The Range of Benefits of Extra-Curricular Activities towards English Language Learners

By

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Master of Teaching Research Paper Abstract

English Language Learners (ELL) experience challenges adjusting to the Canadian education system that can affect students’ social and emotional well-being, confidence, and academic. In order to improve the ELL’s English proficiency, it is important that ELL students have the opportunity for one-on-one interaction with their teachers and peers because it makes language development more meaningful and so, it is important to consider the potential of extra-curricular activities to support ELL students’ social emotional well-being and language development in schools. The focus of this research paper is to learn about the potential benefits of increasing the involvement of ELL students in extra-curricular activity from the perspective of teachers who have supervised extra-curricular activities. Extra-curricular activities sometimes provide a safe learning atmosphere for ELL students to share their interest while at the same time ELL themselves can transition into the Canadian education system smoothly, and thus would result into better academic and social performances.

Key Words: English Language Learners (ELL), Extra-Curricular Activities, Social Development, Academic Development, Community
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Research Topic

There is an increasing influx of immigrants coming to Canada. Statistics Canada (2008) indicates that the number will continue to increase until 2056, with almost 50% of immigrants coming from non-Western countries. In addition, the statistics report a trend where there are an increasing number of students whose mother-tongue is not English (Statistics Canada, 2008). In addition, there have been an increase of the Aboriginal population in Canada as it has grown from 976,305 in 2001 to 1,172,785 in 2006. And in Toronto alone, 51% of the population was born outside of Canada (Toronto Demographic). Within the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), the demographic of East-Asian students is 17% in 2012, compared to 15% in 2006 (TDSB Census Publication).

With the increasing numbers of immigrants and indigenous people in Canada, there is an urgent need to look at the pedagogical aspect and the language acquisition of English Language Learners (ELL) students when they enter schools; but there are not enough studies published to
examine the connection between students and extra-curricular activities, especially for ELL students.

English Language Learners (ELL) are students who experience challenges and need additional support for them to learn the English language (Ortmeier-Hooper, 2012). ELL experience a range of challenges adjusting to the Canadian education system, including, for example, culture shock, which can affect students’ social and emotional well-being, confidence, and academic success (Derderian-Aghajanian & Wang, 2012). Teaching ELL students is also difficult and the challenges teachers face includes accommodating ELL students within mainstream classrooms (Hite & Evans, 2006). In order to improve their English proficiency, it is important that ELL students have the opportunity for one-on-one interaction with their teachers, yet this is difficult when students are integrated into mainstream classroom settings (Hite & Evans, 2006). Learning a new language is a long and difficult process. ELL students are put in a situation where they are forced and pressured to acquire a new language in a short period of time, which means that teachers are also under pressure to instructionally respond to these students’ diverse needs (O’Neil, 2009).

With the increasing number of immigrants, education needs to be transformed to accommodate the diverse population of students. The transformation would help students acquire a stronger identity within their community and to accommodate their social, academic, and emotional needs (Bank, 2011). Bank (2011) further believes that there should be a variety of social interactions wherein students are provided a safe community that allows them to practise their identity which would be beneficial to the students’ success. I concur with Simoncini and Caltabiono (2012) that extra-curricular activities could provide a turning point for ELL students’ when they are experiencing a new environment.
Communication and social interaction are key experiences in children’s language learning because it makes language development more meaningful (Zhang, 2007). In light of this, it is important to consider the potential of extra-curricular activities to support ELL students’ social emotional well-being and language development in schools. Extra-curricular activities provide many new and varied experiences for students (Simoncini and Caltabiono, 2012) and create opportunities for students to communicate and interact with their peers in a less formal learning environment than the school classroom. These opportunities include taking risks, exploring new activities, sharing and expanding interests, and providing more opportunities to practise the English language.

The focus of this research paper is to identify the potential benefits of increasing the involvement of ELL students in extra-curricular activities - such as in music, sports, academic and social clubs. The research will gather data from the perspective of teachers who have several years of experience supervising extra-curricular activities. Extra-curricular activities sometimes provide opportunities for ELL students to share their identity, gradually allowing them to transition into the Canadian culture. This results in improved academic performances and social skills (Derderian-Aghajanian, Cong, 2012; Guest, A., & Schneider, B. (2003).

**Background of the Researcher**

There were many catalysts that helped me focus on this topic, but the two main reasons why I choose this topic were my own experience and that of my close friend. It actually began with a conversation I had with one of my friends. He was an ELL student. Before he moved to Canada at the age of ten, he was very out-spoken, and was known for his leadership and charisma back in China. However, when he moved to Canada, my friend told me how the culture shock affected his personality: he became an introvert, was less social, and he lost a lot of
confidence in his social skill. He was bullied and felt there was a stigma attached to him. His teacher saw this and recommended him to partake in some extra-curricular activities. And so, he join, had a hard time adjusting, but gradually, he was able to adjust and started joining many extra-curricular activities.

At first, I had a hard time believing him ever being an introvert because of his sociable personality around me. However, he reminded me that I met and befriended him through extra-curricular activities. I realized the huge potential of extra-curricular activities. When I met and befriended him during our time in high school, he was involved with the school music council, the science club, the school library, track and field, and various school bands. I met him through 4/5 of these extra-curricular activities. He told me that partaking in these activities helped him open up to others. I noticed that myself, through his charisma and improved social skills.

Part of the reason I started this study is because I have been teaching ELL students. In my years of teaching, I have designed an ELL curriculum (for a volunteer organization/school) and taught and mentored ELL students. From my observation, not only did the ELL students have trouble speaking with confidence after coming to Canada, but to add to that, they also felt heavy pressure from their family to learn the English language. As I came to know and teach them more, they felt more comfortable around me. Although I did the majority of the talking, we were able to converse and slowly get to know about each other. However, it was when we started talking about basketball (or their favourite sports) and their interest in music that I became overwhelmed and captivated with their interest. They were more engaged when we were communicating. It was evident that they felt more relaxed and I was slowly able to gain their trust as an educator. I suggested them to join an extra-curricular activity if they wanted to expand their interest in music. The results were positive as my ELL students became more attentive in
class. They would even take the initiative to bring their instruments to my class, asking me to help them to hone their instrumental skills. It was rewarding to see my ELL students build their confidence and adapt to the English language. Therefore, I have always been interested in not only teaching ELL students, but also in exploring the benefits of extracurricular activities.

Another reason for starting this research was due to my own experience as a student. Throughout my adolescence, I was heavily involved in music, dance, and other academic clubs. I joined several extra-curricular activities that involved music – bands, councils, choir, etc. – and as a result, I developed a strong passion for music. I always wanted to hone my skills with as many instruments as I can. I developed a strong work ethic by practicing the instruments on a daily basis. More importantly, what I valued the most about extra-curricular activities is the strong relationships I developed with my peers and teachers. Extra-curricular activities became a social outlet for me - a safe haven. As a result, I was not afraid to open up to others and ask for help. My confidence grew. Therefore, I developed stronger leadership skills and a better work ethic which transferred into my academic performance.

Furthermore, I also believe that extra-curricular activities offer many skills that are not easily taught in classrooms (Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton, & Ball; 2012). I was also involved with many physical activities, such as the softball team. Here’s how being on the team helped me develop my teamwork and leadership skills:

*In the summer, when I was nine years old, I joined a softball team. I had been very active in sports but this was my first time joining a softball team. I knew the basics, I knew how to catch, and I was very strong at bat. However, our team lacked players that knew how to hit and catch. I was one of the few players who knew both how to play the game and how to catch and hit. Our coach was a university student and he was very knowledgeable in softball. The team was*
on a losing streak and I was frustrated with the team and the coach. My coach called for an emergency practise to hone our skills as a team. During practise, I berated and insulted my teammate for “being lost in the play”. As a result of my outburst, the coach immediately benched me and told me that I was done for the day. After practise, my coach told me why I was being punished and he reminded me what teamwork means. He acknowledged my strong will and work ethic but he stated that my ego prevents me from working as a team. Instead, he told me to use that frustration and turn it into leadership – help my teammates improve by giving strategies and directing the players in the game. And so, I apologized to my teammate, and even took the initiative to host an extra practise. That’s when my coach noticed I had started showing more leadership in practise and in games.

Finally (and this applies to every club that I have joined), I had a sense of unity with other students. I met most of my friends through extra-curricular activities and more importantly, I enjoyed my time during these activities. For this reason, I wondered about the potential and the range of benefits of extracurricular participation for students who are in ELL during their difficult transition into a new community.

