Effective Instructional Strategies for English Language Learners

By
Asiye Mayda

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Abstract

There is an increased English Language Learners (ELL) student population in Canadian schools. Research indicates that the teacher’s support is a crucial part in English Language Learner’s (ELL) success. It is important that ELL students be provided with enough resources so they can better learn the language. In order for ELL students to succeed, they need to be supported and guided by ELL teachers in all of their subjects. This study examines how ELL teachers in Canadian elementary schools identify effective ELL instruction. And it further explores the ways of promoting effective ELL instruction and the quality indicators of ELL instruction.

**Key Words:** English Language Learner (ELL), effective instruction, teaching techniques, strategies, models, multicultural education, literacy, success
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Research problem statement

In 1971, Canada’s multiculturalism policy opened its doors to people from all over the world. Each year, about 230,000 immigrants arrive in Canada and 55% of those newcomers choose to settle in Ontario. Statistics Canada (2005) estimates that by 2017, immigrants will make up 22% of Canada’s population (Ngo, 2001). This shows that 21% to 25% of the total population of Canada will speak a non-official language; neither French nor English (Ngo, 2007).

Census data show that the Greater Toronto Area has “more foreign-born residents as a percentage of its population than any other city in the world” (Regier, 2004). As a result, there is an increased English Language Learners (ELL) student population in Canadian schools. Some ELL students who enter Ontario schools have little or no previous knowledge of English but have received educational experiences in their own countries. Others may be Canadian-born students who are from homes and/or communities in which English is not widely used and who therefore have limited proficiency in English (Resource Guide, 2001).

ELL students have established a strong presence in Canadian education. Research proves that there is a widening incongruence between the complexity of the needs of ELL learners and the availability of ELL services in Canadian schools (Ngo, 2007). School boards across Canada have steadily reduced ELL services over the years. A 2004 survey of elementary schools in Ontario found that although 88% of schools in the Greater Toronto Area reported having ELL students, only 62% of the schools had ELL teachers (People for Education, 2004).
Research indicates that the structure of the current ELL curriculum has a significant impact on ELL student’s academic success. It is important that ELL students be provided with enough resources so they can better learn the language. In order for ELL students to succeed, they need to be supported and guided by ELL teachers in all of their subjects. My research topic focuses on effective ELL instruction in Toronto schools. The term “effective instruction” can also be called best practices may be most simply defined as teacher behaviors and practices which enhance the learning of all students (Ko, 2013).

My research also probes the range of factors that support and hinder ELL instruction. This research takes a deep dive into the ELL teacher’s teaching methods and learns what they are doing. I am also interested in learning more about different ELL programs operating in Canadian schools to help contextualize my research findings.

**Central question:**

The central question guiding my research is: according to small sample of ELL teachers, what are the effective instructional strategies used when teaching ELL’s?

- ELL teacher’s support is a crucial part in student’s success, how does the type of instruction impact the ELL’s?

**Sub-Questions:**

- What do these teachers believe are the most significant challenges they face in supporting ELL students under the current system?
- How do these teachers instructionally respond to these challenges?
- How do the challenges impact ELL students?
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My research investigates how ELL teachers in elementary schools identify effective ELL instruction. And it further explores the ways of promoting effective ELL instruction and the quality indicators of ELL instruction.

**Background of the researcher**

I myself was once an ELL student in middle school and I think it is really important to fulfill the needs of the ELL students to allow them to catch up with the students at their level so they are not left behind. I found that while the ELL curriculum aims to focus on the development of language skills, it did not provide me with adequate support in learning English. I struggled a lot when I was in the ELL program and it took me a while to learn the language. Having a language barrier hindered my educational growth and success and I found myself consistently trying to catch up. I spent too much time in the ELL program for several years because there were some problems in the instructional methods, materials and program evaluation. Based on my experience as an ELL student, I did not receive effective feedback from my instructors and I did not know what to improve on. My English skills were assessed and evaluated regularly to see if I was improving. However, I remember going home and trying to understand the school work by myself with the help of dictionary. My ELL teacher had to deal with bunch of students at the same time, and she did not have the time to sit with me one-on-one. She was helping me with me reading and speaking skills, however, I did not have the chance to improve my writing skills. I was pulled out of my classroom most of the time with bunch of other ELL students from other grades and classrooms, and she taught us the same material.
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Chapter 2: Literature Review

Current ELL Programs in Elementary Schools

Depending on the school, ELL students in Ontario are assigned to partially self-contained ELL classes or integrated into the regular classes with short-term and small group withdrawals (Regier, 2004). Some schools provide no direct ELL support at all or only for a limited period of time. Other schools have used any type of resource available, such as librarians, to provide extra time to assist ELL students facing specific learning issues. Some schools have adopted The Literacy Enrichment Academic Program (LEAP), which helps ELL students to improve their literacy skills; however, the program is designed specifically for students between ages 11 and 16 (Regier, 2004).

Improper Service Provided

The lack of accountability is hampering the effectiveness of the programs. Accountable programming and funding, built on sound frameworks, creates the foundation for an effective ELL system. The numbers of specific ELL programs are limited in Ontario, partially due to the belief that young children learn a second language with relative ease (Regier, 2004). Clair (1995) argue that, in terms of teaching English, the ELL teachers are not fully prepared to teach English to ELL’s. Teachers receive Additional Qualification (AQ) to teach English to ELL’s, and they get all the knowledge in theory, but in practical terms, they do not get to practice what they learn when they are attaining their AQ’s (Clair, 1995). As a result of that, ELL’s are unable to receive the education that they need to learn English. Research also argues that ELL instructors also lack the support and the materials needed to teach students effectively. In addition, the student to-teacher ratio is low; therefore there are not enough certified ELL instructors in the public schools.
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to teach the ELL’s. Teacher colleges in Ontario do not provide future teachers with the kind of training that they need in order to be successful at devising strategies to teach their English Language Learners, and this need to change (Toronto District School Board, 2013).

**Reduction of ELL programs**

First of all, there is a significant increase in the number of ELL students in schools in Ontario and there is a greater need for more ELL instructors. Second, the ELL staffing allocation in Ontario is not specifically designated and is commonly taken away at the school level to meet other pressing staffing needs (Regier, 2004). In a desperate attempt to protect ‘core’ programs and staff, school officials often sacrifice the needs of ELL students. Many argue that the restrictive provincial funding formula and the resulting budget crisis resulted in cuts to ELL departments (Regier, 2004). There is neither a fund specifically designated for ELL programs nor accountability within the structure of the board or government to ensure that funds targeted for ELL are actually spent for this purpose (Regier, 2004). If they are truly committed to effective ELL programs in schools, then it is vital that school boards not be reducing the number of ELL programs. Instead, an important step will be for the provincial government to develop a comprehensive policy on ELL education that can in turn inform school board policy formation and greater sustained support for ELL programming.

**Funding**

Furthermore, in order for ELL instruction to be effective, Ngo (2001) also mentions the importance of funding by the school boards. More resources need to be invested in ELL education because ELL learners needs to be entitled to pedagogical ELL instruction as well as professional support to deal with a psychosocial factors to deal with illiteracy, social alienation,
challenges to cultural identity. Ngo notes that boards need to recruit hire and deploy certified professionals with ELL specialization and cultural competence skills. ELL instructors need to adjust resources throughout the school year (Ngo, 2001). Dooley and Furtado (2013) argue that there is not enough funding happening in Canada. They note that provinces like British Columbia that provide school districts with targeted funding such as for ELL services have moved to restrict the number of years of special funding for ELL students. The Ministry of Education in British Columbia introduced a five-year limit on supplementary funding for ELL students. Therefore, policy reforms have huge impact on student’s academic achievement because some students spend more than five years to learn English. Therefore, ELL students who need the support are not eligible after a limited amount of time and this puts a lot of pressure on the ELL instructors to teach effectively (Dooley & Fortado, 2013).

**Quality of ELL instruction**

Ngo (2001) argues that in order to have high-quality and equitable ELL education, the teaching models, the roles of the community, education and government stakeholders are important in terms of building effective ELL education. A policy document in Ontario, *Many Roots, Many Voices* is designed to support English Language Learners in the classroom. The document is a tool to support teachers, principals, and other education professionals at the elementary and secondary levels in working effectively with English language learners. It contains rich source of practices and strategies that can be put to immediate use in the school and the classroom.
Effective Comprehensive Programming

In order to promote effective instruction to ELL students, schools need to have useful variety of resources for teachers to use. Students of all ages who are just beginning to learn English benefit greatly from visual resources and hands-on activities that help them understand new words and concepts in English. The required resources include: photographs, printed materials, manipulatives, art materials, clocks and watches, maps, and money (Many Roots, Many Voices, 2005).

