Using Culturally Relevant Pedagogy to support ELL Literacy & Language Acquisition

By

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

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Abstract

Developing student literacy is crucial to students’ academic and overall life success (Cummins, 2000a, p. 53), but the literacy acquisition of English Language Learners is hindered by lack of funding for ELL support, teachers who lack knowledge of ELL support, and inability to engage with literacy materials they are given in the classroom (Jones & Carter, 2010). Research says that Ontario teachers feel they are receiving insufficient training to support ELL students, despite the fact that Ontario ELL student populations average at 8% per school (and as high as 92% in some schools [People for Education, 2013].) In addition to a lack of training, it has also been reported that many teachers feel reluctant to work with “low-proficiency ELLs,” and hold “misconceptions about the processes of second-language acquisition [as well as] assumptions (positive and negative) about the race and ethnicity of ELLs” (Reeves, 2006).

Research conducted on how to effectively support ELL literacy and language acquisition has shown the effectiveness of enacting Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995). However, despite the documented success of teachers who have adopted CRP, it remains largely an unrealized educational ideal.

This study explores how a sample group of primary-level teachers use CRP to effectively support student literacy (ELL or otherwise), and the personal and professional factors that influence their decision to actively enact CRP in their practice.

Key Words: English Language Learners (ELL), literacy, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP)
Acknowledgements

This study could not have been successful without the invaluable contributions of many supporters. I would like to extend my deepest gratitude to my MT Program cohort, the Smith family, my research participants, and the OISE faculty for their time and dedication to helping me develop this paper, as well as my personal teaching practice.

To my cohort-mates, thank you for your company during a rewarding two-year process of research, writing, and revision. I could not have asked for a warmer or livelier group of colleagues, and it was a pleasure to share in your journeys of personal and professional self-discovery.

To the Smith family, thank you for uniting with me in spirit and always being a dependable source of encouragement, despite the physical distance that often separated us. I look forward to the day our paths cross again, on either familiar or foreign ground.

To my research participants, thank you for graciously offering your life experiences and insights to further the research on effective ELL support. Your zeal in all areas of education is inspiring, and it is encouraging to know such passionate individuals are guiding and shaping the next generation.

To the OISE faculty, thank you for teaching by example, and being extraordinary educators who invest wholeheartedly in the academic and overall wellbeing of your students. Finally, to Dr. Angela Macdonald-Vemic, thank you for your remarkable positivity and professionalism in facilitating our research program. You were strength when we thought we had no more, and it was only through your tireless dedication that we were able to make it to the end.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context

Research shows that children who start reading from an early age tend to be self-motivated in pursuing higher levels of reading, and that English Language Learner (ELL) students often cannot generate this self-motivation to read because of the language barrier that they face (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Thus, they commonly stop reading in English because they do not see improvement, and they see literature as a challenge and burden instead of a necessary tool for learning (Ibid.). Although literature is powerful in promoting literacy and building a foundation for communication and other developmental skills, the literature that is offered in classrooms often does not take into account ELL learning needs, and is inaccessible to students (Ibid.). As a result, ELLs move at a slower learning curve that the rest of their peers, simply because the language barrier serves as a hindrance to their accessing information.

Teachers aiming to effectively support ELLs must therefore maximize opportunities for students to make meaningful text-to-self connections – that is, taking ideas from a text and relating them to personal experience and beliefs – despite this language barrier. Depending on cultural and academic background, ELL students will engage with and interpret learning materials differently. Therefore, when tailoring lessons and selecting materials for ELL students, teachers must remember that students come into the classroom with diverse lived experiences, and ELL students in particular have a wealth of cultural knowledge that can be integrated into their English learning. Drawing upon different cultural, religious, and social topics engages ELL students in the classroom by giving them an opportunity to share their own experiences in an environment where they might not be able to contribute otherwise (August & Hakuta, 1997; Freeman & Freeman, 2007).
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There are two main factors to examine when evaluating how likely a classroom is to effectively support ELL students: the personal beliefs and background of the teacher, and the background and personal developmental stage of the student (Lucas & Villegas, 2010). A teacher’s personal teaching philosophy and strategy determines the learning atmosphere of their classroom, and consequently, affects the ELL student’s classroom experience (Zhou, 2015).

1.1 Research Problem

A remarkable percentage of Ontario’s student population identifies as ELL – on average 8% within a school, and as much as 92% in some schools (People for Education, 2013). However, statistics show that teachers feel they are insufficiently trained to support ELL students in their classroom (Ibid.). It is widely known that engaging with literature improves student literacy (Lazar; 1993), language empowers students (Ladson-Billings, as cited in Arlette & Lewis, 1998) and student literacy is crucial to accessing “life chances” such as entering university and increasing career prospects (Cummins, 2000a, p. 53), but ELL students are at a disadvantage because they cannot engage effectively with mainstream classroom literacy materials (Jones & Carter, 2010). It has also been reported that teachers feel reluctant to work with “low-proficiency ELLs,” hold “misconceptions about the processes of second-language acquisition,” as well as “assumptions (positive and negative) about the race and ethnicity of ELLs” (Reeves, 2006). This leads to an unfortunate reality where teachers are failing to adequately support Ontario’s increasingly diverse student population, and consequently, ELL students are failing to attain an acceptable level of literacy because they cannot access the material that is given to them in class (Jones & Carter, 2010).
In 1992, Gloria Ladson-Billings coined the term Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) to refer to a teacher’s personal belief that ELL students are linguistically, culturally, and experientially diverse (Lee, 2010, p. 455). Ladson-Billings asserted that “academic achievement of students from culturally diverse backgrounds will improve if schools and teachers conduct classroom instruction in a manner that is culturally relevant and responsive to the students’ home cultures” (Ladson-Billings, as cited in Lee, 2010, p. 455). However, CRP remains largely an unrealized ideal for diverse classrooms, and actual enactment of it is not seen in classrooms as much as it could, or should be (Ladson-Billings, as cited in Arlette & Lewis, 1998).