Research Questions

The central question in my research is what range of benefits for ELL students do teacher-advisors of extra-curricular clubs observe?

1. What particular kinds of extra-curricular activities do these teachers perceive has having the strongest benefits for ELL students?
2. What do these teachers perceive to be some of the greatest challenges that ELL students confront in school and what challenges do they face participating in extra-curricular activities?

3. What benefits do these teachers observe pertaining specifically to ELL students’ social and emotional well-being and academic performance?
Chapter 2: Literature Review

As one can conclude from the previous chapter, the more involved the students are in school sponsored extra-curricular activities, the less alienated they may feel. Involvement in extra-curricular activities results in an increased sense of belonging to the school community (Grassi, Hanely, & Liston, 2004; Brown & Evan, 2002).

In the 21st century, there has been heightened awareness of the need to change and improve the pedagogy for ELL students in regards to creating a supportive learning environment (O’Neill, 2009; Duff, 2004; Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002). Firstly, it is important to define who precisely ELL students are, and to conceptualize extra-curricular activities. Then, I will explore the benefits of participating in extra-curricular activities and how it affects students’ emotional, academic, and social performances. My goal for this research is to encourage further investment in extra-curricular activities and to reveal alternative school resources for English Language Learners.

Definition of ELL Students

Defining ELL has become more subjective as it no longer involves just immigrant students (Webster & Lu, 2012). According to Hooper (2008), an “ELL student” is someone who is still in the process of learning the English language and could benefit from further instruction. Because these students are not limited to where they are born, even those students born in North America can fall into this definition of an ELL student (Lee, 2012). Therefore, students who are in English as additional language (EAL) and English as a Second Language (ESL) are grouped in the ELL.
Struggles of ELL Students

Evidence was found in 2005 that ESL student dropout rates are extremely high across Canada (Toohey & Derwing, 2008). According to Derwing, a professor from University of Alberta, 74% of ESL students did not graduate high school. Another study found that 40% of ESL students in Vancouver failed to graduate from high school between the years of 1997 and 2002. The increasing drop-out rate raises serious questions about the range of factors that may be affecting these students’ schooling experience in Canada. Moreover, there were many controversies, debates, and arguments being made by schools about the struggles of ELL and the strategies that should be implemented for language development (Verdugo & Flores, 2007).

In the TDSB, less than 44% of the students speak English as their first language while 34% speaks one or more non-English languages (TDSB). When students arrive in Canada, they need to develop their English oral and writing skills for a variety of purposes, including socializing with people, performing well academically, preparing for their careers, and assimilating into the culture (Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002; Pappmihiel, 2001). However, to gain a strong understanding of the English language, or any language for that matter, it takes time and according to Cummins (2007), ELL students would need roughly 5 years to catch-up to their English-speaking peers in literacy. Achieving this goal depends on the students (1) willingness to learn, and (2) the exposure to the language through theory (academic instruction) and practice (conversations). Learning a new language is an emotionally difficult process because not only are they learning how to read and write in English, but they are also struggling to learn the content of the lessons (Gibbons, 2003).

Many immigrant students and their families have difficulties adjusting in Canada as they are confronted with different social challenges such as stereotypes and culture shocks (Duff,
For example, focusing on Asian immigrants, immigrant Chinese learners are sometimes stereotyped as “high achievers” who can easily adapt into the education system in Canada and its culture (Derderian-Aghajanian & Wang, 2012). According to Palmer, Chen, Chang, Leclere (2012), they call this stereotyping of Chinese students as the “myth of the model minority” (pg. 140). This stereotype is dangerous and harms immigrant students, in this case the Chinese immigrants, because it overshadows the social struggles that many immigrant students encounter, in and out of school. For example, they experience culture shock, language barriers, socio-economic differences, and other social struggles. Derderian-Aghajanian & Wang suggest that schools sometimes fail to recognize these social realities that students face and as a result, students’ poor academic performance may be affected (2012).

Another struggle that educators sometimes overlook is the difference between the educational cultures that students and parents are accustomed to. The educational culture is very different for immigrant/ESL students compared to their previous country. In China and India, for example, students are more committed to memorizing information which can be seen in Chinese literacy, where instead of alphabets, the students memorize characters (Derderian-Aghajanian & Wang, 2012). Also, in China, the learning, in theory, is teacher-lecture based unlike Canada where teaching leans more towards student-based and the learning is open. Therefore, students not only have to adjust their language patterns and thinking in order to understand the English language but they also have to learn the educational culture in Canada (Derderian-Aghajanian & Wang, 2012).

Another challenge that many ELL students meet, and this is especially true for students from low-income immigrant families, is the lack of parental support; instead, they receive a tremendous amount of pressure to learn the English language quickly (Derderian-Aghajanian &
Many immigrant parents do not speak English and they themselves have their own difficulties of transitioning into a new home. There is a certain expectation placed onto the students to assist the parents to adjust into their new lives (Duff, 2001). Therefore, many ELL students struggle without parental support in transitioning themselves into the Western culture.

For the indigenous people, where students are most likely in English as an Additional Language (EAL), many aboriginals still struggle because of the lack of linguistic background (from their first language). As cited by Babaee (2011) and Cummins, research indicates that ELL are likely to have strong additional language development needs, and that they should have a strong linguistic background in their first language. Unfortunately, indigenous people do not have strong linguistic backgrounds. Some indigenous people speak their mother language, some speak English as an Additional Language, even French, and some speak standard English as a second dialect (SESD) (Babaee (2011). Many of the English spoken – SESD & EAL – have not been caught up with the Ontario Standard English which could lead to students’ disengagement in school (Duff, 2001). Due to the lack of linguistic background for EAL, there is a language barrier between the students and the teachers.

Therefore, students need more exposure and practise for language development. Language development is influenced by students’ context outside and inside of school – social, personal, and cultural experiences (Hite & Evans, 2006) and unfortunately, one of the struggles that many ELL experience is the lack of diversity/culture within the school.
Definition of Extra-Curricular Activities

The definition of extra-curricular activities can include a range of possible activities, including sports that are played without any organization or supervision, just so long as it involves a social community (Eccles, Barber, Stone, & Hunt, 2003).

However, according to Simoncini and Caltabiono (2012), extra-curricular activities are distinct from unorganized and unsupervised social activities such as socializing or playing sports with friends. Instead, they are organized structurally and contain supervision by educators and under careful supervision, extra-curricular activities could emphasis community, communication, leadership, and other social skill-building and positive development for the participants. The supervision of extra-curricular activities enforces positive development for adolescents because it provides guidance for the students (Leung, 2003; Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton & Ball, 2012). Additionally, according to Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton & Ball (2012), with supervised extra-curricular activities, students are guided towards appropriate behaviours and activities while being challenged to help develop competencies and confidence. These learning environments provide a safe atmosphere and provide many (social) learning opportunities for students (Brown & Evans, 2002; Cheung Leung, 2003). As a result, extra-curricular activities may decrease risky activities in students’ growth and instead provide positive influence to the students such as discipline, intelligent, confidence, and character for each individual (Goldberg, 1946). Therefore, in this research, I will be focusing on extra-curricular activities that are sponsored and supervised by schools and teachers.
The Benefits of Extra-Curricular Activities

Schools have traditionally supported and sponsored multiple types of extra-curricular activities but there have been few studies to explore the theoretical effects of extra-curricular activities on students’ and ELL students’ academic performance (Shulruf, 2011). Dimech & Seilers (2011) argue that during a child’s adolescent age, students have a high fear of social embarrassment which discourages some students from joining such activities, thereby affecting these students’ academic and social well-being. Therefore, because of the lack of study and lack of participations of extra-curricular activities, it warrants the question of whether students should increase their participation in extra-curricular activities.

However, school sponsored extra-curricular activities – including sports, music, crafts, etc. – are effective to the extent that they create opportunities for students to develop self-confidence and to improve their mental health. This is a view put forward by Leung (2003); Dimech & Seiler (2010); Battersby, & Bolton (2013), and Shulruf (2010).