According to Ngo (2001), ELL education needs to focus on whole-person experience of students. It has to teach the language, but also their experiences, emotions, spirituality and culture should also be taken into consideration. ELL programming must facilitate, academic and social competence. An ELL curriculum needs to be developed for all levels with detailed descriptions and standards. Professionally trained personnel create standardized benchmarks and procedures, assessment of first and second language proficiency and guidelines for methods of ELL instruction. It is also important that it incorporates culture and first language of the learner. It should provide choices and alternative learning pathways that facilitate successful transition to the next level (Ngo, 2001).

Cultural Competence

Ye (2013) argues that cultural competence is an important component of effective ELL education. He advocates for the development of a system-wide cultural competence policy that would set guidelines for personnel practices, integrate cultural diversity in curriculum development, provide instructional services and school support services, outline procedures to deal with culturally biased incidents, enhance staff development, communication, and involve
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culturally diverse communities in the evaluation of school performance. In schools, he also argues that school climate needs to value ELL learners and diversity through celebration of languages and cultural practices. Finally, he also argues that there is a need for a stronger presence of culturally diverse personnel, and school boards should ensure that personnel at all levels should reflect their community demographics (Ye, 2013).

**Networking, Collaboration and Coordination**

Education, government, business, and community sectors need to work together to promote greater collaboration in order to address the linguistic and sociocultural needs of ELL learners. If schools and community groups form partnerships to share their expertise and resources, it will assist ELL learners. There is a common understanding that parents, service providers and schools generally lacked in-depth knowledge about the availability and the scope of the services (Ngo, 2001). A collaborative effort would address ELL learner’s needs because with the representatives from all levels of government, school boards, businesses, community groups, parents and ELL learners, they would be able to guide the planning and delivery of programs and services for ELL learners (Ngo, 2001).

**Effective leadership**

When developing effective leadership, it is important to have a national ELL strategy where there is ELL curricula for all levels, research-based funding formulas and accountability measures. Establishing district wide ELL policies and regulations that set standards for identification, assessment, instruction, resource allocation, cultural competence, professional development and tracking of process are all crucial in terms of better management of ELL programs (Ngo, 2001).
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**Capacity building and advocacy**

It is important to educate and influence decision-makers at all levels so they better understand the situation of ELL learners. When there is good collaboration between the school and the parents, it is important to involve parents to advocate for their children. Schools should develop capacity to deal with ELL issues (Ngo, 2001).

**Models**

**Pull-out**

There are so many different teaching models that schools use and that are part of their ELL program, however, many agree that the pull-out program is an inefficient model of teaching English to students (Ngo, 2001). Often times, ELL students are pulled out from the classroom to focus on independent English learning sessions with a resource support teacher. Studies have shown that pull-out ELL is the least effective model for English Language Learners (Ngo, 2001).

According to Minnesota’s Department of Education and the research they conducted on ELL teaching models, a limitation of the pull-out model is that when students are pulled out from the classroom, they are separated from native speaking peers and can’t communicate with their classmates. They also point out the extent that ELL students in turn miss the instruction time and consequently commonly fall behind. As a result of that, it is likely that many students feel disconnected from the actual classroom and their peers. This one-on-one instruction model commonly involves independent reading or writing time with a student. Although it has limitations, it is important to note that this model can benefit some ELL students. ELL teachers will frequently employ this model if the classroom teacher does not want to plan or teach
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together. It is also important that the skills that ELL instructors emphasize align with the
classroom teacher’s curriculum (Minnesota, Department of Education, 2011).

On the other hand, educators at the Minnesota’s argue that even though pull-out ELL
program has some challenges, there are also advantages to pull-out ELL programs. First of all,
they allow ELL instructors to group ELL by student’s proficiency levels and it provides
personalized learning. So, the ELL learner can learn better when the instructor teaches at his/her
level. This will expose students to additional content. Also, when students are away from native
English speakers, ELL learners feel more comfortable taking the risk with their new language
and ask questions (Minnesota Department of Education Handbook). However, Mabbot and
Strohl (1992) argue that few ELL educators would disagree with the advantages of the pull-out
programs because ELL instructors experience an initial problem each academic year because of
scheduling. When ELL teachers deal with more than three or four classroom, planning becomes
very difficult. They try to coordinate the main schedules with the ELL schedule so that students
don’t miss crucial lessons in the classroom. It is also important that students do not miss
specialty subjects such as physical education, art, and music because those are the subjects where
ELL learners can participate with their peers with their limited English (Mabbot & Strohl, 1992).

Pull-In

In addition, a new model of ELL education was introduced in some schools in Ontario
because of its inclusiveness. Fynn (1992) notes the importance of inclusion of all students in a
classroom. He argues that all children, regardless of their special needs, should be included in the
mainstream classroom and not treated as though they do not belong and most importantly,
student does not feel isolated from the classroom. Tarone (1982) also advocates for the
importance of pulling ELL teachers into the classroom so that the ELL instructor is available to
help control the difficulty of the material being presented to the class. For example, the ELL instructor should be supportive so he/she can fill in the knowledge gaps for students, adjust tests, and modify assignments when necessary. Thus, the ELL learners may better understand the relevant context inside the classroom.

ELL teachers pull a small group during the independent work time to reinforce or re-teach a skill. During the small group session, instructor would be able to teach more basic language skills or grammar points. The main objective of this model is to focus on mastery and reading level. The small group lesson should align to the classroom teacher’s lesson if possible, but can also be aligned to a yearlong plan that you create based on ELL objectives. This is also an ideal model, provided the classroom teacher has a consistent schedule for independent work time. It is extremely difficult to teach small-group instruction during the introduction to new material or guided practice of the classroom teacher’s lesson (People for Education, 2005).

Muriel Saville argues that ELL teaching would be effective when the vocabulary taught to ELL students is related to the students' learning needs in their subject matter classes. If this is done, the students are more likely to perform well academically. In order to implement that, Saville suggests that it is absolutely necessary that ELL teachers and mainstream teachers consult one another (Troike, 1984).

Ideally, the ELL instructor and the classroom teacher needs to work together to plan to make the most of the time; however, it is often very difficult to do this because not all teachers will provide lesson plans in advance because they do not plan in advance. Collaborating with the classroom teachers can be the most difficult aspect of this model (Troike, 1984). There are several ways for the ELL teacher to work within the classroom. One way is to team-teach. The
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ELL teacher would be focusing on providing scaffolding and addressing more basic skills. The ELL teacher also provides ideas and materials for differentiating and scaffolding. In this model, the ELL teacher is the expert on making the content area material accessible to all learners. This is an extremely effective push-in model, but takes time to develop (Troike, 1984).

**Strategies**

*Helping ELL’s adjust to Classroom*

Moreno (2002) argues that when you have ELL’s in your classroom, it is really important that ELL’s adjust to the classroom before learning takes place. He argues that the classroom should be set up in such a way that it will be a learning environment. He states that the language, content and the metacognitive objects should be displayed around the classroom. He states that the information should be presented in variety of ways which should include written demonstrations with tangible objects. The classroom should include world walls with the vocabulary for a specific unit or chapter. In the classroom, the instructions or steps should be listed in steps for students to see so they will have something to refer to. Moreno also states that ELL’s should maintain a notebook where they can write down the words that they learn with their transitions (Moreno, 2002). Learning settings such as the classroom should be friendly because stressful school environments reduce students’ ability to learn (Bista, 2011).

*Adjusting Teaching Style*

Moreno (2002) also argues that when the ELL’s are adjusted to the classroom, the teachers also need to adjust their teaching style to provide effective instruction. Research suggests that teachers need to adapt student centered approach rather than teacher centered. The main idea behind the practice is that learning is most meaningful when topics are relevant to the
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students’ lives, needs, and interests and when the students themselves are actively engaged in creating, understanding, and connecting to knowledge. Students will have a higher motivation to learn when they feel they have a real stake in their own learning. When teachers are teaching English to the ELL’s, the students will have a higher motivation to learn when they feel they have a real stake in their own learning (Taylor, 2012).

**Dual-Language Approach**

Educators and policy makers emphasize the importance of inviting students to use their first language as well as English enables them to draw on their strengths, including their existing academic, linguistic, and cultural knowledge. This approach also enriches the class environment by exposing English-speaking students to the advantages of knowing more than one language and of cultural diversity in general (Many Voices, 2005).