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how CRP can be enacted effectively in the classroom to promote ELL literacy and language acquisition, and what contributes to a teacher’s active decision to adopt CRP as an approach to teaching. I will present findings from two interviews with teachers who are consistently and intentionally culturally responsive in their teaching. I will explore how these teachers’ life experiences and backgrounds influence their pedagogies to be more culturally responsive, how they choose the materials for their classrooms with ELL support in mind, and what successful integration of ELL support in their classrooms looks like, practically.

1.3 Research Questions

This study was guided by a central question: How is a sample of primary teachers using culturally relevant pedagogy effectively to motivate ELL students in their pursuit of literacy and language acquisition?
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The following subsidiary questions also guided the study in order to explore this topic in-depth:

- What factors in personal, professional, and/or educational background motivate a teacher to adopt culturally relevant pedagogy as a means of supporting ELL literacy?
- How do these teachers select literary material to be culturally responsive to their ELLs?
- What role does the relationship between student and teacher play in the support of ELL literacy? What kind of classroom and/or school culture is most conducive to effective ELL literacy support?

1.4 Background of the Researcher

My interest in the relationship between literacy and language acquisition stems from my personal belief that stories are key to communication, community building, and establishing personal identity. My post-secondary background includes a double major in English and East Asian Studies (EAS), both of which allowed me to explore different facets of language; studying English gave me the opportunity to experience history through the perspectives and voices of countless authors and theorists, and I was able to study the Japanese language through my EAS endeavors. Studying the Japanese language, I developed an interest in strategies for language acquisition, both as a result of my own studies, and as a result of meeting Japanese ELL students who shared with me their personal struggles with studying English. Through my own experiences with studying Japanese, I came to identify conversation as highly effective for acquiring vocabulary, solidifying syntactic structure, and learning fundamental communication skills. I also came to realize that in both my areas of study, I relied on storytelling – both in the oral and the written medium – to gain deeper understanding of culture and language. In utilizing literature in language studies, one is gaining insight not simply into the language in which that piece of literature is written, but into the culture from which that work spawns. Storytelling in the
form of literature also allows language learners to study vocabulary/spelling, rules of formal writing, decoding and gleaning crucial information from a body of text, amongst other things.

As I collected data through reading pertinent literature and conducting interviews, my own experiences in the classroom also informed my research and confirmed my findings. In my first practicum term with the OISE Master’s Program, I had the opportunity to work with an ELL student who had arrived in Canada three weeks prior to the start of my practicum. Working alongside my Associate Teacher (AT), I was able to utilize the strategies I had learned from compiling my literature review to support the ELL student, as well as observe which ELL support strategies my AT applied (and did not apply) in her classroom.

1.5 Overview

In order to explore these questions, I conducted a qualitative study by interviewing teachers who have experience living and/or teaching in a non-English speaking environment, and find out how their experiences have shaped their pedagogy and attitude towards ELL literacy and language support.

Chapter One includes the introduction and purpose of the study, the research questions, as well as how I came to be involved in this topic and study. Chapter Two will present findings from literature pertinent to the research of ELL studies, literacy/language acquisition, and the effects of teacher’s beliefs and pedagogies on the classroom. Chapter Three provides the methodology and procedure used in this study including information about the participants, data collection instruments, and limitations of the study. In Chapter Four I report the research findings and discuss their implications in light of the literature. Chapter Five includes what was learned,
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review pertinent literature on the research surrounding literacy acquisition of English-speaking students, language acquisition of English Language Learner (ELL) students, and the problems that pose as obstacles for ELL support in classrooms. Particular attention is paid to the role of the teacher in ELL support, especially in the selection of classroom materials, and how a teacher’s personal philosophy affects the classroom experience for ELL students.

2.1 The Role of Reading in English-Speaking Students’ Literacy Acquisition

In order to properly identify the obstacles that stand between an ELL student and language acquisition in the standard classroom, it is beneficial to first examine the process of literacy acquisition for an English-speaking, elementary-level student. Research has shown overwhelming evidence for the effectiveness of literature in literacy acquisition (Lazar, 1993); some of the merits of studying literature in traditional and language classrooms include motivation, cultural/intercultural awareness, grammar and vocabulary knowledge, and critical thinking (Khatib, Rezaei, & Derakhshan, 2011). Students who successfully extract meaning from a given text – and are positively reinforced for their success – are typically motivated to pursue more difficult levels of reading (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Reading also develops critical thinking when students take what they have read and share personal opinions in discussions or
group work, as literature can be interpreted on a social, cognitive, and emotional level (Lazar 1993).

For choosing literature that is appropriate for children in the early stages of literacy, Gaffney, Ostrosky & Hemmeter (2008) identify six textual elements that are effective in supporting early reading endeavors: Narrative or informational content, language structures, vocabulary and concepts, rhyme, rhythm & word play, illustrations, and format (Gaffney et al.). As genres, narrative and informational content refer to fiction and non-fiction texts (respectively); narratives encourage anticipation, prediction, and an active imagination, while informational content “expands children’s knowledge of the world” (Gaffney, et al., p. 90). Varying language structure in literature assists in developing a sense of contextual language in early readers, such as dialogue between characters demonstrating conversation, and expressions such as “Once upon a time” that pertain to certain genres. Vocabulary and concepts are similar in that literature showcases different contexts that use different vocabularies, thereby solidifying a child’s understanding of what words can be used in which situations. Rhyme, Rhythm & Word Play engage children in the reading aloud of a book through interesting phonetic variation, and reinforces correct pronunciation of words. Illustrations offer an entry point into literacy for the visual learner. These textual elements are not only vital to literacy acquisition, but can be utilized to optimize the reading experience for ELL language acquisition as well.