The research conducted by McGee, Williams, Howden-Chapman, Martin, and Kawachi’s (2006) found that participation in sports promoted higher level of attachment towards peers, parents, and teachers. The students build a sense of togetherness because they are in a team and they reduce their social anxiety by participating in sports (Wisener, 2008), which ESL students experience. The combined benefit was found to improve students’ mental health and social skills. Additionally, they found that students exhibited positive traits through their participation in sports, including teamwork and leadership. For example, in sports, peers were able to assist each other; experienced teammates were able to serve as mentors to one another; and teammates respected each other. The coaches played an integral part in creating a fair and a respectful environment where these positive behaviours thrived. Due to the close attachment amongst
peers, students felt that they were in a safe environment which decreased social anxiety (Schumacher Dimech & Roland Seiler, 2011). These findings were also supported by Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton, & Ball (2012), who interviewed students and staff about student development in inner city schools and found that students who were committed to their respective teams showed better emotional intelligence. For example, if a team wins a game, students experience success and confidence (Golberg, 1946). But more importantly, students experience a sense of community and unity as students realize that many sports are a team effort and thus, it becomes only natural for teammates to support each other. With many extra-curricular activities providing an opportunity for working in a group-based atmosphere, they may be uniquely beneficial for developing ELL students’ emotional intelligences, social skills, and performing well academically. Combined with the atmosphere of working as a cohesive unit, they could facilitate ELL students’ adjustment into their schools.

These implications might extend to a broader range of extra-curricular activities that similarly provide opportunities for structured guidance. These learning environments may provide a safe atmosphere and provide many (social) learning opportunities for groups (Simoncini & Caltabiono, 2012). The reason being is that when supervision is provided (by educators) by a strong English speaker to an English learner, new appropriate ideas can be shared, and it increases competency for both the learners and the speakers (Zhang, 2008).

According to Dimech & Rolander, studies have shown that students who spend more time in extra-curricular activities at a younger age express better emotional adjustment in the junior grades and in high-schools. Some have found that students who participate in extra-curricular activities express less aggression, social struggles, and academic difficulties (Simoncini & Caltabiono, 2012). This is also supported by Shulruf’s finding (2010) as students
in athletic extra-curricular activities are not only involved for academic reasons but also for social reasons. Another interesting finding from his work is that students who participated in athletic activities have better school attendance records, academic results, social relationships, and self-esteem.

A less obvious benefit of physical extra-curricular activities is mentoring (Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton & Ball, 2012; Dimech & Rolander, 2010). Mentoring can be seen as a form of extra-curricular activity (Shulruf, 2011, Day, 2006). For example, experienced athletes can assist the coach by helping new players or rookies. Mentoring is actually one of the extra-curricular activities that are very beneficial for students, especially students who want a higher chance of getting into college because it builds skillsets that admission office looks for and further career development (Shulruf, 2011). Mentorship deserves special mention because it is powerful (Day, 2006). Mentorship within extra-curricular activities reduces negative psychological or social effects because emotional support is given, advice is shared, and a safe space is created for diverse social interaction (Day, 2006).

Extra-curricular activities have also been found to strengthen relationships between teachers and students. The relationship between teacher and students are important because if the students have a strong relationship with the teachers, the more likely they will do better in school (Penner & Wallin, 2012). With music, ELL students can be exposed to a new and creative approach to communicate with teachers, using a language that requires more than just verbal skills. Most ELL students struggle with language barriers, but this would not be a huge hindrance in music, especially instrumental. Music teachers/conductors create strategies to communicate by sending and receiving wordless messages (for example, using gestures), which is seen as very helpful for ELL students. These strategies that have been incorporated into music are seen as
introducing a new means of communicating to the ELL students which brings a mutual understanding between teachers and students and a safe environment for the ELL students (Battersby & Bolton, 2013).

Furthermore, through music, students are exposed to new creative approaches in learning the English language. For example, in singing, students can practise their sentence structure, reading fluency, and so on through songs, in a more innovative and engaging method. Adding musical elements in literacy creates a positive learning environment for the student (Paquette & Reig, 2008) because they provide a sense of safety for ELL students.

Extra-curricular activities also enable students to try new things and expand their interests (Cheung Leung, 2003; Pang & Hung, 2012). Music is a good example, especially for ELL students, because students are in a new environment where they experiment with new tools (instruments). Learning musical instruments encourages students to take on challenges, to be confident in their performances, and to be competitive. This is very true in Canada’s school-based music programs (Cheung Leung, 2003). Musical performances provide a sense of achievement, school value, and like other extra-curricular activities, a sense of belonging amongst students.

Extra-curricular activities have promoted pro-social behaviour towards students because it provides a safe environment for students to identify themselves and to practise cooperative learning. Extra-curricular activities provides supervisors – coaches, conductors – that help transitions students into adulthood and as a result, not only do students develop positive behaviour but also positive academic performances (Morrissey & Werner-Wilson, 2005; Guest & Schneider, 2003).
How will Extra-Curricular Activities benefit ELL Students?

In Vygotsky's theory of zone of actual development, learning originates in the socialization process through interactions, group-activities, and communication (Gibbons, 2003). For this reason, as stated by both O’Neill (2009) and Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney (2002) it is important that teachers encourage ELL students to partake in opportunities for group-learning where listening, speaking, and sometimes reading and writing, are prioritized. Promoting communication and interaction is one of the best ways to develop language skills, and extra-curricular activities provide more room for error for ELL students when communicating with their peers. They also offer a safe environment for students to continue to practise their public speaking (Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002; Chatouphonexay & Intaraprasert, 2014). Peers can correct one another’s writing (Ma, 2010) and verbal skills in a sensitive way where ELL students can view it not as criticism but as a learning goal (Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002). In contrast, direct correction of an error from a teacher in front of a student’s peers might stunt students’ efforts and discourage them from practising/using their newly acquired language due to embarrassment (Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002). However, with the addition of teacher supervision in extra-curricular activities, there will not likely be any risks of peers using extra-curricular activities as an opportunity to make fun of ELL student’s mistakes despite the lack of the less formal space (Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton & Ball, 2012). Teachers, or supervisors, initially responsibility, should be acting as models and mentors, and providing a safe environment for student participants (Cubukcu, 2012).

Vygotsky’s theory is also supported by Brown and Evans (2002) who further argue that through extra-curricular activities, students who participate, regardless of ethnicity, will likely
show improvement on their behaviour inside and outside of school and they will feel a sense of community (Ernst-Savit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002; Grassi, Hanley, & Liston, 2004).

The more informal out-of-classroom interaction they have, the more likely their language proficiency will be developed. (Ernst-Savit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002; Grassi, Hanley, & Liston, 2004).

According to Mok (2011), many extra-curricular activities in schools are regarded as non-formal space for student-centred learning. Student-centred learning environment provides interactive activities that allow a lot of open-discussion and sharing which creates a lot of deepened understanding and meaning (Cubukcu, 2012). Extra-curricular activities provides an opportunity for students to take ownership of their work, goals, and activities which brings personal value, encourages in-depth understanding and intrinsic motivation orientation (Cubukcu, 2012). Learning is social and with extra-curricular activities where co-operative learning is encouraged for all ethnic groups, ability levels, and areas of school, students benefit positively in multiple ways. This includes higher academic performance, stronger feelings of personal efficacy, greater satisfaction with school, and improved interpersonal relations across ethnic groups (Cubukcu, 2012; Teemant, 2005).

In these spaces, students are directly involved with discovering new ideas, knowledge, activities, and so on. In order for student learning to take place, lots of activities are done through problem solving, cooperative learning, involvement with society, and being responsible for self and peer learning. Therefore, extra-curricular activities provide the students with a way to connect with the community in a safe working environment. For example, the service learning program, an educational program for students, also opens up discussions on school-wide problems, diversity, and other areas of improvement of the school/community. Service learning
provides activities and service-learning that expands students’ cognitive knowledge. (Heuser, 1999). ELL Students experience personal interaction that helps students develop their language skills and more importantly, students become more aware of their surrounding culture and community. Service learning program educates both the students and the community, thus creating a path for accepting diversity (Grassi, Hanley, & Liston, 2004).

This is further supported by Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney (2002), who argue that students who have adjusted into their new community feel less frustrated and feel better adjusted into the school culture, which evidently improved their confidence as students.

In many ways, students who do not participate in school activities are not participating in the school itself and its community (Grassi, Hanely, & Liston, 2004). This claim is further supported by Brown & Evane (2002) who stated that many students who participate in extra-curricular activities have a stronger connection with the school. There is a strong belief that with greater involvement in school activities, it will help prevent alienation and, consequently, student dropout (Brown & Evan, 2002). Students should make strong connections with the school in order to get a better experience and a healthy (academic) and social outcome during their adolescence (Hall, Eisenburg, Christenson, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007). Extra-curricular activities may bring a sense of community and school involvement for ELL students and consequently, with this strong sense of being a part of a community, it may help them with their transition into the Western culture and possibly, and hopefully, lead to decreased drop-out rates and decrease problematic behaviours (Brown & Evan, 2002, Morrissey & Werner-Wilson, 2005).