Vacca-Rizopoulos and Nicoletti (2009) also discuss the importance of encouraging the use of student’s native language to teach English. Just like Ngo, they also touch on the importance of providing options for them, for example through the use of nonlinguistic organizers to promote an appreciation for other languages and cultures. ELL learners who are usually embarrassed to speak English out loud in classrooms, for example, can learn English by adding vocabulary words on the wall, in ways that help them feel connected to the classroom. (Vacca-Rizopoulos & Nicoletti, 2009).

**Providing Background Knowledge**

Marzano argues that background knowledge is really important for ELL students. In an academic sense, background knowledge also includes content knowledge, academic language
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and vocabulary necessary for comprehending content information. When it comes to English learners and students from diverse cultural and educational backgrounds, the type and amount of background knowledge related to a particular topic can vary. Students may have a high degree of academic schooling in their native language when they arrive in your classroom, but not have the words to express what they know in English. Other students may have had interrupted formal schooling, or their background knowledge may not match the perspective presented in the classroom. Background knowledge plays a strong role in reading comprehension as well as content learning; when individuals have knowledge about a particular topic, they are better able to recall and elaborate on the topic (Marzano, 2004).

Moreno suggests that background information can be taught in variety of ways. He suggests ELL teacher to use semantic webbing and graphic organizers to understand the content. Allowing students to brainstorm and record their responds before the lesson would also get them to think about the topic and have some content knowledge. The K-W-L chart (what I know, what I want to know, what I learned) is a great tool to find out background knowledge about the topic and ELL students can get an idea of the topic before the lesson starts. This procedure helps students activate background knowledge, combine new information with prior knowledge, and learn technical vocabulary related to a thematic unit. Students become curious and more engaged in the learning process, and teachers can introduce complex ideas and technical vocabulary. Good for some is good for all. So all students regardless if they are ELL or not, KWL charts are great pathway that starts the learning journey. Research suggests that, ELL students make their individual K-W-L charts, and they will just focus on what they know, and what to know (Moreno, 2002).
Adapting Techniques

Visual Aids

When teaching ELL students, the research suggests that instructors need to use realia (objects or activities used to relate classroom teaching to the real life), and also maps, photos (pictures and flashcards), and manipulatives. The use of visuals is really important for ELL’s because they can understand the content by the visual even if they don’t know the content. The picture/visual may be worth a thousand words (Moreno, 2002). Canning-Wilson (1991) argues that imagery facilitates learning. The visuals can be used to immerse a learner into a new or familiar world that cannot otherwise be created in the classroom environment. Research also states that visuals provide a situational context, and visuals are highly successful on word recognition (Canning-Wilson, 1991).

Instructional/Teaching Aids

Besides visual aids, Moreno (2012) states ELL instructors can also alter their teaching by allowing students to do activities where students can interact and move around. Moses, Busetti-Frevert, and Pritchard (2015) argue that teachers can use inquiry-based instruction when supporting emerging bilinguals’ content and language development. It has been documented that inquiry based learning increase motivation, content knowledge, and reading comprehension of the ELL’s. ELL instructors can introduce the topic and pose questions, problems or scenarios, rather than simply presenting established facts. And the ELL’s will have the opportunity to explore, investigate and research about the topic. ELL’s will feel enthusiastic and motivated to learn the language by wondering, researching, and discussing. ELL’s will have the opportunity to cooperate with other ELL’s to share their knowledge and experience (Moses, Busetti-Frevert, &
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Pritchard, 2015). Moreno (2002) also suggests that ELL students should also work in small groups and were there would be constant dialogue about their emerging questions, research topics, research posters, and presentations (Moreno, 2002).

Technology

The ESL classroom without technology is incomplete. Internet and computers should be the cornerstones in ESL learning programs. Technology based activities help motivate learners and increase critical thinking. In ESL courses, learners actively participate in classroom learning when they are asked to use software applications for listening, reading, writing and speaking activities (Svinivki & McKeachie, 2011). In addition, Moreno (2002) suggests teachers and ELL students use the computers in the classroom to access educational websites and games that can teach the ELL’s the language. Teachers can also use CD’s and videotapes that come with a book, and they help students practice reading fluency through echo reading. ELL students will have the opportunity to listen to the narrated story, and become familiar with different words, and they will know how to pronounce English words. Moreno adds on by saying that the overhead projector is a common technology tool that is found in most of the classrooms, and ELL instructors should use it every day to model and highlight text, and to identify main ideas or new vocabulary or to show pictures (Moreno, 2002).

Furthermore, Godwin-Jones (2011) states that emerging mobile apps are helping ELL students to learn the language in a more efficient way. The use of technology is increasing each year and there is a huge emphasis on using Apple tablets in schools in GTA (Greater Toronto Area. There are mobile apps available for multi purposes. Godwin-Jones (2011) argues that mobile apps can help ELL’s with language learning. If there are iPads available, instructors can
download apps to better support their ELL students. Some apps are free and some costs in order to download. The following apps are suggested by the researchers, and they are useful tools to implement in an English learning classroom environment. Some Apple apps include: Conversation English App, Sentence Builder, Intro to Letters App, Speech Tutor App, IDAILY PROHD, Hello-Hello, Basic Pronunciation: Clear Speech From the Start App, WordbookXL: English Dictionary and Thesaurus App, Learn English with Busuu.com!, Adventures for Kids App, Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English App, Phonetics Focus App, English is Easy-1HD App, Berlitz My English Coach for iPad, Puppet Pals HD. Most of these listed apps help ELL’s to practice and improve their conversational skills, and some of them are aimed towards elementary aged ELL students learning to build grammatically correct sentences in English (Godwin-Jones, 2011).

Checking Comprehension

After providing all the support to the ELL’s, teachers need to check student’s comprehension in order to know further steps that need to be taken. As outlined in the Growing Success document, which is published by the Ministry of Education in Ontario, teachers are expected to use assessment for learning to track down student’s progress. Teachers can use student reflections (learning journals, concept maps), anecdotal note-taking, conversations with students, peer assessments (Government of Ontario, 2010).

Research states that effective teachers are responsible for ensuring student learning of the content. Fisher and Frey (2007) argue that important part of the learning process in all content areas is identifying and confronting misconceptions and confusions that can interfere with the learning. The act of checking for understanding is not only corrects misconceptions, it can also
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improve learning. When the teachers regularly check for understanding, students become increasingly aware of how to monitor their own understanding. A variety of suggested ways to check for understanding include: asking the ELL students to explain the materials in their own words. And teachers can have students’ present information with illustrations, comic strips, or other visual representations (Fisher and Frey, 2007).

Furthermore, other researchers also emphasize the importance of checking comprehension and providing descriptive feedback to enhance ELL’s language learning. Moreno (2002) says that teachers should set up dialogue journals between teacher and the student so that students can willingly let the instructors know about their struggles/challenges and their strengths. Teachers can also encourage students to write summaries about what they have learned. The instructors should also be asking questions to ELL’s about the content material. Students should be allowed to provide answers and explain processes instead of teachers telling them (Moreno, 2002).

Meaningful Feedback

Austin and Haley (2004), state that ELL instructors can provide written and oral feedback. The oral feedback can include formal and informal conversations with the ELL students, such as conferencing, having impromptu conversations, and making notes. Teachers should keep record of the student progress by writing down their stage of learning (Austin & Haley, 2004). On the other hand, Gronlund, (2004) suggest that teachers should keep developmental and showcase portfolio’s to trace student learning. Portfolio reflections can include comments about student progress, and those reflections can be recorded by the teacher, and or someone who speaks the same language as the student. So ELL’s can fully understand the
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areas that they need to work on. Research highly recommends that teachers shouldn’t be giving feedback with a grade attached to it, because grades often discourage ELL’s from learning, and they often pay more attention to the grade rather than the actual feedback that the teachers give them (Gronlund, 2004).

**Project: Helping Children to Learn at Home**

Ngo argues that support programs should not only be limited to school, and there are ways to go beyond that, such as developing projects like *Helping Children Learn at Home*, which is a parents program that supports ethno cultural parents in creating healthy learning environments in the home, in understanding better and addressing their young children’s learning needs, learning about the Canadian education system, and contributing to the decision making processes in schools and in the community that affects their children’s educational success. And in order for this work, it is important to guide parents to create structures and positive learning environments at home that support their children’s learning needs; and to foster in parents a deeper understanding of the Canadian educational system and promote active engagement in school processes and increased student academic success (Ngo, 2001).