2.2 The Role of Reading in an ELL Language Acquisition

In an article exploring why literature (the term here referring to poetry, plays, short stories or novels) is often left out of the ELL classroom by teachers – despite being a recommended component of ELL curriculum according to the Common European Framework of References
for Languages (CEFR) (Jones & Carter, 2010), an interview was conducted at the University of Central Lancashire with twelve English Language teachers. 75% of the sample group believed “literature is a useful source of classroom material,” 41.6% believed “textbooks don’t feature enough literature as reading material,” and 66.6% believed “literature can improve a learner’s awareness of language use in a helpful context” (Ibid., p. 72). However, despite these answers supporting the use of literature as an ELL classroom material, 41.6% of the same sample group also answered that there was “not enough classroom time available for using literature,” 66.6% said “literature often contains a lot of difficult cultural references and low frequency language which students struggle with,” and 50% believed that “understanding literature was not what most learners need to do” (Ibid., p. 72). Although these results were derived from a sample group taken from only one academic institution, they suggest that a common concern amongst teachers is that literature is “inaccessible” to students as a learning resource. With the above responses in mind, Jones & Carter determined three main “guiding principles” for a teaching framework when choosing and using literature: access, activity, and awareness (Ibid., p. 73-77).

Access refers to how culturally relevant and of interest a piece of literature is to an ELL student; a poem about a British seaside town, however well-written and pertinent to a certain culture, will not be as relevant or relatable to a class of students who were not born in, have never been to, or particularly have any interest in Britain (Ibid., p. 74-75). Instead of this, Jones and Carter suggest literature that is cultural, but “does not require extensive explanation of cultural reference points before students can begin to engage with the text” (Ibid., p. 75). Activity is the principle of engaging students in tasks to preface the introduction of any piece of literature, so as to promote critical thinking and a deeper interaction with the text (Ibid., p. 76). Awareness refers to a student’s awareness of the linguistic underpinnings of a text, and
illuminating the “lexical, grammatical, or phonological features” of what they are assigned to read (Ibid., p. 77).

The three principles of access, activity, and awareness relate to the making of self-to-text connections, a comprehension strategy for literacy coined by Keene & Zimmerman (1997). Other research on the effectiveness and necessity of self-to-text connections has been conducted by Elsa V. Hamayan (1994), who made the following findings about ELL language acquisition:

[...] Since the students in question come from cultural contexts that are quite different from those represented in most published materials, especially ESL reading texts, the students end up reading and writing language that is very different from their own language, both in form and content. When children are given instructional materials that are not directly related to their past experiences or to their current daily lives, reading and writing become irrelevant and the motivation to become literate diminishes (Hamayan, 1994, p. 288)

While this journal discusses the problematic nature of implementing traditional literature in teaching low-literacy students, it is suggested that the principle of accessibility still applies: without this self-to-text connection, the act of reading becomes less relevant to students, and students become less motivated to pursue literacy.

In addition to the question of whether or not literature should be used as a tool for instruction for ELLs, there is also the question of whether instructing in in the student’s first or second language is more effective for promoting higher levels of reading. Research has shown overwhelming evidence for the effectiveness of having a child first read in their first language, and then in their second language, or reading the two simultaneously as a form of study (Cheung & Slavin, 2004; Cummins 2000). Michaela Colombo (2008) reports on a series of five studies conducted by the National Literacy Panel (NLP) that “involved random assignment of Spanish-speaking students either to English-only instruction or to instruction that was in both English and
Spanish” (p. 14-15). The studies showed “positive effects of bilingual education on students’ reading achievement on various measures of reading in English” (Colombo, 2008).

2.3 The Role of Motivation in Language and Literacy Acquisition

Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998) describe reading as “a process of translating visual codes into meaningful language” (p. 849); for a child who is in the beginning stages of literacy acquisition, the purpose of and motivation behind reading lies in the successful derivation of meaning from a given word or text. In the early stages of literacy acquisition, a child must also have sufficient scaffolding from an instructional figure to affirm their progress. Whitehurst and Lonigan use the example of a child who, despite being able phonetically read every individual letter in the word “bats,” (/b/, /a/, /t/, /s/), does not understand that the sounds they have put together have created any lexical meaning. However, when a teacher or other instructional figure provides scaffolding in the form of verbal affirmation (saying the word “bats” out loud for the child), or visual affirmation such as a picture of “bats,” the child registers understanding and is motivated to further “decode” other words (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998, p. 849).

For the ELL student, however, the phonetic reading and affirmation of the word “bats” is meaningless unless he or she understands what “bat” means in English; Whitehurst and Lonigan’s findings suggest that simply reading an English word or text phonetically and being affirmed by a teacher figure is not enough to generate motivation for an ELL student, because there is no personal connection to the meaning of that word. While August & Hakuta (1997) suggest that “some minimal ability to segment spoken language into phonemic units is a prerequisite to beginning to read in all alphabetic languages and that bilingualism promotes this ability” (p. 55), it is not enough to create an intrinsic desire to keep developing literacy. Cheung
& Slavin (2004) argue that “bilingual programs do not harm and usually improve the English reading performance of English language learners,” (p. 1) and that “only after the student is proficient in that [first] language and has developed substantial proficiency in spoken English should he or she be transitioned to English-only reading instruction” (p. 1-2). Cheung & Slavin and Whitehurst & Lonigan’s research suggest that when a child has enough literacy skill to understand what he or she is reading in his or her first language, he or she will generate self-motivation when reading in English, and being able to derive meaning from that second, foreign language. Further research is needed on an ELL’s process of generating self-motivation through consuming literature.