Furthermore, extra-curricular activities give students a sense of self-identity and value (Guest & Schneider, 2003). Academic extra-curricular activities such as peer-support groups can
provide group discussion, media representation, critical thinking, and other social issues (Brooks, 2007). In addition, some extra-curricular activities that are focused towards group-discussions can be seen promoting questioning, critical thinking, and other peer-support groups, allowing students to develop a more critical attitude towards methods of teaching and learning but also to be more aware of their surroundings such as the media (Brooks, 2007). These group-discussion based extra-curricular activities caused students to be more critical with the information they receive, such as from the media. More importantly, they may become more accepting of others’ differences and ultimately more collaborative with each other and promoting a wider society.

Extra-curricular activities involving group activities and discussions are strongly related to my friend who I mentioned earlier. Before he joined various extra-curricular activities, not only was he bullied but teachers and other staff at the school were, as he stated, “incompetent.” He stated that students and teachers perceived him to be stupid because he was not able to speak intelligibly to others; he felt rejected from the school. This is supported in Gay’s article (2002) where teachers tend to speculate and stereotype the abilities of the children of colour, ethnicity and background experience; teachers sees ethnicity as a learning disability (pg 614 – 617). Right now, my friend is enjoying his success as he has a graduate degree in Finance and is currently working at the Royal Bank of Canada. He credits his success to his participation in extra-curricular activities; which provided him with a safe space for him to practise English, share his opinion, communicate and befriend others, and gain a lot of self-confidence in his social and academic performance.

Therefore, extra-curricular activities provide students with a way to connect with the community in a safe working environment. For example, the service learning program, or an educational program for students, open up discussions on school-wide problems, diversity, and
other areas of improvement of the school/community. Service learning provides activities and service-learning that expands students’ cognitive knowledge. (Heuser, 1999). ELL Students experience personal interaction that helps students develop their language skills and more importantly, students become more aware of their surrounding culture and community. Service learning program educates both the students and the community, thus creating a path for accepting diversity (Grassi, Hanley, & Liston, 2004).

However, studies on extra-curricular activities are limited but more so, studies on extra-curricular activities and ELL are extremely limited which caused insufficient amount of data or studies that had opposite results. For example, in Dimech & Seiler’s (2011) research to see if physical activities decrease social anxiety, there was only a few weeks experiment done to see if the students’ social anxiety level would decrease, but unfortunately, the research was limited and Dimech & Seiler’s hypothesis was unproven. Although Dimech & Seiler did not achieve statistical significance that they want, there were still positive outcomes in the research as there were still positive signs of students’ interaction in teamwork, support, and even social adjustments. A more in-depth study including a clinical sample could further bring insightful and positive results. In addition, this is just one study as we will go more in depth of the connections between extra-curricular activities and ELL students.

There is a need to further investigate the specific benefits that ELL students may experience from the participation in extra-curricular activities. Few studies have been done aimed at understanding the importance of extra-curricular activities for ELL students. Schools realize that environment and social interaction are critical factors for students to achieve academic achievement (Brown & Evan, 2002). A better understanding of how extra-curricular activities connect to the well-being of ELL students will help schools shape future programs.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Methodological Approach

My research is a qualitative study that aimed to determine the perceived effects of extra-curricular activities on the academic performance and social development of English Language Learners (ELL). The purpose of my study is to gain a better understanding of the benefits of extra-curricular activities for students who are ELLs. I explored my topic based on my literature review of the ELL students and extra-curricular activities. For my field work, I conducted three one-on-one interviews with teachers who have had ELL students in their classrooms who have participated in extra-curricular activities and have supervised extra-curricular activities outside of the classroom setting. I did this in order to explore the phenomenon taking place (Creswell, 2013; Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach, & Richardson, 2005). Furthermore, this research was analyzed through the phenomenological approach and some grounded theory research has been integrated. Existing qualitative research, it provides strong support and promotion of extra-curricular activities (Paterson, 2012). I explored the impact of extra-curricular activities on ELL students. I interviewed educators who supervise an extra-curricular activity and gaining their perspectives of the academic or social changes they have witnessed amongst students who are ELL over time. I coded the transcribed interviews and I looked for common and central themes, which will allow me to generate a better understanding of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013; Paterson, 2012). And to finalize my research, I made connections between the data that I collected and the literature review.

As mentioned from the previous chapter, it is important to assess the extent to which extra-curricular activities are supervised, as supervision is essential for maintaining a diverse and safe atmosphere. To account for this, the study examined what the educator, who supervises
extra-curricular activities, experiences. This study will also define the effect of the (supervised) activities towards ELL students from teachers’ perspective.

**Instruments of Data Collection**

I located participants through recommendations from principals or teachers that I have worked with. Using my educational contacts made it easier for me to track down potential candidates for my interviews. The participants were informed that interviews would be held in mid-October and/or in late January to collect data for my qualitative study. The reason why I picked those months is because I wanted to avoid times when teachers are busy writing report cards. This would allow the participants to focus on sharing insightful ideas. Additionally, the time between these interviews primed teachers for the interview; it allowed teachers to begin reflectively thinking, observe, and compare the ELL student’s behaviour and their overall improvement/transition in class.

**Participants Selection**

The data for this qualitative research will be collected through interviews. Interviews will take place at two different schools and the reason for having two locations is because according to Creswell, more than one site is needed to make the study more diverse. I will be interviewing three teachers each where two teachers are from one school and one teacher will be from another school where each teacher must currently be supervising an extra-curricular activity. A further criterion that must be met in order to take part in the conduction of the interview is listed below:

- a teacher who supervises physical activities extra-curricular activity
- a teacher who supervises music extra-curricular activity
- a teacher who supervises any academic extra-curricular activity from both schools
The justification for having a small-scale of interviews is because the context of my research is specifically focusing on students through teacher’s observation and thus, having three teachers allows for a diversity of experiences while also permitting the development of identifiable themes. Furthermore, this method would allow me learn about the impact that ELL students receive from extra-curricular activities from the teachers’ perspective. Picking three teachers will provide a deeper understanding and help me develop a well-saturated theory (Creswell, 2013). I also decided to interview teachers from different schools to avoid my research from being focused on one particular school (Creswell, 2013). By interviewing teachers from different schools, it provides a more versatile and wider look at extra-curricular activities and their effects towards ELL students.

**Ethical Consideration**

The participants will sign a consent letter notifying them that any revealed information from the interview will be anonymously aggregated and confidential. To further ensure the safety and comfort of my interviewees, they will have the options of withdrawing from the interview anytime they please. Furthermore, there might be some questions that are too sensitive or uncomfortable for the participant and as a result, participants will have the option to not answer (Creswell, 2013). In addition, certain comments from the interview might cause harm to other individuals or their comments might be outside the social norm, the participants will have the right to request to move onto the next question that they are more comfortable with (Creswell, 2013). By ensuring the confidentiality of the participants, the participant are likely going to feel comfortable and will provide detailed answers for my research questions throughout the interview process, knowing that they are protected during the interview (Creswell, 2013).
**Data Analysis**

After the interview in October, I will be analysing my findings by comparing the interviewees’ statements. I will be looking for common or significant statements in order to create a focused, systematic data and hopefully, find a generalizing pattern from the interviews. Furthermore, I hope to move on towards a detailed description on discussing what the participants observed and how they experienced their phenomenon (Merriam, 2009; Creswell, 2013).

**Limitations**

One of the limitations of this qualitative research is that this study’s only instrument to collect data is conducting interviews with teachers. This research would have been more meaningful and rounded if I was able to conduct interviews with students and participate in both classroom observations and observing extra-curricular activities.

Another limitation that my research will encounter is the limited time-span. If a more concise and saturated research is to be developed, then interviews and observations must continue for more than a few months. This time constriction will limit my assessment on the extent of ELL student’s improvements in the academic and social field. There is a likely possibility that ELL students would show an increase of social and language development because extra-curricular activities provide a safe atmosphere for ELL students to practise and improve their language skills (Schumacher Dimech, A., & Seiler, R. 2011). Thus, I would expect ELL students to be more engaged with (certain) lessons because as mentioned earlier, the more ELL students are involved with school activities, the more likely they would be engaged in classrooms. It is important to sample for teachers who have been consistently supervising extracurricular activities over their careers. It’s not about asking about specific ELL students as
much as it is asking about what they have observed about ell students’ participation in extracurricular activities over the years based on their experiences. In addition, the participants may tell me specific stories of specific students and as a result, it is important to design questions that will generate a broader answer from the participants.