Unfortunately, not all of the schools take this initiative to support ELL learners at home.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Nature of the research

This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach and includes a literature review and data from face-to-face interviews with two qualified ELL teachers. This research explored effective ELL instruction by investigating the practices of two ELL instructors in Ontario elementary schools. One of the reasons why this study focused on qualitative research is due to the fact that it allows the research to have complex detailed understanding of the issue by talking directly with teachers. The study was intended to create the opportunity for the identified experts in this field to share their stories and experiences, and to have their voices heard. Qualitative research minimizes the power relationship that exists between the researcher and the participants in the study. This will happen when the participant openly shares his/her experiences with the researcher. By allowing participants to review and answer the research questions, it will allow participants to interpret the phases of the research (Creswell, 2013, p. 49).

During the initial phase of this study, I conducted a literature review on ELL instruction and I identified significant themes and problems. My next step was to conduct semi-structured interviews with a small sample of teachers. The major focus of this qualitative research include: effective ELL program delivery, pedagogical knowledge, instruction challenges, and integration of ELL students into the mainstream classes. The participants of the study had insight on the topics that I am trying to cover.
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Procedure

Instruments of Data Collection

The data collection involved informal semi-structured interview which meant that the interview included open-ended questions and it created space for new ideas to be brought up during the interview as a result of what the two interviewees say. The interview protocol was handed to participants on the day of the interview to prevent them from over thinking the questions. The participants had five-ten minutes to go over the questions that they needed to answer. In that way, the participants had a general idea about the type of questions that was asked. I felt that it was not useful to give out the questions in advance because they might practice presenting a better answer. The participants knew about my general focus area to give them an idea of what type of questions I ask them. I wanted my participants to provide genuine responses to my research questions. The interview was audio recorded for the purpose of not missing any information and to have engaging conversation with the participants. Please refer to Appendix B to read the interview questions.

Participants

The participants for this study were selected based on the criteria that I created. The participants of this study are ELL teachers who work at the Peel District School Board (PDSB) over an extended period of time so that allowed them to speak to the changes in the ELL instruction they have observed over the years (for example, teaching more than ten years). Thus, the participants also had enough experience working with the ELL students. The chosen elementary schools had diverse student body with an extensive ELL program. Two different schools were contacted in Peel District School Board with the recommendations from the
placement schools. All participant candidates were viewed and because of their availability and their willingness to participate in the study, they took part of this research.

I met my first participant, Karen while I was in placement, and she was the head of the ELL department at that school. Karen was a certified ELL teacher for fifteen years, and also had the support role for eight years. Karen worked as a classroom teacher the first for couple of years, and then completed her additional qualification (AQ) in English as a Second Language. Karen was exclusively an ELL teacher until she decided to get another (AQ) in special education. During her eight years of her teaching career, she was exclusively an ESL teacher. And she was in the classroom just supporting the ELL’s.

My other participant, Michelle worked as an ELL teacher over twenty years. She mainly taught combined junior class of only ESL students. After that, she said she worked in schools where the ESL students were in the mainstream classroom. Unlike Karen, Michelle had the opportunity to teach English abroad in Japan. Both of my participants had dual role as in school support and as an ELL instructor.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

After each interview was conducted, it was promptly transcribed and meticulously analyzed for common themes and ideas. I organized my data by highlighting common themes and visually grouping data for each theme together in chart form. Since the literature review was used as a guide when constructing interview questions, it was also used as a guide when identifying recurrent themes in the interview data. Many themes that arose in the current literature were also evident in the findings of my interviews.
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There are five themes or ideas that continued to appear throughout the interviews. The first theme is on professional growth that focused on the training received, being up-to-date with the current research, being flexible and resourceful, being aware of the cultural differences. The second theme is on collaboration that focused on joint planning, small group work, support teaching, team teaching. The fourth theme is on effective ELL models that focused on pull in and pull out models. And the fifth theme focuses on the effective strategies that were suggested by the participants in this study. And the last theme is on student success, which focuses on the importance of assessment, and feedback and guidance for the ELLs.

Ethical Procedures

According to the ethical review procedures for the Master of Teaching program, the participants that contributed to this study were aware of the nature of the study. When the selected participants agreed to take part of the research, they were given a copy of the consent letter which included information about the overall process of how it will work. In the consent letter, the participants read and agreed that their information was confidential and the content of the research be viewed and presented to the fellow classmates and perhaps at the conference. The participants also had the choice to opt out from the interview process and refuse to be interviewed. They were also able to refuse to answer any specific question which will be asked to them. The interview was audio recorded, the participant knew that the recording was going to be destroyed after when the research is presented and published. The participant was also required to sign a consent form which will be attached with the consent letter to get the approval. (Please refer to Appendix A for the consent letter and the consent form).
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Limitations

There are few limitations of my research because of the limited amount of participants and other factors that may be considered as a limitation, such as the ELL instructor might not have worked with diverse ELL students. First of all, in this qualitative research, only the voices of the ELL teachers are heard. And there are only two ELL instructors that provided some insight to the research, and it limits the researcher’s ability to reach a consensus on what constitutes an effective ELL instruction. This research did not include the experiences of the ELL students. Therefore, the information that is provided by the participants is personal and it reflected their own way of thinking. The participants had their own philosophy and they might totally contradict with the researcher’s statements. And also, the researcher was not able to interview parents to get their feedback about how they find the ELL instruction at the schools. Parent-teacher communication is really important in terms of understanding the program in depth and also knowing what their children are going through at school. The voice of the parents and the ELL students would have provided more information as to how they find the ELL instruction in Canada specifically in the Greater Toronto Region. The biggest limitation of this study is that ELL students and their parents will not be able to contribute to the study and share their experiences.

Strengths

Despite the limitations of the study, there are a few strengths that will be useful for the researcher. First of all, ELL instruction is important in a Canadian multicultural society and it shapes the future of the language learners. By allowing current ELL instructors to share their experiences and their stories, it allowed the researcher to have an idea of the current ELL
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instruction and how it is run in the Canadian elementary schools. The findings of this research allowed researcher to answer the central question. By doing this research, some current issues were addressed by the participants, therefore it allows educators to be aware of the weaknesses and the strengths of the ELL instruction in particular and perhaps might even call for a change in policy of the education. Therefore, the information provided by the participants and the final remarks of the researcher is crucial in terms of looking at the ELL instruction in Canada.
Chapter 4: Results/Findings

Introduction

Overarching themes that emerged from one-on-one interviews, individual summations and focus groups in this study include: (a) professional growth; (b) collaboration (c) effective ELL models; (d) strategies; and (d) student success. Furthermore, subthemes exist within each theme, which helps to narrow the focus of the findings and to allow differences in participant responses to be distinguished. For the purpose of this study, the names of the participants are confidential and they will be given a different name. The current chapter outlines the overall findings of the data collected from the two interviews conducted with Karen and Michelle.

The chapter informally discusses some effective strategies for assisting ELL students and will conclude with a more formal discussion of strategies as outlined by the participants. Both Karen and Michelle were given the same interview questions (please see Appendix B for a list of interview questions). Each interview took approximately 30 to 45 minutes. The participants in this study were experienced teachers with the several years of experience teaching English Language Learners, either in an ELL classroom environment or within a mainstream classroom (sometimes both). In addition to working with English Language Learners, each participant also had experience working with students who received special education at the Peel District School Board. However, Michelle also had the experience being a classroom teacher for several years before becoming an ELL teacher. Excerpts from ELL data sources are provided where appropriate to outline variety of strategies that were practiced over the years.
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Professional Growth

Training Received

The two participants in this study were asked what kind of pre-service teacher training they received to help them teach English Language Learners (ELLs), and each response varied somewhat. The first participant, Karen, was a certified ESL teacher for fifteen years, and also had the support role for eight years. Karen worked as a classroom teacher the first for couple of years, and then completed her additional qualification (AQ) in English as a Second Language. Karen was exclusively an ELL teacher until she decided to get another (AQ) in special education. During her eight years of her teaching career, she was exclusively an ESL teacher. And she was in the classroom just supporting the ELL’s.

Michelle on the other hand, stated that her very first job was an ELL teacher, which was about twenty years ago. She mainly taught combined junior class of only ELL students. After that, she said she worked in schools where the ELL students were in the mainstream classroom. Unlike Karen, Michelle had the opportunity to teach English abroad in Japan. She suggested that all teachers should take an AQ to teach English Language Learners as well as an AQ to teach students who receive special education. She thinks that those AQ’s are helpful for all the classroom teachers, and they should have that before they have their own classroom to be aware of the kinds of things that they need to do.