Freeman & Freeman (2007) report on research that also reinforces the importance of self-motivation and teacher affirmation in language acquisition; observing an intermediate ELL classroom of students who lacked basic first-language literacy and were not proficient in English, it was concluded that effective teaching “encouraged involvement, provided opportunities for success, and included scaffolding and a variety of graphic organizers to draw on background knowledge and give students access to content” (Freeman & Freeman, 2007, p. 353). The “effective teaching strategies” mentioned above focus on the accomplishments and progress of the student, which draw upon new learning as well as prior knowledge and cultural/personal values that they bring into the classroom. An effective teacher facilitates learning by providing classroom materials that naturally increases student self-motivation.

2.4 Main problems surrounding support for ELL students

2.4.1 Lack of Funding
One of the most significant hindrances to ELL support in schools is the lack of required funding to provide suitable classroom materials for teachers, hire trained ELL teachers, and provide professional development to prepare teachers for working with ELLs (Jimenez-Castellanos & Topper, 2012; Baker & Green, 2008). People for Education’s 2014 report on language support in Ontario schools shows that many schools are understaffed and receive insufficient funding for ELL programs, which often results to ELL funding being fed into other school programs/initiatives entirely, because allotted ELL budgets do not have to necessarily be used to support an ELL program (People for Education, 2013, p. 2). It is also worth noting that the Ontario policy for funding language acquisition support is not based on students’ language proficiency – rather, funding is allotted for “‘recent immigrants’ from non-English or French-speaking countries, on a sliding scale for up to four years; or ‘pupils in Canada’ who speak neither English nor French at home” (People for Education, 2013, p. 2). These requirements do not focus on nurturing language fluency, but instead on giving students “basic ‘survival’ communication skills (People for Education, 2013, p. 2).

2.4.2 Lack of specialized materials/generalization of ELL students

In response to the evidence supporting bilingualism for language acquisition, teachers need to re-evaluate the kinds of materials they use in the classroom to see if they are suitable for the ELLs they are working with. A common problem with selecting literature for a diverse classroom with ELL students is a general lack of appropriate non-English-language resources to choose from (Baker & Blum Martinez, 2010, p. 325). Oftentimes the non-English language resources that are available are produced in English-speaking countries, such as America or Canada, and are simply translations that “frequently utilize unnatural phrasing that can interfere with children’s learning” (Baker & Blum Martinez, 2010, p.325).
Another common obstacle for ELL support is the tendency for academic institutions to “lump inappropriately under the same ‘special needs umbrella’ many different kinds of students, including ELLs, special education students, “at-risk” students, and culturally diverse students more generally” (Bunch, 2010, p. 364). The problem with generalization is the assumption that all ELL students come from the same social, economic, educational background, and that all ELL students learn at the same pace.

2.4.3 Lack of Teachers and Teacher Support

Despite the increasingly culturally-diverse demographic of Ontario schools, there is a lack of teachers to support the growing number of ELL students in classrooms (People for Education, 2013). According to People for Education’s 2014 survey, as of 2013, 8% of students in elementary schools are identified as ELL students, although the percentage of ELL students at some schools is as high as 92%. However, on average, only 36% of elementary schools have ESL teachers, and the ratio of ESL teacher to students in these schools is a staggering 1:73. In addition, 23% of elementary schools with 10 or more ELL students have no specialist ESL teacher (People for Education, 2013, p. 1). These statistics reflect a significant deficiency of support for ELL students in terms of funding, appropriate training for teachers, and oftentimes even finding specialists to teach ESL classes at all.

Aside from the problem of finding qualified ESL teachers, teachers of traditional classrooms are often given inadequate training in how to support ELL students; teachers report feeling unprepared to work with ELLs (Reeves, 2006), and the response to this has been extensive discussion on how to best equip teachers with the necessary skills to help ELL succeed in and out of the classroom (Faltis & Valdes, 2012).
In investigating solutions for this lack of ELL support training for teachers, Lucas & Villegas (2010) proposed four potential program design strategies that could be implemented into university and graduate studies as a way of increasing awareness of ELL needs: adding a course to teacher education, modifying existing courses and fieldwork, modifying pre-requisites, and adding a minor or additional certification (Lucas & Villegas, 2010, p. 308). The most effective strategy, as proposed by Lucas & Villegas, would be to infuse attention to ELLs in all courses and field experiences for teacher candidates, which would ensure that “the experience of ELLs is treated as part of the regular curriculum and sends the message that all teachers in all aspects of their preparation and their teaching careers should be prepared to teach in ways appropriate for ELLs” (p. 309). The problem then would go back to whether there is sufficient funding to enact these programs in universities and graduate-level studies.

2.4.4 Didactic Beliefs and Philosophies of Teachers

Teachers assume a front-line position in not only language and literacy acquisition of ELL students, but also their emotional and academic adjustment into a school environment. Both regular classroom teachers and teachers of ELL students are responsible for properly equipping themselves and their ELL students with the necessary tools for academic success; this means being aware of the needs of ELL students, staying up-to-date with the most effective strategies and materials for teaching English as a second language, and designing classrooms to be inclusive and safe for all students. Lucas & Villegas (2010) explore what an effective teacher of ELLs would look like, and conclude that teachers must to be “linguistically responsive” to their students’ individual needs (p. 302-303). Lucas & Villegas have designed a set of seven guidelines that are meant as a “framework for the preparation of linguistically responsive teachers” (p. 302): 1. Sociolinguistic consciousness, 2. Value for linguistic diversity, 3.
Inclination to advocate for ELL students, 4. Learning about ELL students’ language backgrounds, experiences, and proficiencies, 5. Identifying the language demands of classroom discourse and tasks, 6. Knowing and applying key principles of second language learning, and 7. Scaffolding instruction to promote ELL students’ learning (Lucas & Villegas, 2010, p. 302). The list places emphasis on the importance of preserving and learning about an ELL student’s cultural values and language, the teacher’s responsibility of staying updated on professional practices regarding ELL teaching strategies, and of creating a safe classroom environment conducive to the student’s learning. The list is largely comprised of what Lucas & Villegas call “orientations,” that is, “inclinations or tendencies toward particular ideas and actions, influenced by attitudes and beliefs” (p. 302). While the inclusive classroom is important, it cannot be created unless the teacher of the classroom has pre-existing beliefs that it is important.

