly resulting in resistance and acting-out in multiple ways.

Friendship

Based on the responses from both Lily and Joanna, it is evident that communication plays a great role in their ELL students’ socio-emotional needs. Without communication there can be a barrier from students successfully interacting with others. Communication is especially needed in order to maintain a friendship with other students. Former ELL students described their school experience based on their interactions with peers (Baker, 2013). Consequently, in order for ELL students to feel a sense of inclusivity and belongingness it is crucial for them to have at
least one friend to play with. Having someone to interact with can truly make an ELL students’ day go smoothly and help boost their own emotions, allowing them to feel good about themselves.

**Student – Teacher Communication**

Communication is important for ELL students, both in their interactions with peers as well as their teachers. When in the classroom, every student needs to be able to communicate with their teacher whether it is for clarification on instructions, permission to do something, or significantly, their own stories about their lives and/or experiences. Not being able to communicate well with peers in a classroom, especially with a teacher, can make it difficult for ELL students (especially those as a lower stage) to feel a sense of belonging. For this reason ELL students especially at a lower stage need to have an easier way to communicate with their teacher. A lower stage in this case refers to stage 1 where ELL students “are becoming familiar with the sounds, rhythms, and patterns of English. They try to make sense out of messages, and they show some limited comprehension of ‘chunks’ of language” (Ontario, 2001, p. 9).

Although communication is key to developing friendships and student-teacher interaction, a student’s personality can play a large role in determining their motivation to do so. Children who are shy tend to take longer to form friendships with others and improve their communication with their teacher, as indicated by the participants. Similarly, students may also be reluctant to share their thoughts with others for a variety of reasons such as resisting their new environment. This may also result in it taking much longer to form friendships for these students due to the lack of communication between ELL students and their peers.
Adapting to Culture

Although diversity should be celebrated often, if a child is unable to adapt to the new culture that they have migrated to, the daily classroom routine may be difficult for these students to adjust to. As Cummins et al. (2012) noted, ELL students should be encouraged to hold onto their own language and culture while still adapting to the new culture, and in turn this should help alleviate any societal power relations within the classroom and at recess. For example, if an ELL student in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) is eating snow or wearing snow pants in the fall (things that are not usually done in this particular culture) other students may begin to notice and react negatively, while the ELL student may be confused about what they are doing wrong. Nevertheless, once these students are able to adapt to the new culture they may feel a sense of similarity and inclusiveness in the school community, positively impacting them socio-emotionally.

What range of instructional strategies do these teachers use to respond to the socio-emotional needs of ELL students?

In response to the socio-emotional needs of ELL students that Lily and Joanna observed, they have implemented many strategies to provide these students with a chance to meet and improve these needs. These strategies have been placed into three sections: i) Using visuals, ii) Implementing grouping and iii) Providing emotional support. In order to exercise these strategies often it is crucial that teachers set aside ample amount of time to plan, allow for one-on-one or small group interactions with peers, and provide emotional support through multiple ways for ELL students.
**Using Visuals**

ELL students can take up to five to seven years of being enrolled in the ELL program to succeed academically through the use of the English language (Hakuta et al., 2000). For this reason, teachers must be considerate about the period of time it may take for an ELL student to truly grasp the English language. As the participants noted in this study, sometimes allowing a student in the class or an older student who speaks the same language to translate what an ELL student is saying or simply to play with can be very beneficial. Rather than forcing an ELL student to completely disregard their first language and replace it with the English language, it is important to allow the child to practice their first language simultaneously with the new language: English (Doll, 2010).

Because communication is the main focus for teachers when helping an ELL student succeed socially and academically within a classroom, teachers tend to use a variety of visuals to not only communicate their instructions and ideas to the ELL student, but also the other way around. These visuals include gestures to indicate a message, visual dictionaries, picture cues, etc. Visuals can be significant in building meaning and communication for ELL students since it allows them to make a connection between the picture of an object and the English word that accompanies it until they are able to make that connection on their own.

**Implementing Grouping**

Sometimes teaching students as a whole class can result in losing the attention from some students, whether or not they are English Language Learners. For this reason it is always important to find the time to work with students either one-on-one or in small groups to provide them with an opportunity to improve their learning. These groupings allow teachers to zone in on
what the student needs further clarification on. In addition, students may be more willing to ask questions that they have when in a small group rather than as part of a whole class lesson.

ELL students and native English speaking students may have different ideologies such as pronunciation which can negatively impact their interactions with one another (Ricklefs, 2012). Providing opportunities for both ELL students and their peers to interact through an engaging activity in a safe place can help solve this issue (Ricklefs, 2012). By placing native English speaking students in small groups or one-on-one with an ELL student gives this child the chance to interact with his/her peers especially since they may not always be able to successfully do so on their own.