Being Up-to-Date with Current Research

The participants think that ELL instructors need to be on top of the current research and strengthen their pedagogical knowledge as they can. Karen thinks that having an AQ in many
ways is still general. She thinks that it depends what setting you are in, so at the school that she works at, there is a team of them who are ELL/ISSP teachers who attend professional development to deepen their understanding on how ELL learn. They say that not all the teachers attend the Professional Development (PD) that is provided by the Ministry. And when small groups of teachers in a school are sent off for specific training in a given topic, and they then go back to their school and train the rest of staff/teachers. She says their team passes on the message to their school staff so they are up to date with the current research. Both of the participants said that it is important to stay on top on what the latest development is. Karen enjoys attending fall institutes at the Peel District School Board’s ELL institute to find out what is new, what is this year’s focus, which in turn helps her to give a focus. Board actually provides supply teachers for that day so that is helpful. Oftentimes for PD, she said they have to do after school hours, which they do. But she said a lot of colleagues choose not to. She said that everyone is responsible for our own professional learning. But being the head of the ELL department, she believes she needs to attend workshops or conferences to further educate her team. She said that what is good about Peel is that they provide workshops. So far the most part, she attends the ones that they provide every year. And she also added by saying that, also for her dual role as Special education teacher, she attend those as well. Michelle said that she does her best to attend the PD’s that are available. However, she said she relies on online resources for the most part to find out the newest education trend.

**Flexibility and Resourcefulness**

Both of the participants agreed that the ELL instruction guide that is provided by the Ministry is inefficient. They agreed that it is a very good starting point; there are other documents that have been published like the *Linguistically Appropriate Practice* book which
they find really useful. They said that the Ministry document gives some support but not enough. She added by saying that, if ELL instructors want to provide effective education, they need to be able to go beyond that and look at other ELL instruction documents to broaden their teaching, and to be able to become an effective teacher. Both of the participants said that they don’t refer to the Ministry document a lot. And they said that the models that they practice is kind of based on the superintendence, they get information about what our role is from the superintendent, so they outline the kinds of models that we should use together as a team, and they don’t have ELL teachers doing different type of things in the school. So all the ELL teachers share ideas with each other, and they are all aware of each other’s teaching practices. The head of ELL department at their school outlines the program which encourages them to work within the classroom. Michelle said her colleagues are important source of resource because they share the information with one another. And Karen said that it is when working with the families that you learn the most. They bounce ideas off each other and keep each other updated about the resources that they hear from other teachers. Both participants said that their school invested in resources for teachers and for ELLs in the school. Some of the resources that they made good use of it were CDs, cassettes and videotapes with books that help ELLs. As a result, the participants emphasized the importance of being flexible and to be aware of the resources that are available to provide good education for ELLs.

**Awareness of Cultural Differences**

Interviews took place at the schools that had a very diversity of students. A good eighty percent or close to eighty five percent of the both schools were ELLs. Teachers were respectful of the differences and valued diversity. Cultural and religious holidays were seen as important as the Canadian holidays. Karen said that due to the lack of ELL teachers in the schools, teachers at
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the whole school truly believe that they are all ELL teachers. When majority of the students sitting in the classrooms are ELL, the school values differences and appreciates multicultural diversity.

The participants agreed that every individual is valued and it is important that students’ self-identity is taken into consideration. It is important to show the respect because that helps to bring down the wall of fear. Karen says:

When I take the time to work with students one on one, I make sure that I make them feel that I care about them. And students go: hey she believes in me, I can do it. My way of approaching to ELL students, really impacts their learning. Some of them are very shy and quiet because the environment is new to them. I often learn about their culture and invite students to read or write about their own culture. I value student’s cultural backgrounds and it is the most important thing that is attached to them. So taking something that is so important to them like their culture, and using it for their learning is always beneficial.

When students see that their culture is being appreciated and valued, Karen thinks that all of a sudden, the talking begins. And the teachers make sure that students are not feeling afraid to make mistakes. Karen and Michelle said that just like kids, they all make mistakes, and learn throughout the experiences that we face. Karen said that they also need to communicate well with the parents and value their sayings. Parents are also ashamed of speaking English because of an accent. She claimed that, when teachers create that warm environment, students get that confidence to practice speaking English. They are afraid of the unknown, and they are constantly
have been turned down. The educators need to respect where they come from and the experiences that they had.

**Current ELL Programs**

*Service Gap*

Both of the participants complained about not having enough ELL teachers in the schools. In both of the schools, the ELL teacher capacity was so low; there were about four ELL teachers in each school. Karen said that there are two of them that are full time ESL/ISSP, and one person is 0.8 and then another person is 0.4. So there are three and bit teachers in a population of five hundred and fifty students for the whole school. They believe that having three teachers for eighty five percent of the school is not enough. They emphasize that the board needs to build capacity. They said that in order to provide effective education for the ELL’s, schools need to have enough ELL teachers to work one-on-one with all the students.

One of the participants, Karen was currently doing a dual role in school support, and ELL. So, she is overwhelmed by the amount of work she deals with by being the head of the ELL/ISSP department at the school as well as assisting students with special needs, and ELLs. She claimed that the legal requirement for the special education work that is done with the Ministry seems often to take precedence over her ELL’s. She said that because of the work load, she spends more time with the students who receive special education. And that negatively affects the ELL’s in the school because ELL teachers are often busy working with students with special needs.

On the other hand, the other participant, Michelle an ELL specialist, claims that all the teachers in the school are all ESL teachers. She believes that the job shouldn’t be separated
because classroom teachers should also acknowledge that they will have ELL students in their classroom and they need to differentiate their instruction to meet individual needs. In short, participants concluded that the numbers of ELL teacher in public schools are very low. And sometimes on top of one role, they sometimes get dual role and they have to provide support to students who need other support other than learning a new language.

**Collaboration**

*Joint planning*

Participants said that the ELL department at their schools planned everything together. Their teaching teams collaborate in planning and evaluating lessons or units of work for whole class. Under the direction of the head of the department, the appropriate models are outlined together and Michelle said that it makes their work a lot easier. Karen thinks that careful and extensive planning can help instructors prevent disagreements down the line regarding assignments, grading procedures, and teaching strategies. She also said, they generate a progress sheet together as a group, and they are on the same page. She says the progress sheet for students help them to trace down the students speaking, writing and reading skills. After they trace down where the students are in terms of their skills, the ELL teachers then plan together for next steps.

*Small group work*

Teaching teams at these two schools also plan a brief activity for a small group in the class. Often times the participants told me that one of the team member works with the small group while the classroom teacher takes responsibility for the whole class. They see this as more effective because they can focus on the small group of ELL learners so they can catch up with the whole class. Michelle and Karen think that small group work allows students who have
difficulty talking in class to speak in a small group. And in a small group, students have a chance to participate when they are learning. Small group work is beneficial for teachers and to ELL’s.

Support teaching

The two ELL instructors touched on having the support of the classroom teacher in the school. One team member assists targeted learners with normal classroom activities while the other teaches the whole class. Karen has the role as the support teacher in the ESL role. Because she has dual role, she believes that all the teachers are ELL teachers. She relies on the classroom teacher’s support when supporting ELL in the classroom. As a support teacher, her biggest challenge is to open teachers mind to other ways of teaching students. She also goes into classrooms where there are students who need individual support; she is not in a certain class from 9:00 a.m. till 3. So she finds it daunting responsibility that she is only there for a short period of time. As a result, she models different ways of teaching ELL’s in a specific classroom for teacher to see and to open other ways of teaching the content.

Karen and Michelle said that they need the classroom teacher’s support in order for students to reach to their potential. Oftentimes, when ELL teachers are not in the classroom, the classroom teachers take the role of the ELL teacher and makes sure that students are getting the support that they need. So Karen and Michelle check in with the classroom teacher and support them in the areas that they need help in. When the classroom teachers need some guidance, Karen and Michelle talk to them about the strategies that they can use while they are not there with the student. And oftentimes, ELL teachers find it frustrating when they can’t work with certain students every day. ELL teachers look up to the classroom teacher to really track down student’s progress in detail to make sure that they are being supported.
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**Team Teaching**

Both of the participants emphasized the importance of team teaching with the other ELL staff by sharing expertise, and pedagogical philosophy is important to functioning as an effective instructional connection. The ELL teachers that were interviewed worked collaboratively at the school. The head of the ELL department who was in charge managed the program and shared the outline of the program with the ELL teachers at the school. Karen and Michelle worked with an ELL team at their school, but they said that schools need competent teachers who can address the needs of the ELL students. Michelle says:

> When you get schools that have lower ESL population, and the teachers comfort level isn’t there for the ELLs. That is where the support persons help comes in handy. In our school, we team teach together because I learn something from my colleagues and they learn something from me. I believe that working with a team is absolutely a great thing because it feels like someone has your back.