Freeman & Freeman (2007) report on research-based findings that suggest three key characteristics of teachers who work well with ELL students:

Teachers who believe in their students often become advocates for them. Moll (1988) identified three key characteristics of effective teachers working with English learners: a) They were able to articulate theory and defend their classroom practices; b) They were able to argue with administrators to allow them to select materials and implement curriculum according to their professional judgment; and c) they drew on support from colleagues who shared their approach to teaching (p. 355).

Teachers who demonstrate these characteristics strongly believe in their own teaching philosophy, and use their philosophy to shape a classroom according to how they think it would benefit their students. These characteristics are also typical of teachers who demonstrate the aforementioned culturally relevant pedagogy.

2.5 Pedagogy as Shaped by Political and Economic Factors
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While personal philosophy is a clear factor in the shaping of curriculum for a classroom, there is also research that suggests pedagogy is not always shaped by the academic sphere of society alone. Constant Leung (2007) proposes that the integration of ESL students into the mainstream curriculum is an “ideologically laden process” (Leung, 2007, p. 265), and that educator pedagogy can be influenced – or more pertinently, oppressed – by policy and practice enforced by a political sphere. Through case studies on England, Victoria (Australia), and California, Leung found that economic and political shifts often bear a negative effect on ESL integration policies. Victoria’s ESL policies were emphasized in particular: Once known as a nation that valued and prioritized support for multiculturalism, Australia’s changing economic sector meant budget cuts for education, and subsequently, the education system’s ESL provision department (Leung, p. 259-260). As a result of these changes in policy, ESL – which was previously a “specific purpose program” – was lumped into a “general purpose program,” meaning a decline ESL general support (Leung, p. 260). To add to the severity of the situation: As ESL support diminished, there was a simultaneous re-definition of literacy by means of “benchmarks,” which assumed “mother tongue fluency in English and formal learning of English from Kindergarten” (Leung, p. 60). This gradual-yet-unspoken re-definition of literacy came about as a result of the “demand […] to produce the necessary human resources for economic competitiveness” (Leung, p. 60); essentially, Australia’s economy simultaneously began putting an emphasis on monolingualism in English while slackening support for ESL students and adults. From this case study, it is evident that despite an educator’s best intentions in shaping curriculum and personal philosophy for an ELL student, political and economic tumult can pose problems for and disrupt language acquisition in the classroom.

2.6 Conclusion
In her book “Learning to Read,” Margaret Meek Spencer (1982) makes assertions that “reading is learned by reading,” and that “what the beginning reader reads makes all the difference to his view of reading” (Spencer, 1982, p. 10-12). The literature shows clear evidence for the importance of choosing classroom materials that allow students to succeed and generate self-motivation to pursue further learning, and this is a finding that applies to both literacy acquisition and language acquisition. In examining the role of reading in an English-speaking student’s literacy acquisition and the role of reading in an ELL’s language acquisition, it is interesting to note the considerable amount of overlap in what is considered effective practice for teaching. After discussing the effectiveness of reading for ELL students, August & Hakuta (1997) mention that “all but one of the programs we found to be successful with English language learners were adaptations of programs also found to be successful with English-dominant students” (p. 4-5). Although reading is highly valuable in both literacy acquisition and language acquisition, teachers must evaluate the nature and quality of the reading materials they choose to use in their classrooms, with the knowledge that English-speaking students and ELL students have different cognitive and social needs.

The findings from this study will offer insight into how a sample group of primary teachers are effectively enacting culturally relevant pedagogy using a combination of experiential and research-based knowledge, in the face of the aforementioned logistical hindrances to ELL support.


Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter is an outline of the research methodology I have chosen for this study. I begin by introducing the procedure used to conduct my research, presenting an overview of the nature of my research, how data was collected for the purposes of answering my research questions, and an explanation of the rationale behind my methods. I then present the instruments of data collection used for this study, looking at the questions participants were asked to answer in order to guide the study. The chapter will then introduce the sample group involved in the study, providing the criteria and methods used to gather the sample group, and brief background information about each participant. Information about the analysis of and conclusions drawn from raw data will be given in the section proceeding, followed by a section on the procedures used to ensure the study’s adherence to OISE’s Master of Teaching ethical review policies. The chapter concludes with an examination of limitations and strengths in the study’s methodological process, and a summary of methodological decisions made in the research process given the study’s purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedure

Following a qualitative framework for research, this study employed semi-structured interviews with educators with experience teaching English Language Learner (ELL) students, both inside and out of the traditional classroom. I chose a qualitative approach to data collection in order to access a broader spectrum of data that pure quantitative research would not provide. While qualitative research commonly limits results to a series of numbers and statistics, qualitative research allows for fluid discourse between the participant and the researcher.
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throughout the data collection process. The semi-structured framework for interviewing encourages participants to speak tangentially while answering questions, allowing participants the freedom not only to elaborate on answers, but to modify and contribute to the questions themselves. Analyzing qualitative data, then, is about “expanding the volume of data,” as opposed to reducing it, and data collection and data analysis occur in tandem (Gibbs, 2007).