**Providing Emotional Support**

Teachers are responsible for much more than simply teaching academic knowledge; they must also give students emotional support often, and this goes for all students. If teachers have emotional intelligence resulting in them attending to students’ needs, these students should feel attended to which in turn may positively influence their behaviour within the classroom (Nizielski et al., 2012). Because ELL students may feel excluded, teachers must work even harder to be emotionally supportive at all times so that these students may soon feel confident about themselves; socially and emotionally. The teacher should attentively listen and observe the student’s feelings, thoughts, and actions, so that the appropriate support may be given. Some ELL students may need a large amount of emotional support frequently, whereas others may simply need to see a smile from the teacher or receive positive acknowledgement through gesture. Therefore it is the teacher’s duty to observe the students’ socio-emotional needs and react accordingly.
Sometimes ELL students may feel so disconnected and excluded from the class due to peer relations or other factors. Because of this they may act out and be unwilling to express their thoughts. In cases such as this (which Joanna experienced), teachers must take a step further. It is obvious that for ELL students who may not feel included in the school environment just yet, their families may be the only people whom they trust. By inviting the child’s parents/guardians into the school to not only comfort the child but also assist in communicating the issue, teachers are able to better support their ELL students’ socio-emotional needs.

**What impact do these teachers observe their instructional responses having on ELL students’ socio-emotional needs?**

*Using Visuals*

The use of visuals and gestures to enhance communication to and from ELL students is beneficial both academically, and socio-emotionally. Through the use of visuals and gestures ELL students begin to feel a bit more confident in their communication process since they are now able to get their ideas out while also comprehending what is being said to them by a teacher. By finding an alternative way for ELL students to communicate in a simpler form until their English speaking skills improve, this increases the child’s chances of building a friendship, improves their student-teacher interaction, and helps them adapt to the new culture they are a part of; meeting the socio-emotional needs observed by the participants. Therefore by attending to these three areas previously noted as the socio-emotional needs of ELL students, teachers are actually improving these needs for their ELL students.

*Implementing Grouping Strategies*

By grouping ELL students with their peers in either one-on-one or small group settings in order to participate in activities, the teachers began to notice that it truly had a positive impact on
the ELL students. These students became motivated to communicate with their peers to the best of their ability in order to take part in the activities. The ELL students also had a slight increase in interactions with their peers since they had the opportunity to learn more about each other and their similar interests. It was evident that these ELL students responded well and appeared to be much more engaged and happier during and after the activities. By allowing students to be involved with a task in small groups, this invites them to listen and speak with one another; therefore encouraging communication. This communication may take place through working together in order to brainstorm, create, or even problem solve as a team. By organizing the time for students to take part in these engaging activities, every child including ELL students are being encouraged to collaborate and build their communication/understanding in a fun and interactive method.

**Providing Emotional Support**

Building an inclusive classroom by not only encouraging peer relations with the ELL and native English speaking students, but also providing encouragement or validation through a simple pat on the back is a great way for teachers to provide emotional support. Students begin to recognize that their teacher truly cares about them and acknowledges their worries. They realize that their teacher takes the time to attentively listen to their needs and provide support accordingly. As the participants noted, these gestures to assist students appear to have a positive impact on the child’s day, therefore improving their socio-emotional well-being.

**Implications/Recommendations**

As a teacher this research process has been an educational journey for me. I have learned about some of the many socio-emotional needs that my future ELL students may have. I now know of some effective instructional strategies to use with these students in response to their
socio-emotional needs that I observe. For example, I am aware of the effectiveness that picture cues, gestures, small group activities, and emotional support can have on these students. Most importantly, I will be able to identify if these strategies are successful, or if new strategies must be implemented to ensure that my ELL students’ socio-emotional needs are met.

Looking further at pre-service education, it is evident that there currently is not a large focus on English Language Learners. North America, especially the GTA has such a diverse community where languages from all around the world are spoken. With a growing number of ELL students, how can there not be enough light shined on this area in educational classes? Just as there is always room for improvement in any area of study, the pre-service education should consider implementing a larger focus on English Language Learners. There should be more focus on not simply the academic achievement of these students, but also their socio-emotional needs, and how to instructionally respond to these needs. Teacher candidates should be taught how to provide many pathways for communication with an ELL student (such as using gestures and visuals), group strategies to promote inclusive classrooms, along with emotional support and building teacher candidates’ emotional intelligence.