As I mentioned on my previous chapters, the lack of research on ELL students and extracurricular activities itself is a limitation (Shulruf, 2010). While I am conducting my research, I must consider the fact that extra-curricular activities are not the only factors that may have helped ELL students improve their language skills. However, I hope that my qualitative research will help school boards and other researchers to further study the effectiveness of extra-curricular activities towards ELL students.

**Strengths**

The biggest strength for this qualitative research is the interview process. The purposeful sampling will allow me to select participants who have experienced/witnessed the central phenomenon in my study (Creswell, 2013). The idea of using and sharing the teacher’s experience is further encouraged by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Clandinin and Connelly emphasize the power of narrative inquiry approach in research. From learning about experience from interviewees, the research is approached from a personal and social viewpoint. The interviewees are not only sharing their personal experience and are sharing their understanding and learning of the situation itself. And to expand on the role of the interviewee, he and/or she is inviting the interviewer the phenomena that was took place from their experience (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). While at the same time, I am implementing and combining my own research into their experience, as Clandinin and Connelly calls this “negotiating relationship,” which is essential for educational research. Negotiating relationship allows the interviewee and the
interviewer to work together to find the key points of the interview and to even refine the purpose of the research.

As a result, the interview will allow me to collect data through listening about the experimenters’ experience as a supervisor of an extra-curricular activity, thus gaining meaningful insights about extra-curricular activity and their impact on ELL’s social and academic development.
Chapter 4: Finding

Introduction

I have interviewed three teachers with all of them having an extensive experience in supervising extra-curricular activity. To respect their privacy, I will be labeling them as Interviewee A, Interviewee B, and Interviewee C. Interview A has been supervising music extra-curricular activities for over a decades. Interviewee B has been supervising and coaching extra-curricular activities that are sports related for 6-7 years and Interviewee C have also been supervising extra-curricular activities that are dance-related for just over a decade.

After conducting the research, I interpreted the data to try to find a common pattern, theme, and organizing my findings. According to Creswell (2012), I have been engaging in “lesson learned.”

The themes were created based on the focus that I have obtained from one-on-one interviews. The themes revolve around 1) Social Development 2) Academic Development 3) Growing as a community. In addition, some sub-themes have emerged during the coding process of my data collection. The sub-themes I have developed for Social Development are mental health, motivation, and confidence. In Academic Development, the sub-themes I developed are language development, health and physical education, sports, and work habits.

Social Development

I encountered several common sub-themes of the (range of) benefits from ELL students who participate in extra-curricular activities. One of the benefits that extra-curricular activities provide is stronger social development because extra-curricular activities provide a safe space. In the Ministry of Education’s Supporting Mind: An Educator’s Guide to Promoting Students’
Mental Health & Well Being, it is argued that extra-curricular activities promote positive mental health. The document indicates that ELL students are liable to mental health problems because of multiple factors such as poverty, social exclusion, discrimination, etc. It is also argued that ELL students need a safe environment, meaningful social opportunities, and positive relationships with peers and within the community for a strong mental health. Extra-curricular activities address all these needs, and as a result, extracurricular activities will create better mental health for students including the strengthening of the confidence. They also help build stronger relationships amongst peers.

Mental Health

Extra-curricular activities, especially activities related to sports, enhance mental health for students (Interview A). Extra-curricular activities provide students the social skills needed by providing a social outlet for ELL students. This is especially the case for students who have struggles at home.

“Especially in this being a tough neighbourhood, an inner city neighbourhood, many can’t afford athletics outside of school and so, this gives them a free opportunity to be involved with the school.” (Interview B)

Additionally, it is not only through athletics where students can develop better mental health:

“In a club, students are able to adapt to the school. In a club like this, students are able to explore and share their interest. This is where passion can develop. As a teacher, we always want to try and promote students to take risk and try new things.” (Interview C)

In this quote, the interviewee specifically discussed a wide range of the students’ personal life experiences as an example to expresses the importance of extra-curricular activities. ELL students not only develop important skills, extra-curricular activities also provide the social support that students need.
**Motivation**

In addition to mental health, extra-curricular activities provide extrinsic motivation to come to school. Some ELL students have a hard time adjusting to school because of the lack of companionship. Extra-curricular activities create a space for students to communicate and build strong relationships. This creates mental development and development amongst peers (unclear). This quote indicates that extra-curricular activities influence positive attendance records as it gives students an intrinsic motivation to be excited about school.

“This creates mental development and development amongst peers. I found that if you come to school, it can be used as a motivation. It gives them a reason to be excited about school. Thus, extra-curricular activities provide a social outlet. It builds a strong friendship and also confidence.” (Interview C)

**Confidence**

In addition to mental health, students gain confidence through extra-curricular activities. Teachers regularly notice that with ELL students, they have seen so much growth and an increase in confidence through extra-curricular activities,

“Building confident, leadership skills, building community and developing relationship…Yes, definitely, they tend to be more confident and interact with more students outside the classroom and within the classroom than they normally wouldn’t interact with. In some class, the language comes more quickly, particularly those who have been struggling.” (Interview B)

Students are confident socially and academically as it provides them an opportunity to build relationships and to communicate with peers. As a result, (oral) language tends to be established a lot quicker for ELL students who participate in extra-curricular activities.

Through extra-curricular activities, social identities are created and through this social status, more opportunities are created for students to socially interact with teammates. As a result, students are more confident and are encouraged to practise teamwork not only within a
team setting but also outside of extra-curricular activity settings. Consider the following example from the interview:

“Student A, who had a really hard time in his primary years, slowly began to show more confident in his social and academic performances ever since he joined the soccer team. Before he joined the soccer team, he really lacked motivation to do school work, and was more focused towards playing than working hard from the lessons we provide. However, ever since he joined the soccer team, he kind of gained a social identity. As a result, he gained more confidences socially which transferred academically. He still struggles on the basic skills in soccer but he at least puts an honest effort to improve his play and this is slowly being transferred in his school work. He is beginning to ask for help more often from his peers and that is really what all teacher wants, a student’s gaining confidence and asking for help when needed.” (Interview B)

In addition, to gaining confidence, it is the overall social skills that students gain from extra-curricular activities.

‘…Teaching people skills such as interpersonal skills, teamwork, and even self-discipline as well. You are teaching the same skills you need to take in a business world. You have to be able to work together…’” (Interview C)

The statement provided by Interviewee C describes one of the benefits ELL students derive from participation in extra-curricular activities. This quote identifies how ELL students engaging in extra-curricular activities are at an advantage in terms of being able to develop and hone their skills. Furthermore, extra-curricular activities encourage social interaction which is beneficial for the students’ social development; extra-curricular activities provide important socialization skills.

**Academic Development**

From the interviews, I found that extra-curricular activities assist ELL students’ academic performance. ELL students also produce better academic performance as they improve their English language development/skills, health and physical education, and their work habits. In my
interviews, one of the key reasons for ELL students improving their academic performance is because the students feel that they belong in a community:

“We (the school) have become a strong community. We connect in ways that most people don’t outside the group. Extra-curricular activities allow further student, and even teacher, interaction thus students are more comfortable in classroom and gain confidence in them.” (Interview B)

When a strong community is established and a rapport is built between students, and even teachers, the strong relationships allows students to excel at activities and take risks without feeling judged.

“Confidence is one of the drives of students’ academic success and when students are in a safe space like in a club or other extra-curricular activity, students are given a space to befriend others or talk to other. Once students are able to gain confidence, they are willing to take on tasks and ask for help. As educators, we want to promote teamwork and I believe extra-curricular activities parallel teamwork. Of course, this is where teachers play a huge role. We must create a safe atmosphere and be aware of our surroundings.” (Interview C)

Language Development

Through extra-curricular activity, in this case, choir, students are exposed to new ways to develop their oral language skills. My interviewee, who supervises the choir, provided details of what he/she witnessed when he/she was conducting the choir.