> And having a team at schools is really helpful because the teaching team share responsibility for planning, teaching, assessing and evaluating mainstream programs. They jointly plan curriculum content, lesson methodology and classroom organization.

**Models**

**Pull In/Inclusion**

One of the participants of the study, Karen had the opportunity to work at schools with large ELL population, and she thinks it is more effective when it is integrated into the general classroom instruction. Pull in model is when ELL teachers go inside the classroom to support
and guide students on their in class work. The participants think that when the ELL teacher’s use a pull in model, students are more concentrated and comfortable in the classroom. She says that what is necessary for some is good for all. So they find that English support that they have in place is good for the other kids. It is effective, when the strategies are common place, vs. giving students oral practice and graphic organizers on a daily basis. So it’s not something that the teacher doesn’t have to think about what he/she has to do for her ELL students. It is already part of the program. So it is not an extra thing, it is how you design the program. Both of the ELL instructors preferred pull in rather than pull out because pull-in models are always the best, because students are integrated into the classroom. And when ELL teachers are pulled inside the classroom, the ELL’s don’t have to be separated from their classroom and therefore, they are not segregated. They think that you would have an inclusive classroom by having all the students to stay inside the classroom and ELL teachers just come in. When there are other kids who are excellent English speaking role models, the best way is to immerse kids. So in primary level, students are integrated into the classroom and provided with support, but as the years get higher, they become part of the ELL program and they are pulled out. Each students needs are different, so it is hard to meet every students need because ELL programs are not individualized to meet specific needs. However, generally speaking, they think that ELL teachers can integrate ELL’s into the regular classroom programming, accommodating and modifying for them, and sometimes you as a classroom support teacher might suggest to teacher as why don’t I take some students outside of the classroom to focus on this specific skill, so we definitely do that. But for the most part, we are talking integration and supporting in the classroom.
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**Pull Out**

Although having students included in the mainstream classroom is really beneficial for students, but at some point in time, Michelle thinks that it is sometimes beneficial to practice pull out at certain times depending on what stage is the ELL student. ELL programs are often designed as a pull out program where the students leave the classroom to meet with the ELL specialist. Although it is difficult to coordinate schedules around specials and lunch times, this type of model may allow the ELL specialist to group students across classrooms or grade levels who are at a similar level of English proficiency for ELL support. Michelle and Karen think that this program model is especially effective for beginning ELLs who need to develop “survival” English skills. As students advance in their English language proficiency, the ELL specialist may take responsibility for teaching a specific subject area, providing background information for upcoming lessons, or reviewing difficult content. However, grouping intermediate ELLs across grade levels or even across several classrooms from the same grade level for instruction bring challenges in effectively supporting students in content area learning.

Participants think that ELL teachers would run into a problem if you prefer one model or the other. If ELL teachers exclusively prefer one model over the other, the ELL learner wouldn’t be able to benefit from the advantages that two models bring. The participants think that the choice of pulling out and pulling in depends on the situation of the children that you work with. Some children might require/need more one-on-one support individually because they are at the beginning stage of the ELL program. For example, Karen said that there are Grade three students that she pulls out for leveled literacy intervention program, so she does a focused reading program where she tries to improve the skills that they already have and just build on. It is very structured and it builds listening skills and listening to vowel sounds, phonics, and sound
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segmentations. So those are the activities that remind the students that they are looking for application of this in their reading and writing. So it’s not a separate thing as drill and kill, but the students know that she is looking for them to apply what they are learning. So when she does a withdrawal, it is more focused on reading and writing specifically.

**Strategies**

*Instructional Strategies*

**Visuals**

Both of the participants said that, the visuals are important resource to use in overall teaching. When teaching ELL’s, the visuals are important because it teaches a vocabulary or the content. Karen and Michelle said that, they have printed cards that include a visual beside the word together that helps the ELL’s grasp the material. Visuals or pictures are a great tool for seeing and understanding. Visual aids allow children the time they need to process what they are being asked to do. They do not disappear into thin air to be forgotten as spoken words or hand gestures do. Visuals can also be sequenced to breakdown and learn a skill bit by bit. Karen says that the aim of visual aids for learning is to improve the independence and self-esteem of all people. They say that visuals can be included in the worksheets as well because if ELL’s are unable to understand what is on the sheet, they can use visuals to understand.

**Dual Language Books/Dictionaries**

One of the participants talked about the use of dual language story books that were used in schools. The dual language books are written in two languages. In one page, the story is written in a certain language and on the next page beside it, the story is written in English. These types of story books allow the reader to understand the story and also familiarize them with the
English language. Karen also said that, at the school that she works at, they also have language dictionaries that ELL teachers and students make use of it. Those dictionaries are often can be found at the school’s library for all students to access. The dual language dictionaries that are found at schools are often in languages that are commonly spoken at that school. Also at the school that Karen and Michelle work, they mainly have ELL’s who are Chinese and Indian speakers. So some students are lucky enough to have the Chinese-English, or Urdu-English dictionaries that are available in the classrooms, or they can be borrowed from the library. When ELL’s have no idea what certain words mean after all the strategies that are used by the teacher, the students can use those dictionaries to look up the words. Karen said that, they also look for older students who may speak the same language as the ELLs, so they know who to go to. So they don’t just support them academically in class, they support them in all areas of school. So when there is a problem during recess and when a student gets completely frustrated because he/she can’t explain what happened in English, the ELL teachers rely on the students who speak the same language to translate.

**Word Wall**

Karen emphasized how important the vocabulary is, when you are teaching your students something new. She says she reminds herself and reminding the teachers that when they launch into the content, there are ELL’s who are learning English in addition to the content, it is so important to teach the vocabulary before diving into the content. She says, oftentimes what teachers used to do is launching into the new unit of study and tell kids that by the way, these what the words mean. Whereas, now, she thinks it’s more like let’s give them the background information. She says when teachers introduce the words, for example; there is a Math word wall, and the words go up on the wall for students to look at. She adds on by saying that all
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teachers no matter if they are ELL instructors or not, they need to explain the words before they launch into the content. Word walls which typically means putting up alphabetically arranged high-frequency words to be displayed on the classroom wall which can be an easy access point for students. She also says that teachers can also include visuals beside some words for students to remember what the word means.

**Graphic Organizers**

The participants said that graphic organizers are important and effective pedagogical tools for organizing content and ideas and facilitating learners’ comprehension of newly acquired information. The ELL teachers think that graphic organizers can be used for all learners, and you reach all learners because it is so effective. They suggest the classroom teachers to use graphic organizers because it actively engages a wide variety of learners, including students with special needs and English language learners. Graphic organizers can be used for any subject matter and are easily integrated into course curriculum. Michelle on the other hand thinks that graphic organizers divides the course work into chunks by allowing ELL’s to complete the task one at a time.

**Environmental Strategies**

**Flexible Grouping**

Educators think that no matter what kind of teacher you are, differentiated instruction is the key to a classroom because it is helpful for diverse learners in the classroom. The participants think ELL teachers should set up groups in their classroom so they can differentiate their instruction by providing different pathways for all learners. They think that differentiated instruction allows all students to access the same classroom curriculum by providing entry
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points, learning tasks, and outcomes tailored to students’ learning needs. ELL teachers said that when differentiated instruction is being implemented at first glance, they are saying that it might appear to be noisy and very active. However, a well-planned of instruction can take place in cycles of large group, small group, paired and individual tasks and learning opportunities.

The participants think that differentiated instruction does not attempt to address each student’s every need during every single class period. Instead, it is the aim that through flexible grouping we can meet the needs of many learners and over time will teach to students’ strengths as well as assist students in performing better in their areas of weakness. They suggest that depending on the ELL’s English proficiency, the basis for grouping varies between responding to student readiness, interest, or learning style. The groups can be teacher-selected and heterogeneous or homogeneous, based on readiness level or interest.