I began data collection in this study by exploring literature discussing literacy acquisition (both for ELL students and students whose native language is English), ELL language acquisition, problems surrounding ELL support, and the role of teacher pedagogy and personal beliefs in providing support for ELL students in the classroom. In learning about teacher pedagogy and its effects on the classroom, I recognized that I would have to speak directly with various teachers to understand how different pedagogies translate into different strategies for supporting ELL students.

Qualitative data can be collected through any form of human communication, be it written, audio, or visual (Gibbs, 2007). Because teaching a second language requires developing students’ reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills, teachers of a second language apply different communication strategies to support their students. These communication strategies may include speaking at a slower pace or emphasizing intonation, speaking in a students’ native language, using symbols in writing to communicate phonetic, grammatical, syntactic learning points or mistakes, amongst other practical strategies. Conducting face-to-face interviews with my participants is an opportunity for them to elaborate on these strategies in depth. I also thought that meeting and interviewing experienced teachers would point me to more resources in the area of teaching English as a second language, and further my learning even after the interview process was complete.
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

This study was conducted through a set of informal semi-structured interviews with a sample group of two primary teachers. The semi-structured framework begins with a series of researcher-prepared questions that were presented to the participants before the interview is conducted, followed by a face-to-face interview wherein participants were encouraged to broaden questions and give personal anecdotes that still remain within the scope of the research topic. Questions were deliberately open-ended, with the interviewer actively listening to the interviewee’s answers and eliciting further comments and sentiments. The semi-structured interview is not intended to cast the interviewer as all-powerful and in charge of the entire interaction, but instead acknowledges the interview as a “two-way exchange,” in which a strict interview schedule may sometimes even be rendered superfluous (Barbour, 2008).

While I have chosen a semi-structured interview protocol as the primary instrument of data collection, I recognize that effective data collection involves more than just collecting answers to researcher-formulated questions. Rapley (2001) emphasizes the interview as a “space of interaction,” a space which data is the production of an active discourse between the interviewer and the interviewee. Transcriptions of interviews often fail to include non-verbal communication – such as silence as a prompt from the interviewer, or mid-sentence laughter to indicate lightheartedness in a comment – thus omitting an aspect of interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee that could potentially be analyzed for data. In order to maximize data collection, interviews were audio recorded with participant consent, and detailed notes were taken to ensure that non-verbal communication such as a body language and silent prompts are textually conveyed in the final transcription.
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This study aimed to examine how culturally relevant pedagogy is being enacted in classrooms for the purpose of supporting ELL students, and how teachers’ backgrounds and personal experiences contribute to their stance on ELL support. The interview began with several questions about the participant’s background in education, such as where and how long they have taught in their field, and progress into more specific situational questions about specific instances in their teaching career involving ELL support.

3.3 Participants

This section will introduce how participants were selected for this study, as well as provide a brief biography of each participant and their vocational and personal history. There are two participants, each coming from a different cultural background, but each also with extensive experience in teaching ELL students (either in or outside of the traditional classroom).

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

Each participant was required to have at least four years’ experience teaching in a primary-level mainstream classroom, either in or outside of Canada, and at least one year teaching an exclusively ELL classroom. The minimum requirement of five years teaching experience increased the likelihood of participants having encountered a diverse range of learners, which in turn would have better informed their practices and allowed them to attempt different teaching strategies with different groups of students. This requirement also aligned participants’ answers with the study’s research question, which specifically examines how to support primary-level ELL students.

While teachers were not excluded from participation depending on where they had taught, participants were required to have at least one year’s experience living in a country where
English is not the native language. Said participant must have lived in the country either before or during their teaching experience. Having participants with experience living outside of an English-speaking country gave insight into how personal background shapes one’s pedagogy to be culturally relevant.

### 3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

This study’s sampling procedure relied on a combination of purposive and convenience sampling. Purposive sampling selects participants based on “specific purposes associated with answering a research study’s questions,” while convenience sampling involves participants that are readily accessible to the researcher, and who are willing to participate in the study (Teddle and Yu, 2007; page 77). In this study, sampling was purposive in that participants were chosen according to specific criteria created by the researcher, but also involved convenience-based sampling in that participants were found through the researcher’s social and academic networks. A request for participation was made to board-level ELL support workers, educators at OISE with background and connections in ELL support groups, and alumni or current participants of international English teaching programs such as the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme.

### 3.3.3 Participant Biographies

**Jenny**

The first participant I interviewed was Jenny, an OISE graduate who, at the time of her interview, was in her tenth year of teaching. During her post-secondary education, Jenny volunteered as an ESL support worker with the Toronto District School Board (TDSB). After graduating, Jenny taught English for one year in Taiwan at an international language school, and
then came back to Toronto and started working for the TDSB. Jenny had had experience working in both the primary and junior divisions. Jenny was born in India, moving to Nairobi when she was one-years old, and then to Toronto when she was seven-years old. She spoke Gujarati as a first language, English as a second, and French as an academic third. The school where she was teaching had a mixed student demographic, composed of mostly students from Middle Eastern or Indian backgrounds.

Erin

The second participant I interviewed was Erin, also an OISE alumnus. After graduating in 2008, Erin taught English in Spain for at an international school, returned to Toronto after two years, and started working for the York Region District School Board (YRDSB) in various ESL support roles until she procured a full-time ESL position in 2012. Erin was born and raised in Toronto, and spoke Cantonese as her first language, English as second, Mandarin as a third, and French as an academic fourth. The school where she was teaching had a predominantly Mandarin-speaking student demographic, who were mostly from recently landed immigrant families.