“For ELL students, I would say the biggest changes I’ve seen is in singing, in vocal and choir. They are developing their language skill in a different way than they are used to and it expands their vocabulary and making sounds that are new to them. That’s the biggest change. But also, leadership and opportunity to speak in front of other people and have discussion with other ppl and their classmates and work with people who don’t speak a lot of English or vice versa. Or even students who speak their own language. You can see improvement in the students’ oral language skills” (Interview B)

In addition, sports are also used to improve language development

“For language development, it is hard to determine if the ELL student understands or not. However, they will develop the language a lot faster. And remember, most sports, the language is universal. For example, they will likely know what the word pass means in soccer. If not, they will quickly pick up the language.” (Interview B)
Extra-curricular activity allows ELL students to learn the English language outside a classroom setting. Through extra-curricular activities, students can experiment with new ways to improve their language skills. As the interviewees stated, there is an international language in sports. When the interviewees stated how “pass” can be interpreted as a universal language, the implication is that extra-curricular activities provide a vernacular language through the extra-curricular environment. Through extra-curricular activities, some language can be communicated culturally instead of orally. The interviewee also revealed that ELL students who participate in extra-curricular activities tends to pick up the English language a lot faster than those who do not participate.

*Health and Physical Education*

In this small section, I discuss the ways certain extra-curricular activity can be related to the curriculum itself. Extra-curricular activities assist ELL students with their physical literacy. Extra-curricular activities give opportunity for students to practise their dance and expand other interests. Extra-curricular activities can also help students develop better work habits.

*Dance & Expanding Interests*

In this interview, it shows how extra-curricular activities are beneficial for both students and schools; not only are curriculum expectations met, but it expands the students’ interest and encourages students to try new things.

“…Because this school has a lot of teachers with strong background in dance, we are able to promote dance. Students always want to try new things. However, the problem with these types of extra-curricular activities is that some dance forces students to interact. And since the club is a waltz and salsa club, interaction is forced which can make students uncomfortable. So it depends on the students and the dance.” (Interview A)

However, in another interview, the interviewee also indicated that it depends on the dance.
“In the dance club, it encourages teamwork…it does not have direct or immediate contact with each other. I try to arrange the club so that students can communicate with each other at their own pace but at the same time, I announce a strict rule of participation and respect. And so, the onus is on the students. From my experience, it was not the dance that I was too focused on but it was the creativity, teamwork, the hard work and respect the students bring into the club…There is this one student; she was very shy before she was in the dance club. However, because of the safe environment and even her dedication, she started to develop leadership skills which she slowly transferred in class.” (Interview C)

This interview shows how teachers relate extra-curricular activities with the physical education and even arts curriculum. Students are able to expand their interest and experiment with new things.

**Sports**

Sports are an important component in both extra-curricular activities and to the physical education curriculum. Through sports, not only does students’ confidence increase, but necessary skills are being taught and developed such as physical literacy, teamwork, and so on. Sports -- in this case volleyball, basketball and soccer -- have connections to the physical education curriculum. One of the curriculum expectations in physical education is to teach the basic skills or in other words, to develop students’ physical literacy. However, it depends on the students’ effort.

“Through extra-curricular activities, students learn through student engagement. It’s amazing and students need to be provided with more opportunity. It helps with their confident and oral skills. The skills learned in sports, it is universal. It requires more physical activity than oral and eventually, students will be able to pick them up. What helped was that teammates helped each other and so, they developed teamwork and respect. This later helped students build confidence in themselves…It is all about discipline and hard work. I first showed a visual to the students of the routine and they got really into it. They practiced even outside the classroom and I honestly saw improvements from each participant on a weekly basis. So academically, in this case physical education, the harder you work, the better your academic performances are in physical education.” (Interview B)

In addition to sports, I want to talk about the accessibility of sports in extra-curricular activities:
“I started a baseball camp in the summer (at a school). A lot of these kids have problems outside of school so in summer, to give them something to do, started a camp. It provided a cheaper daycare for their family. They learned about teamwork. (Interview B)

The statement reveals how sports provide a cheaper resource for students. Extra-curricular activities provide opportunities for students that are not assessable for them outside of school. Hence, students can continue to expand their interests, build rapport with peers and teachers, and provide activities for students to continue during the summer.

Work Habits

Within all these physical extra-curricular activity, a commonality that I noted was work habits. Sports-related extra-curricular activities require a lot of practice and dedication, not only for oneself but for the team, including cooperation, dedication, and respect. In one of my interviews, an interviewee shared the following story with me:

“Often, I have seen teamwork and dedication being displayed in extra-curricular activities… Not just with ELL students but students who tend to struggle academically but do very well in their instrument because I have seen their hard work. I have this open office during lunch where students are free to enter in the music room and ask me for help. As a result, the ELL students’ respect teachers have complimented me for some of the positive changes that they have seen. The ELL students perform a lot differently, academically and socially, in band than they do in a classroom setting. This could be because they are learning in a different environment” (Interview A)

Through participation in extra-curricular activities, students feel part of a community and it is evident that students perform better academically when they are more involved in the school community.

“In band, we are working on technically playing skills so, and at a higher level that is expected in the classroom. The kids are taking their own extra time and so we are working beyond on what they have done in the classroom. And also, with some groups, it’s important to teach the responsibility and respect of joining extra-curricular activities because some of them don’t realize that they are letting others down if they don’t practise.” (Interview A)
With intrinsic motivation and a safe environment, extra-curricular activities assisted ELL students to improve existing skills or learn new skills. In this quote, respect was emphasized because all students realized that being in an extra-curricular activity means they are working as a team.

**Being in a Community**

From the data I have collected about the sense of community extra-curricular activities create for students, it is clear that extra-curricular activities create a safe space, and schools must encourage ELL students to participate in extra-curricular activities.

*Safe Space*

Extra-curricular activities help build and cultivate a community allowing students to build relationships. One interviewee stated,

“Making friendships and building community and building relationships with others is what attracts students to extra-curricular activity. I know you are focusing on English Language Learners but developing those other skills as well, speaking skills. But really, the main one is building relationship. Extra-curricular activity is a community that you can go to and being supportive of you and a safe place.” (B & C)

This quote reveals that ELL does develop a few language skills; however, there was an emphasis on building relationships and creating a community.

**ELL Involvement**

It was discouraging to hear about the common struggles that participants seemed to have in getting ELL students to join an extra-curricular activity. For this reason teachers have taken it upon themselves to persuade students to participate.

“I think a lot of it is personality. So if they are shy, that tends to be a difficult to get them out of their shell. It takes a long time. So if they are only in grade 8, they don’t have
enough time or chances unlike in grade 7. Also, I believe it takes more time with the older grade whereas in the younger ones, you do see a lot more development.” (Interview A)

The students themselves know the benefit of joining certain extra-curricular activities but it would seem that not enough incentives are provided.

“There tends to be fewer extra-curricular activity options (at least in this school). As a result, I would say that majority of them needs extra encouragement. Every year, probably 1 or 2 out of 10 (intermediate students), there don’t tends to be as many students participating in extra-curricular activities sports because unless they have demonstrate a strong skill in school or physical education class, they are encouraged to participate. So I would say majority of them need a lot of encouragement and every year there would be a few students who would take the initiative.” (Interview A)

Teacher/staff, administrations and students, in other words, the school community, have a responsibility of encouraging ELL students to participate in extra-curricular activities. ELL involvement is very complicated and inconsistent. Many ELL students need encouragement from either teachers or peers to join. “In this school, I’ll saw roughly 1 or 2% of all ELL students participate in extra-curricular activities.” (Interview A)

Another interviewee gave me a similar statistics. The interviewee also provided several possible explanations for the lack of ELL student participation,

“I’ll probably say 3% but if I really want to stretch it, and flexible with attendance, I’ll say 5%. I believe there are several reasons why there are not enough ELL participates. One is the language barrier, sometimes we hear a club or activity in the announcement but there is no one to translate that information to the ELL students. Thus, as teachers and students, we should try and relay that information constantly.” (Interview C)

Some ELL students do not know when it starts, they are too shy or they do not know where to go or even don’t know what to do. That is a huge issue, especially for a sports team, you are required to pick someone who has potential and is coachable. It is hard to coach an ELL student because of the lack of experience. It is also a challenge because of the potential lack of comprehension in English.” (Interview B)

In addition, sports extra-curricular activities are not solely on individuals’ skills. Skill is also an asset and is considered when teachers/coaches are picking their respective teams.
“When I was picking this ELL student, I was at first not planning to have him on the team because of his limited skillset. However, the student was recommended to me by the ELL teacher. And he became one of the positive outcomes of the team. He was very coachable, was arguably one of the most improved in a short period of time, he picked up the oral language a lot quicker, developed better work habit and more importantly, he became more confident as a student which transferred into the classroom.” (Interviewee B)

However, if a student wants to join, they do not always meet the skill requirement on the team. As a result, extra-curricular activities can bring some negative aspect. However, if teachers can make further professional judgement, they can be more in flexible in selecting their players, as previously quoted from my interviewee, extra-curricular activities will bring more value to ELL students and to the team. The skills can be learned but developing a strong community within sports teams is what takes time to develop.