Assessment Strategies

Pre-assessment

When dealing with ELL’s at the school, the participants think that pre-assessment is important to know your ELL’s English level and plan a suitable program for them. The pre-assessment takes place in the beginning of the school year, a semester or an instructional unit. It serves as the first step in the formative assessment process. They think that pre-assessment plays an integral role in successfully differentiating the classroom. First of all, Karen thinks that pre-assessment allows the teacher opportunities to truly understand his or her students, their strengths and weaknesses, interests and backgrounds and the differences between students in these areas. Second, the data gathered from pre-assessments, together with formative and summative assessments, will directly inform the teacher in making meaningful decisions about classroom
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materials (content), activities (process) and end-of-the unit assessments (product). The key benefit of conducting systematic and meaningful pre-assessments is that they enable the teacher to become more purposeful about grouping students during class, in assigning materials and designing classroom activities by using data s/he has gathered about students’ strengths and weaknesses in regard to the content to be studied.

Feedback and Guidance

In teaching, the participants think that feedback plays a key role in formative assessment. The feedback received from formative assessment should be shared with the classroom teacher and with the ELL team to inform future teaching practice. In essence, assessment becomes a roadmap that drives instruction. Assessment information helps the ELL teacher to map next steps for varied learners and the class as a whole. For the student, this feedback is crucial in understanding the desired outcomes are the components of successful learning. In addition, Michelle thinks that the notion of feedback is part of the act of communication between the instructor and the learner, which plays a crucial role in learning. Communicating feedback effectively to the learner is a special pedagogic skill that needs to be practiced in order to be mastered. This skill is called guidance which emphasizes that the learner needs both feedback and guidance to be able to learn effectively.
Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

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

Reflections: The Literature And The Data

ELL Programs

There are many interesting correlations that can be noted between the findings of the literature review (Chapter 2) and the findings of the data collection (Chapter 4). The research states that some schools provide no direct ELL support at all or only for a limited period of time, however, data collection made it clear that majority of the schools had ELL programs for the newcomers and to those who needed it. Both the literature and the data collection made it very clear that schools don’t have enough ELL teachers in the schools. In both of the schools, the ELL teacher capacity was so low; there were about four ELL teachers in each school. The literature emphasized that ELL teachers weren’t able to work one-on-one with the ELL’s because of shortage in staff.
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**ELL Training**

In terms of ELL teacher’s training, they only need to take one course for part 1, and they can become specialist on teaching English if they take other courses. The two participants in this study were asked what kind of pre-service teacher training that they received, and both of them only had their ESL (English as a Second Language) certificate as part 1, and they weren’t specialized. Because they were teaching for quite a long time, they feel confident when they are teaching ELL’s due to their experience in teaching. Both participants perhaps would have felt differently if they weren’t teaching for a long time. However, the literature review suggests that, the ELL teachers are not fully prepared to teach English to ELL’s. Teachers receive Additional Qualification (AQ) to teach English to ELL’s, and they get all the knowledge in theory, but in practical terms, they don’t get to practice what they learn when they are attaining their AQ’s. As a result, this affects ELL’s negatively, and they are unable to receive the education that they need.

**Reduction of ELL Instructors**

Both the literature review and the data collection drew attention to the decline in ELL support staff in the public schools. Because the numbers of ELL students in Ontario schools are increasing, there is a greater need for more ELL instructors. The literature state that, the ELL staffing allocation in Ontario is not specifically designated and is commonly taken away at the school level to meet other pressing staffing needs. In a desperate attempt to protect ‘core’ programs and staff, school officials often sacrifice the needs of ELL students. Many argue that the-restrictive provincial funding formula and the resulting budget crisis resulted in cuts to ELL departments (Regier, 2004).
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The findings support the data collection that is above. The two participants in this study were complaining about having only four ELL instructors at their school. Karen even said that two of them that are full time ELL/ISSP and one person is 0.8 and then another person is 0.4. So there are three and bit teachers in a population of five hundred and fifty students for the whole school. They believe that having three teachers for eighty five percent of the school is not enough. Just like in the literature review, the ELL instructors emphasized that the board needs to build capacity. They said that in order to provide effective education for the ELL’s, schools need to have enough ELL teachers to work one-on-one with all the students. One of the participants response correlates with what the research says. Due to school’s funding and budget problems, some ELL instructors like Karen were given a dual role as a school support and being an ELL instructor at the same time. But the research says that, if the funding is too restrictive, then some schools don’t even have ELL instructors. In short, the research and the findings emphasized the funding problem at the Ontario schools.

Collaboration

There were also a number of correlations in regards to teacher collaboration between the data and the literature review. In both the literature review and the data study, it was clear that many teachers of English Language Learners believe in the importance of collaboration. While the findings mentioned the collaboration with the colleagues and with the staff at the school to support and team teach together to provide better service to the ELL’s at the schools, the research on the other hand suggested for greater collaboration between parents, teachers, staff, and the community to get together to build partnerships and to share their expertise and resources, it to better assist ELL learners.
Models

In terms of choosing the appropriate model for ELL’s, there is an interesting viewpoint about what the research states and what the finding suggests. The literature review state that although pull-out model might have some benefits for the ELL’s, it is mostly seen as an inefficient model because ELL’s are often separated from the mainstream classroom and students don’t have connection with the other learners in the classroom. The research argues that the pull-in model is more effective when the ELL’s are integrated in the classroom, and they learn best when they are surrounded by their classmates because the language learning will happen mostly in the mainstream classroom. As a result, studies have shown that pull-out ELL is the least effective model for English Language Learners. On the other hand, just like the research, one of the participants (Karen) also said that pull-in model is the best teaching models for ELL instructors to adopt. However, Michelle argued that, ELL instructors need to practice pull-out models when appropriate. She thinks that it is sometimes beneficial to practice pull out at certain times depending on what stage is the ELL student. ELL programs are often designed as a pull out program where the students leave the classroom to meet with the ELL specialist.

Strategies

There were several links between the findings of the literature review and the data in regards to effective teaching strategies of English Language Learners. Both the researchers in the literature review and the participants of this study agreed that it is important to recognize the diversity of students. Not all the effective strategies that were outlined in the literature review were implemented by the participants in this study. The correlations between literature review and the data collection were: the importance of using visual aids, dual language approach,
graphic organizers, providing meaningful feedback and guiding ELL’s through their learning journey. The effective strategies that were outlined in the literature review were not addressed or mentioned by the participants were: providing background knowledge to the ELL’s before teaching the content. The participants talked about word wall as a way of providing background but not really teaching the content. Another effective strategy that wasn’t mentioned by the participants was the use of instructional aids, whether if it’s teaching aids or visual aids that help the ELL. Also, the use of technology was seen as an effective tool by the research which helps ELL a lot, and the participants didn’t draw attention to the use of technology at all because of the unavailability of the iPads or computers in the classroom. The research emphasized the importance of checking student comprehension as part of the effective teaching, and effective teachers are responsible for ensuring student learning of the content. Fisher and Frey (2007) argue that important part of the learning process in all content areas is identifying and confronting misconceptions and confusions that can interfere with the learning. On the other hand, the participants did not state that they were checking student’s comprehension all the time. The participants said they provided the accommodations that the ELL’s needed, but they weren’t checking that often if ELL’s were getting the material. Lastly, the literature review stated that it is really important to help children learn at home by getting in touch with the parents and letting them know about what the ELL’s can do at home, so the learning can also happen at home as well. However, the participants were only concerned about what the ELL’s did at school, and they weren’t touching base with what the students were doing at home.

**Recommendations**

Based on the above discussion, there are important recommendations for the administrators and for the teachers to take into consideration. First of all, based on the data and
the findings, there are not enough ELL instructors at the public schools to provide effective education to ELL’s. The lack of ELL staff at the school does have a negative impact on the education that they provide because ELL’s are not getting the good education that they need in order to learn the language. Especially when the ELL instructors like Karen, who have a dual role as a school support, and ELL ends up being overwhelmed by the amount of work she deals with by being the head of the ELL/ISSP department at the school as well as assisting students with special needs, and ELLs. In that case, the legal requirement for the special education work that is done with the Ministry takes precedence over her ELL’s. This clearly outlines the lack of support that ELL’s get from the schools. The research also suggests that the funding issue need to be solved by the ministry in order for ELL instruction to be effective. Ngo (2001) also mentions the importance of funding by the school boards. More resources need to be invested in ELL education because ELL learners needs to be entitled to pedagogical ELL instruction as well as professional support to deal with a psychosocial factors to deal with illiteracy, social alienation, challenges to cultural identity.