3.4 Data Analysis

Effective data analysis requires more than a mere “identification of themes” from a set of raw data. Bazeley (2009) suggests a three-step model for analyzing data that provides a more comprehensive understanding of how certain themes arise under certain conditions and its significance in relation to the study’s research questions: Describe, compare, and relate. First, describe the context of a study, as well as demographic characteristics of its sample group. After outlining the details of the study, analyze the first theme/category by identifying its
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characteristics and boundaries (how participants talked about the theme; what participants included in their answers, or did not include). Results from the above analysis process are then compared to determine whether participants of certain demographics answered questions in a certain way, or whether themes occur more or less frequently for different groups, and meaningful associations are recorded. Lastly, the researcher should ask further questions about the nature of the theme/category by relating it to other themes and categories, determining whether certain themes arise under certain conditions, and what this means for the study (Bazeley, 2009; page 5).

Analysis for this study began with a transcription of the audio interviews into text, with particular attention paid to conveying non-verbal communication through use of appropriate punctuation, font stylizing, and textual indicators where necessary. Transcriptions were then reread numerous times and analyzed for recurring key words and quotes, which were used to create theme-based categories in the Findings chapter of this research paper. Findings from interviews with participants were compared for commonalities and differences, as well as contrasted with findings from the literature review, specifically in terms of whether participants are practicing what the literature says to be effective ELL support strategies (or if they agree with the literature at all), whether participants’ pedagogies are in line with Lucas and Villegas’ (2010) set of seven guidelines to becoming a “linguistically responsive teacher,” and participants’ thoughts and insights on the purported lack of support for ELL teachers and teaching methods.

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures

Participants were asked to sign a letter of consent prior to the interview process (See Appendix A), of which one copy were given to them, and another retained on record for the study. Interviews were conducted at a time and location suitable for the participant, and every
effort were made to ensure the participant’s comfort before, during, and after the interview process regarding content, consent, and confidentiality. Participants were informed of their right to refrain from answering a question, to modify or retract an answer, and to withdraw from the study at any time. Anonymity of participants were preserved through the use of pseudonyms and omission of individual-specific information.

All questions were presented to participants a few minutes ahead of the interview process, with a reminder that due to the semi-structured framework of the interview, questions can stray from the original interview schedule depending on the flow of conversation. There are no known risks (eg. physical risks, emotional triggers) to participation in the study. Participants were given access to the audio recording of the interview, as well as its transcription. All data was stored on password-protected devices, accessible only to the researcher and the participant, and will be deleted five years after the study is complete.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

In conducting my research, I recognize that a significant hindrance to my methodology is the fact that I am not an English Language Learner, and that any ELL support strategy presented to me by a teacher, however experienced, is perceived differently from how an actual ELL student would perceive it. An interview with one of my participants is, in reality, an exchange between two fluent speakers of English; any attempt to convey a strategy for teaching a specific concept in English would be nullified by the fact that the concept was understood to begin with. This inherent problem to the study becomes a kind of researcher bias that cannot be entirely overcome, but instead minimized to the best of the researcher’s ability through practical application of strategies in the classroom, reviewing of relevant case studies, and ongoing
discussion with figures in the field of ELL support.

Another logistical obstacle would be the size of the sample group, which limits the range of perspectives the study can provide, as well as the number of interview questions the researcher was allowed to ask given the short amount of time with each participant. While the sample group is small, rigorous sampling criteria ensured that each participant has extensive experience in their field, and ensured that the size of the sample group does not detract from the depth of insight in answers given by participants.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of the methodology and limitations to said methodology of this study. The qualitative research approach was chosen so that participants had as much freedom as possible to share their experiences and thoughts on supporting ELL students. Face-to-face interviews allowed participants to demonstrate their teaching strategies visually and verbally, thus providing the researcher with a clearer sense of what participants are offering to ELL students in the classroom. In chapter four, I report the research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report and discuss the findings from interviews conducted with two teachers, one of whom works for the Toronto District School Board (TDSB), and the other for the York District School Board (YDSB). Both participants identified as people of colour (POC) and had experience learning an additional language and living abroad. During their interviews, participants provided information about the state of ELL support in their respective school boards, and discussed how their own pedagogies fit into the culture of their schools. In analyzing participants’ answers, I identified three overarching themes that respond to this study’s research questions: (1) Teachers draw from their own lived experiences to inform their practice and pedagogy, (2) Effective ELL literacy support is a collaborative effort involving teachers, administration, parents, and students themselves, (3) These teachers believed that culturally relevant pedagogy means focusing on the whole child, and supporting learning through any means necessary.

To preserve participant anonymity, I use pseudonyms in place of participants’ real names. Schools and students mentioned in participant anecdotes are also given pseudonyms.

4.1 “I am the ELL” – Teachers draw from their own lived experiences to inform their practice and pedagogy

4.1.1 Intersection of student and teacher background; increased empathy as result

Research shows that the more teachers experience and encounter different cultures, the more aware they are of ELL needs in the classroom (Zhou, 2015). Coming from backgrounds where English was not their first language, and having lived long-term abroad, both saw their personal
experiences reflected in the lives of their students. Jenny described herself as “an ELL student,” and said the following when asked why she was initially volunteered in an ELL support role.

I myself am an ELL learner. I came to Canada when I was 7 years old. Going into Grade Four. And I had – I tell you, like, I could speak English a little bit? I could like, put together sentences. […] I could get away with it, but I had never read a book. Like, I knew how to read and stuff, and I took exams and things like that in Nairobi, so when I came that was like the first time [I had to read in English.] So, personally, that... Is where my ELL interest comes from. Because I, myself, started like that.

Jenny acknowledged that “knowledge of one language informed another,” and through her experience learning an additional language, she learned firsthand that grammar structure between languages could be very different. She mentioned that her first language helped her learn French in school, as grammar structure and masculine/feminine rules for certain words were very similar to that of Gujurati. Coming from a Gujurati background also allowed Jenny to empathize for students who were struggling to understand English grammar, and also personalize teaching to students whose first language was similar to her own (such as Tamil-speaking students.) Jenny also learned basic Mandarin while teaching in China, and based on her own experiences, she empathized for students who she knew were living in Canada without “even being able to read street signs or store names.”