Self-identity and Self-respect

All students, including those who are ELL, perform better academically when they feel they are part of a community.

“I want them to enjoy it for its sake as oppose to doing it because you have to. There are some times that I had to encourage students because we don’t have enough baritone or trombones. And I do my best to sweet talk them and they usually do it because they realise it’s a benefit to them and that is simply enough. That they are important and they matter and they would add something to the band.” (Interview A)

Extra-curricular activity should be student-based and a teacher’s main role is to supervise the activity. Teachers are to make sure that students are learning something within the extra-curricular activity and should only step in when skills needs to be taught, “I try to give students choice – what they want to play – and expose them to various large types of music so they can find out what they enjoy and what they don’t.” (Interview A)
Conclusion

Extra-curricular activities are effective to an extent. It provides a social outlet which gives students the confidence they need. Changes are being shown and the main benefit that the interviews have indicated is the social aspect. Extra-curricular activities provide a safe learning environment for ELL students enabling them to develop gain self-confidence. In addition, students are gaining better work habits and have shown confidence not only socially but also academically.

“With ELL students some students tend to struggle academically but do very well in their instrument. I have seen changes and I have had teachers commented on what that child is doing in band and how different it is with what they are doing in the classroom.” (Interview A)

Academically, students show their strength in the physical education curriculum. A common benefit cited by interviewees was the social development of the students. Extra-curricular activities seem to be one of the turning points of ELL students’ social development. Through their social development, they are slowly improving their academic performance. More importantly, they are showing strong dedication and hard work academically and socially.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this research was to explore the range of benefits of extra-curricular activities and the effectiveness of these experiences for English Language Learners (ELL). I have interviewed teachers who have supervised extra-curricular activities for at least three years and asked for their perspectives and experiences with ELL in an extra-curricular activities setting.

My interviewees offered several specific benefits and examples that they have experienced and witnessed when they were supervising extra-curricular activities. One such benefit is that ELL students have gained stronger leadership and communication skills. In some cases, they have seen the confidence and communication skills of these students being transferred into their academic performances (Guest & Schneider, 2003). It was found that ELL students are slowly approaching peers and teachers for more help and some ELL students are developing their language a lot quicker than ELL students who do not participate in extra-curricular activities.

From the insights and the positive responses I discovered in my research and interviews, I hope to continue to promote extra-curricular activities to the schools and to ELL students. It is crucial that ELL students feel welcomed in a school in order for them to succeed and I believe extra-curricular activities are one of the pivotal solutions to assisting ELL students adjust to Ontario schools. Extra-curricular activities create a safe learning environment that allows students to feel that they are part of the school community. With the safe learning environment, ELL students who participate in extra-curricular activities will gain confidence in their social and academic abilities.
Related to the Literature Review

There is a strong connection between the literature review and the data I collected from the interviews. The literature has shown that extra-curricular activities are beneficial for students in ELL as it instils more confidence and correlates to positive mental health for the students (Wisener, 2008). All of my participants’ experiences have revealed that sports and physical activity can bring a positive effect towards the students’ mental health. Some students who struggle with mental health have difficulty with social relationships, but with extra-curricular activities, ELL students are more likely to feel welcomed and part of the community. Additionally and, as a result, this acceptance helps improve the students’ social behaviour (Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton & Ball (2012). In every interview, the interviewees mention that students who actively participate in extra-curricular activities, have developed positive mental health outlooks.

It has been shown through my research that extra-curricular activities provide a safe learning environment and, as stated by Simoncini & Caltabiono (2012), ELL students tend to do better at school because extra-curricular activities provides a safe space for them. With a safe space, students are given the opportunity to connect with peers (Brown & Evans, 2002; Cheung Leung, 2003). For example, in one interview, sports provided opportunities for these students to develop their self-confidence because they have a sense of belonging, community, and team-spirit.

Students who feel a sense of community express better emotional, social, and academic performances from their active involvement in extra-curricular activities (Dimech & Rolander; Shulruf; Simoncini & Coltabiono (2012). In extra-curricular activities at school or in community-based setting, students experience mutual respect for themselves and their peers. In
music, my interviewee stated that when the students are in a band, they are part of a community/team and as a team, they must play together to create harmony in music. If one student does not practise his/her instrument, they will be out of sync and let the other instrumentalists down. In a typical band, each instrumentalist practises to better collaborate with each other in the band; each instrumentalist is individually accountable for his/her learning in music and also accountable to others in the band. Accountability engenders a sense of connection and respect amongst peers (Hall, Eisenburg, Christenson, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2007).

In addition, McGee, Williams, Dowden-Chapman, Martin, and Kawachi’s (2006) stated similar arguments in sports, where students are more strongly attached to their teammates. My interviewees have also given similar statements. One interviewee told me about a student who joined a soccer club and through his experience, the confidence he gained socially transferred to his academics. The student started to ask for help when needed, instead of being shy and not commenting or reaching out. He was putting in an honest effort to improve his play and this gradually transferred in his school work. He began to ask for help more often from his peers and that is really what all teachers want, students gaining confidence and asking for help when needed.

Shyness is one of the key reasons why ELL students need to be encouraged to join extra-curricular activities and that is what I have emphasized in this research paper. ELL students are resistant to joining extra-curricular activities for several reasons. It could be because ELL students are afraid of taking risks and have a fear of social embarrassment (Dimech & Seilers, 2011). It could also be the lack of communication between teachers and other students as it was stated from Interview A and B. These students need to be encouraged by their peers, teachers, and even their parents. In order to make the environment less threatening, teachers can act as
mentors (Cubukcu, 2012). One of the primary roles of a teacher is to provide a safe space and help nurture students’ social skills, leadership skills, and other skills to help instil confidence in students (Leung 2003; Dimech & Seiler 2010; Battersby, & Bolton 2013, Goldberg, 1946; Shulruf, 2010).

Extra-curricular activities provide a safe learning environment as stated from all three interviews. Students are not afraid to make mistakes. Because the environment is safe, students are free to practise their oral communication skills with other peers; as a result, students build strong relationships. This point is further supported by O’Neil, 2009 and Zhang, 2008 as they mention that students can improve their language skills when they have exposure and opportunities to help practise their language development. As stated by Ernst-Slavit, Moore, & Maloney, 2002, extra-curricular activities helps students improve their oral language skills as students are exposed to more chances for safe communication.

Learning a new language takes time but many students will get used to it. This research has shown that in some cases, they will pick up the language quicker than students who do not participate in extra-curricular activities. While the students are more exposed to the language, they will also get to use the language in different settings depending on the extra-curricular activity they choose. For example, in a sports setting, as opposed to a typical English classroom, students are more involved with physical literacy, which can be a universal language, to supplement oral literacy (Battersby & Bolton, 2013). Students learn through student/team engagement. It will ultimately take time, but students are able to grasp concepts and ideas much quicker. Through vocal music students are exposed to practising oral communication through music literacy, allowing students to become more familiar with speaking the sounds and developing stronger (oral) language skills.
Another positive potential of extra-curricular activities is the social and behavioural development, and work habit. One of my interviewees, a soccer coach, is sometimes more worried about teammates being able to work as a team than individual skill levels. Coaches do not always look for character over skill. However, the reason this particular interviewee picked character over skill was that skills are teachable and/or coachable and the interviewee decided that it was best for ELL student’s confidence and social performance if the student was in a safe learning environment. As a result, the ELL student’s social skills and self-confidence are improving. This experience is not just in sports but in almost every teacher-supervised extra-curricular activity. Extra-curricular activities require teamwork where groups/students must respect one another and continue to perform and act as a cohesive unit (Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton & Ball, 2012). As a result of this sense of belonging, ELL students gain confidence and improve their academic and social performances.

Extra-curricular activities are also a motivational factor for student attendance. Brown & Evans, 2002; Cheunf Leung, (2003) and Goldberg (1946) explained how students are less alienated when they are in extra-curricular activities. Thus, students are motivated to attend and be active in their school. When they attend there is more social interaction as stated by two of my interviewees who have seen a lot of interactions that students would not normally display in classrooms. That creates a sense of interaction in a safe environment. Other benefits of extra-curricular activities include improved mental health, and better attendance.

Implications/Recommendations

In order for ELL students to join and be actively involved in extra-curricular activities, schools need to promote extra-curricular activities as much as possible to ELL students. It was
discouraging to hear from all of my interviewees that only a small portion of ELL students are actively involved in extra-curricular activities.