Moreover, there are other suggestions for ELL educators. First of all, because of the lack of time spend with the each ELL’s at the schools, they don’t have the opportunity to experience ELL’s grow. When they do have little bit of time, the ELL instructors need to be aware of the instructional strategies that the research outlines to be effective, and they should implement them in their ELL program. Because ELL instructors lack of availability most of the time, they need to collaborate well with the classroom teachers to keep track of student progress. ELL instructors and the classroom teachers need to know ELL’s abilities and their literacy background in order to help them more efficiently. In addition to recognizing student literacies, teachers need to ensure that the kinds of assignments that English Language Learners receive are as meaningful
as the assignments received by native English-speaking students. In order for students to succeed, they need to be given assignments that they are motivated to complete.

Lastly, based on the findings and the research, the ELL instructors as well as classroom teachers need to be fully prepared and trained to teach ELL’s. Based on what the participants said in the findings, when the ELL instructors don’t have the time to teach the ELL’s, then they rely on the classroom teacher to do the work for them, and sometimes they are not ELL trained. As a result of that, the classroom teacher wouldn’t be aware of the effective strategy to use in order to help the ELL’s in the classroom. They would also not have the time to work one-on-one with ELL’s in the classroom because they have to deal with the rest of the students in the classroom.

Implications

For the Educational Community

The findings of this study have great implications for teachers and researchers alike for many reasons. First of all, the schools value linguistic and cultural diversity of the ELLs, but the school boards are not funded enough by the Ministry to provide sufficient staff to each school. The Ministry of Education in Ontario needs to address the issue of budget, therefore schools can overcome understaffing. Secondly, the understaffing of ELL instructors at the schools leads the classroom teachers to do the best they can to help the ELLs in their classroom without proper ELL training. More ELL specialists are required at the schools so that the ELL students shouldn’t be looking up to classroom teachers help all the time.
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Furthermore, it is clear that there are some gaps in English Language education, and teachers need to be made aware of those gaps. Not only do teachers need to be made aware of those gaps, but so do educational institutions. The evidence of this study has proven that there are serious concerns in ELL education for pre-service teachers. It is obvious then that something needs to be done to remedy this. Many teachers do not feel as though they have been adequately prepared to teach English Language Learners by their faculties of education and this need to change.

On the other hand, Teacher’s colleges in Ontario do not provide future teachers with the kind of training that they need in order to be successful at devising strategies to teach their English Language Learners, and this needs to change. When the teachers are out in the teaching field, they feel that the Ministry document does not give enough support, and they need to go beyond that and look at other ESL instruction documents to broaden their teaching, and to be able to become an effective teacher. The Ministry document needs to be revised and edited in order to be the great source for teachers so they can have that piece of material to refer back to each time without looking for additional sources.

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

For the Researcher/Teacher

This study has been of importance to me as a teacher and researcher, because it has taught me the importance of recognizing gaps and failings in the education system. It has taught me to question the system. As a young child who was also didn’t receive enough support from the ELL instructors, I struggled a lot being in the ELL program for quite long time. I found that while the ELL curriculum aims to focus on the development of language skills, it did not provide me with adequate support in learning English. Because it affected me so much, I felt the need to deeply investigate how the programs were run in Ontario. As a teacher, it will be important for me to be aware of how and where the education system may be failing so that I can work to remedy the situation, if not on a greater scale, at least in my own classroom. This study allowed me to realize the deeper issues with ELL education today, or what those issues are. I am much more aware now and believe that it will help me to become a better teacher. As someone who hopes to teach in metropolitan cities like Toronto and it is surroundings, I now know that a large percentage of my students will likely be English Language Learners.

Limitations

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

Another limitation is that English Language Learners themselves were not utilized as active participants in this study. First, I did not interview ELLs as a part of my research. Much could have been determined about the level of success experienced by students had they been interviewed as a part of the research. I also did not have the opportunity to watch ELL instructors teach or deliver a lesson to see the kind of instructional strategies they use. The classroom teachers who collaborated with the ELL instructors were not part of this study, and their insight on effective instructional strategies would have been helpful for this study.

Further Study

There are two areas for further study that I would suggest to researchers. First, I believe that it would be important to complete further extensive research in order to have a variety of perspective from many ELL instructors to determine instructional strategies that they implement when teaching English Language Learners. It would be extremely useful for researchers to observe ELL teachers in the classroom to track down the instructional strategies when teaching ELL’s. Thus, the teachers as well as the ELL students should be tracked for a period of time to find out if their instructional strategies were helpful to ELL’s. Student progress needs to be noted to determine the ELL’s growth for a period of time. I believe that it would be important for researchers to gather student insights into ELL teaching practices. It would be beneficial to observe junior students who can speak to their teacher’s instructional strategies about how they find them. This would help to determine which practices the students themselves believe to be
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most effective. In short, the further research should also involve more schools in other parts of Ontario to find out teachers and the ELL’s experiences.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I believe that an ideal study would include each of the above elements in order to determine which strategies are most effective for ELLs. This study made evident the many issues surrounding ELL education in traditional elementary schools in Ontario, Canada. The study explored these issues by examining the current literature surrounding ELL education, specifically looking at the impact of teacher collaboration as an approach to assisting ELLs; and the potential need for further preparation that some teachers believed they would need in order to better assist their ELL students. The study then presented the results of interviews with two very experienced ELL teachers and five very important themes were draw as a result of the findings. The overarching themes that emerged from one-on-one interviews, individual summations and focus groups in this study include: (a) professional growth; (b) collaboration (c) effective ELL models; (d) strategies; and (d) student success. First, there was evidence from the interviews to suggest that many teachers do not feel they are adequately prepared to successfully teach such linguistically diverse students upon leaving initial teacher education programs. Second, the findings suggest that teacher collaboration is an invaluable and essential strategy for teachers hoping to deliver effective instruction to ELLs. Third, findings suggest that the effective model has to be pull-in where it includes all the students. However, the findings suggest that there is no one way or another, the model needs to picked depending on the ELL students level. Fourth, the findings suggest that there are several strategies that ELL teachers can implement: visuals, graphic organizers, dual language books/dictionaries, word walls and so on. Lastly, ELL teachers need to keep track of student progress by providing constant descriptive feedback and support.
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Appendices

Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear: ___________________

I am Asiye Mayda, a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching student. This letter invites you to participate in my research study as an interview participant on a graduate research paper on effective English as a Second Language instruction. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this topic as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for this assignment this year is Angela MacDonald. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 40 minute interview that will be 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 informal presentation 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 presentation, or publications. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work will research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your mind any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in this 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,

Researcher name: __Asiye Mayda____

Phone number: ___647 382 0195___

E-mail: __asiyemayda@hotmail.com/ a.mayda@mail.utoronto.ca
Instructor’s Name: __________________________
Phone number: ____________________________

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that my 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 Asiye Mayda and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described.

Signature: __________________________________________

Name (printed): ________________________________________

Date: __________________________
Appendix B: Interview Questions

Name of the participant: ____________________  Position of the participant: ____________________

School Board: ___________________________  Name of the School: __________________________

Time of the interview: _____________________  Date: ____________________________________

The following information will be shared with the participants to inform them about the research focus area.

The research problem:

The structure of the current ELL curriculum has a huge significant impact on ELL student’s academic success. It is important that ELL students should be provided with enough resources so they can better learn the language and they need to be supported and guided by ELL teachers in all of their subjects.

Central research question:

According to the small sample of ELL teachers, what are effective instructional strategies for teaching English Language Learners?

Sub-Questions:

• What do these teachers believe are the most significant challenges they face in supporting ELL students under the current system?

• How do these teachers instructionally respond to these challenges and the impacts they perceive these challenges having on ELL students?

Interview Questions:

1. How long have you been teaching English as a Second Language?
2. How has the ELL instruction guide helped you in lesson planning and teaching? If you could make one big change to the guide, what would it be?
3. How would you characterize effective ELL instruction and why?
4. How do you promote effective ELL instruction amongst your colleagues?
5. When you talk about ELL’s or ESL instruction with your peers, what are the biggest questions or concerns they seem to have?
6. And are there any instruction challenges that you face when supporting ELL students? How do you overcome those?
7. Do you think there is a systematic problem in the ELL instruction?
8. And if there are any, what kinds of changes need to be made?
9. Based on your experience with ELLs, what do they tend to do really well in school? What do they tend to really struggle with?

10. Think about an ELL you’ve worked with in the past who did really well in school. Why do you think that student was so successful?

11. Can you tell me about lesson you team-taught in a mainstream classroom that really focused on language learning as well. How did that go?