Each and every one of us is constantly learning more about the English language. We know how it feels to not understand a form of poetry or a new term that we have not heard before. We feel excluded if we are part of a conversation where jargon is being used and we do not understand what the term refers to. This means that we must still be learning the English language; we must also be English Language Learners. We all have first-hand experience and know how it can impact us socio-emotionally if we feel excluded because of this. Having a stronger look at ELL students and how to help them through their journey in our schools should be a great focus for us both in pre-service education and in our careers as educators.
Limitations

There are a few limitations to this study. Due to the time constraint, only two teachers were interviewed, therefore causing the data results to be somewhat limited. These teachers were also from the same school which is problematic since their experiences may have been similar due to the shared resources and school environment. In order to have had a more rich collection of participants, there should have been a large number selected from a variety of schools. However, this would only be possible if there was more time available to conduct interviews and collect the data. Finally, a great limitation to this study is that there is not one specific kind of English Language Learner. All students including ELLs learn at their own pace and through different methods. Unfortunately this study looked at ELL students as a whole rather than focusing in on one kind of learner or one stage of ELL students.

Further Study

Due to the limited number of participants and the shared school location, a future study should focus on teachers from different schools, school boards, and/or socio-economic areas. This would allow researchers to note if there is a vast difference in the results. It would become evident if location does or does not determine the socio-emotional needs observed or the teacher’s instructional strategies used as a response to these observations.

Although the research questions in this study were focused on ELL students in general (including students at any stage), both participants focused their responses on ELL students that were at a lower stage, even if they had ELL students in their class who were at a higher stage. A future study should zone in on what mainstream classroom teachers observe about the socio-emotional needs of ELL students at a higher stage, and any instructional responses that are used accordingly. Through this new study it would become a great stepping stone for educators to
learn more about the socio-emotional needs of ELL students at all stages and how to go about responding to their needs through instructional strategies.

Throughout both interviews and within the results section it is evident that both participants often referred to an ELL students’ personality having an influence on their socio-emotional needs. They also mentioned that sometimes it is difficult to determine if an ELL student, especially in a primary grade, has an additional unidentified need (such as a learning disability) which is impacting their communication and/or interaction within the classroom. To further investigate these questions a new study should be conducted to see how personality and other underlying exceptionalities influence an ELL student’s socio-emotional needs, and if so, how teachers go about responding to these needs.
References


Retrieved
from http://search.proquest.com.myaccess.library.utoronto.ca/docview/1312419910?accountid=14771


Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Interview Protocol: Teacher’s Instructional Response to ELL Students’ Socio-Emotional Needs

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interview:

Interviewee:

Position of interviewee:

(Briefly describe the purpose of this study)

Interview Questions:

Part A: Background

1. How long have you been teaching?

2. What grades have you taught?

3. Do you have any ELL additional course qualifications (part one, two, or three)?
   a) If yes, what are they? Where did you go to receive these qualifications?
   b) If not, how did you prepare yourself to teach ELL students?

4. Have you ever worked in a school as an ELL resource support teacher? If so, for how long?

5. How many ELL students do you currently have in your class?

Part B: Observations

6. What would you say are the primary needs of ELL students?

7. What are some obstacles to meeting the primary needs of ELL students?

8. Describe some teaching techniques you use to teach ELL students.

9. What have you observed about the social needs of your ELL students?

10. How do your ELL students engage with your native English speaking students? How successful are they at interacting with their peers?

11. What have you observed about the emotional needs of your ELL students?

12. What have you observed about your ELL students’ emotions in your class/in the school?

13. How do you think the socio-emotional needs of your ELL students compare to native English speaking students?

14. Have you gathered any instructional strategies to respond to these socio-emotional needs?
   a) If so, what strategies have you used?
   b) How would you describe the impact your strategies had on your ELL students?

15. What are some challenges you face when teaching ELL students?

16. What advice would you give to a beginning teacher?

(Thank the participant for taking part in the interview. Remind the individual that his/her responses are confidential.)
Appendix B: Letter of Consent Form

Univertsity of Toronto
OISE | Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

(date)

Dear (name of participant),

I am a graduate student at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching student. For the purpose of a graduate research paper, I am studying about how elementary school teachers instructionally respond to the socio-emotional needs of ELL students. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this topic as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor, who is providing support for this assignment this year is (name of supervisor). 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 approximately a 45 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you, outside of school time.

The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a research 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 audio 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.

Sincerely,

Researcher
Melissa Kimberly Menon
(416)727-0362,
melissa.menon@mail.utoronto.ca

Research Supervisor
Larry Swartz
larry.swartz@utoronto.ca
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 Melissa Kimberly Menon and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature:

Name: (printed) ____________________________________________________________

Date: ___________________________________________