Among ELL students there is a bit of a resistance to joining. My interviewees stated that they have taken it upon themselves to persuade students to participate, whether it is through direct encouragement from teacher to student, or from asking the other students/peers to encourage ELL students to participate. However, the responsibility of encouraging ELL students to join extra-curricular activities should fall on all teachers, staff, and the students themselves to encourage and communicate to ELL students the benefits of extra-curricular activities.

ELL students who participate in extra-curricular activities have a stronger knowledge of physical literacy as they are practicing and developing their sports skill. In addition, students, who are in an instrumental band and choir, get more exposure to language and practice because of their respective role in music. Furthermore, through extra-curricular activities, ELL students develop better work habits. Finally, ELL students have been able to pick up the English language a lot quicker compared to other students due to the mentorship and co-operation with their peers (Ma, 2010). The teamwork and mentorship that drive social development is arguably the most recognizable and greatest benefit of extra-curricular activities.

Extra-curricular activities are one of the turning points of ELL students’ social development. The reason for this finding is because extra-curricular activities create a safe learning environment that enforces students to work as a team. With a safe learning environment, ELL students are given more opportunities to communicate and interact with their peers, share and expand their interests, and even take risks (Simoncini & Caltabiano, 2012). Hence, ELL students gain more confidence in themselves and get better recognition and support from their peers. In addition to developing strong social skills, the ELL students slowly transfer the skills
they obtained in their academic performances and as a result, some ELL students are showing better performance both academically and socially.

**Limitations and Further Study**

There needs to be a more extensive research done to learn about the other potential benefits of extra-curricular participation and the impact on the ELL. According to McGee, Williams, Howden-Chapman, Martin, and Kawachi’s (2006); Schumacher Dimech & Roland Seiler (2011); Holt, Sehn, Spence, Newton, & Ball (2012), in extra-curricular activities, students are more committed and respectful to each other. ELL students who participate in physical activities have shown significant growth and positive results in mental health, social interactions, in addition to academic benefits.

Throughout this research I found that a few new questions were raised. One of the questions is how can schools more effectively cater towards ELL students in order to help them improve their academic performances. In addition, I learned that many ELL students cannot commit to extra-curricular activities for several reasons. So the question arises - how can these students be encouraged to participate more to ensure ELL students reap the benefits from extra-curricular activities? I also discovered that some students have extra responsibilities at home to help their families. These duties may take away time from joining extra-curricular activities. What kinds of accommodations can schools and administration make to help ELL students take part in school activities? Finally if the ELL students cannot commit, what learning opportunities can educators take from extra-curricular activities and apply in a classroom setting? It has become clear to me through this research that extra-curricular activities are doing something that makes the learning environment more welcoming and equitable (Howard & Ziomek-Daigle,
As a result, I am wondering what we can do as educators to use/transfer learning and/or skills from extra-curricular activities into a classroom setting.

Throughout this research I have seen some of the positive academic performances by students who participated in extra-curricular activities. Consequently, educators would want to understand the specific types of extra-curricular activities that schools can use to facilitate the academic performance of ELL students. Further research might look at more specific extra-curricular activities that would help students’ academic (Ontario-curricular) performance. For example, from this research, we have discovered how students were able to develop stronger oral language/communication skills. In addition, ELL students were able to develop the English language a lot quicker because they were exposed to a new way of learning the English language. This research paper does not fully explain or yield results of the ELL students’ reading and writing comprehension. Therefore, we do not fully know if extra-curricular activities can help with other academic performances that are related to the Ontario curriculum. Thus, studies must emerge on how we can create and cater these specific extra-curricular activities for ELL students to more fully validate an increase in academic achievement.

From this research it is clear that extra-curricular activities are very beneficial to all students, especially ELL students as it helps them gain confidence and respect. It also gives them the opportunity to work as a team, and gives them a sense of belonging in a school/community. Therefore, all members of the school community (e.g. teachers, administrators, parents and other students), might take up the responsibility of encouraging ELL students to participate in extra-curricular activities.
English Language Learner (ELL) students are likely to feel social, academic, and emotional problems when they are in a new school environment. Extra-curricular activities have addressed many of the ELL students’ needs. Indeed, they can improve the ELL’s adjustments in school, as such, provide opportunities for ELL students to create meaningful relationships with teachers and peers, a safe learning environment, and a sense of self-worth. Therefore, there is a great need to explore innovative measures for students’ future success via extra-curricular activities and the way in which extra-curricular activities will help ELL students to become successful students and citizens in Canada.
References


Hite, Clare & Evans, Linda. Mainstream First-Grade Teachers’ Understanding of Strategies for Accommodating the Needs of English Language Learners, *Teacher Education Quarterly, Spring 2006*.

EXTRA-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES TOWARDS ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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Appendix A:

Interview Protocol

Interviewer: __________________________ Date: __________________________

Interviewee: __________________________ Time: __________________________

Location: __________________________

Position: __________________________

Research Question

What extents do an extra-curricular activities increase students’ academic performances?

What range of benefits for ELL students do teacher-advisors of extra-curricular clubs observe?

Opening Statement:

Thank you for agreeing to this interview. Your participation will greatly help my research. Just to remind you, the purpose of this research is to look at the extent to how extra-curricular activities affect ELL students’ academic performance and social development. With this study, I hope that school boards/schools will sponsor more structured/supervised extra-curricular activities that would encourage more ELL students’ participation. And so, I will be asking 8 – 11 questions as part of the interview.

As a participant, you have the right to your privacy. And so, your responses will be kept anonymous, any disclosed information from the interview will remain confidential and the information will be used only for my research. If there is any question you are uncomfortable with, you may request to skip it. In addition, if you are uncomfortable with this interview, you have the right at withdraw any time you want and all records will immediately be destroyed.

PS: Refreshments will be provided (to create a more relaxed and comfortable atmosphere)

Interview Questions:

1. Can you describe for me your current position and for how long you have been teaching?

2. As criteria of participation, you indicated that you have been consistently involved in extracurricular activity supervision over the course of your teaching career. Can you tell me why this been important to you?

3. What range of activities have you supervised over the years (sports, interest clubs, games, etc.)

4. How long have you been supervising (an) extra-curricular activities?

5. Which extra-curricular activities are you currently supervising (music, sports, others)?
6. What social and emotional impacts do you think participation in extra-curricular activities has on students generally? [depending on response, can probe about academic, social, emotional]

7. In your experience, approximately what percentage of students participating in extra-curricular activities are ELL students? Why do you think that is?

8. What do you believe are the potential benefits of ELL students participating in extra-curricular activities?

9. Do you see any changes in ELL students’ when they participate in extra-curricular activities when they are in classrooms (for example, emotionally, academically)?

10. What indicators have you observed that lead you to believe that their participation in extra-curricular activities has an impact?

11. What factors do you think make a difference on how ELL students experience extra-curricular activities?

12. In your experience, do you find that ELL students are self-motivated to join extra-curricular activities or do you find that they require encouragement? Why do you think that is?

13. What are some of the challenges you experience when encouraging ELL students to participate in extra-curricular activities?

14. What are some of the essential skills you teach/train/practise when you are supervising your respective extra-curricular activities? (ex. making better choices, teamwork, etc.)

15. The skills the ELL students learn from extra-curricular activities, have they been using those skills effectively in a classroom environment? In other words, have you observed transference of those skills into the classroom environment?

16. In your experience, have other classroom teachers spoken to you about the impact of extracurricular involvement has on ELL students? What have they said?

17. What potential do you see extra-curricular activities having for the successful social, emotional, and academic integration of ELL students?

18. Do you have any recommendations for how to include more ELL students in extra-curricular activities?
Closing Statement:

“Thank you for your participation for today. Is there any question you would like to revisit?”
“Do you have any questions for me about the interview?”

I will be back in March just to see if there are any new developments in the students’ behaviour that you believe is worth quoting.

My email is ____________________________ if you have any further questions.

Thank you again for agreeing to take part in this interview and I will be sending you a copy of the transcript as soon as I have it typed out.
Appendix B:

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Date:

Dear ,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching student. I am studying teachers’ perceptions of the impact of extra-curricular activities on students who are English Language Learners for the purposes of a graduate research paper. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

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 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 question. 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.

Yours sincerely,

Daniel Park

416-554-7418

Instructor’s Name:

Phone Number:
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 __Daniel Park__ and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature:

Name: (printed) _______________________________________________

Date: ______________________________