Erin’s experiences learning Spanish in Barcelona also allowed her to empathize with students learning English, and reminded her that not every student learns the same way, even according to the widely-accepted belief that students will learn a language as long as they are immersed in a culture that speaks it.

So you know how people say, "Yeah, you're going to be there, you're so immersed in it, of course you're going to learn." No. I learned nothing. [SL: (laughs)] So, it really made me understand that... First of all, not everyone learns the same. One model doesn't work for everyone. I'm sure it works for some people but... I have friends who were there and they picked up tons of Spanish,
right? But for me, I had to... I'm a learner who -- I have to like, sit down with a book and I need, like, rules. I need like, I need it very structured for me to learn it. Whereas on the other side, some people just immerse themselves in the language and they just get it. Like, like they can start conversing in it and they can start using it. Um... So for me, that made me realize that I can't assume that the kids I have learn a certain way.

Erin also mentioned that occasionally she would confuse Spanish with Mandarin while speaking, because she felt her mind understood language as “English, Cantonese, and Foreign Language.” She empathized openly for students who, like herself, spoke various languages with varying degrees of fluency, because it often leads to confusion in oral communication. She applied this knowledge to struggling students in her English classroom in Barcelona, as she knew many of them spoke more than two languages, and that perhaps they were “confusing all these other things […] they could have two other dialects they speak.” Erin explained that because she spoke four languages and also knew that simply being in Barcelona did not teach her how to speak Spanish, she recognized “understanding the background of children's language” is crucial to supporting them.

Participants realized that, much like themselves, ELL students in their classes were navigating through English grammar by applying what they knew about linguistics from their first language. They recognized that in order to effectively support English language acquisition, teachers always have to “start with what the student knows.” Participants also seemed to agree that it is beneficial for teachers to have a basic knowledge of linguistic rules, so that they are able help students identify grammatical and stylistic differences between English and their first language.

Through their experiences living and teaching in different cultures, participants were not only more empathetic towards students’ struggles learning English, but also more cognizant of
potential struggles in student lifestyle and family situations. Erin’s school scenario is one that is common in certain parts of the Greater Toronto Area: students are largely from Mandarin-speaking homes, where parents or guardians (grandparents, extended family) do not speak any English. Due to the fact that she herself came from a similar upbringing – her parents and grandparents having immigrated to Toronto from Hong Kong before she was born – Erin felt she related with her students on a personal and cultural level, in a way that many other teachers at her school could not. More than just being able to communicate with students using Chinese, Erin believed that her upbringing and cultural background allow her to personally understand and accommodate students who may not be receiving English literacy support at home.

In a similar manner, Jenny’s family circumstances also informed her practice by setting her standard for what a supportive family looks like in a child’s schooling. Jenny spoke of her own experience as a student in the TDSB ESL support system, and she recalled how she would be “pulled out of her classroom for half a day” to learn about Canada and the “Canadian lifestyle,” and then go home and talk to her parents about the English that she had learned, because her parents were enrolled in an ESL class of their own. In describing the relationship between parents and teachers in her Taiwanese classroom, Jenny mentioned that there were parents who would paint outside with their children because, “You know, they were good families.” This suggests that Jenny sees familial relationships as vital to a child’s healthy development, and through the lens of her own upbringing, healthy relationships between parents and children are key to English language acquisition as well.

4.1.2 Cultural Connections
A common topic between participant answers was the idea of making reading materials – and all learning materials in general – relevant and meaningful to ELL students. Both participants emphasized the importance of knowing individual students and taking into consideration students’ backgrounds when selecting materials for the classroom. Jenny described one particular activity she held in her class called “Four Corners of Celebration.” Being in a predominantly Middle Eastern and South Asian community one year, Jenny highlighted the months in between September and December as months of culturally diverse celebrations. She designed the four corners of her classroom to each represent a different cultural/religious holiday – in particular, Kwanzaa, Diwali, Eid, and Christmas. In each corner were artefacts and books relating to each holiday, and students who celebrated certain holidays but did not fully know why they were doing so could read more about their own culture or religion. Jenny encouraged the sharing of personal knowledge and background amongst her students, and encouraged student agency in learning and teaching about their cultural and religious traditions.

In Barcelona, Erin also found that incorporating English literacy materials that involved Spanish culture motivated her students to read. Erin noticed that students were able to make “real life connections” from what they were reading, and when they were interested in content, they were more motivated to understand the language. In the Canadian ESL classroom, Erin mentioned that she is very conscious of choosing materials that introduce Canadian culture to students, but are not so entrenched in Canadian tradition that students are unable to relate to the content.

We want to choose materials that are like, for example, many of them don't go camping. So we can't... If we choose materials talk about purely Canadian culture, without background, like, we need to make sure we pre-teaching all that stuff. Like, be sensitive to what they come with and what they already know, what they know, what they don't know.
While teachers may feel integrating Canadian content into literacy would motivate students to read – perhaps because of the novelty of the content – participants advocated for an approach that engaged students based on what they bring into the classroom. Jenny suggested literacy materials that examine the lives of exceptional Canadians, and intentionally choosing Canadian figures who are of different ethnicities. This way, ELL students begin to recognize Canada as a country that celebrates diversity, and in reading about different Canadian figures, “begin to see themselves as a Canadian citizen.”

Studies suggest using “access, activity, and awareness” as the three guiding principles for choosing literature for ELLs (Jones & Carter, 2010), and choosing to incorporate cultural background into the classroom falls in line with “access,” which refers to the cultural, linguistic, and personal accessibility of a piece of literature. Following all three principles sets students up to make meaningful self-to-text connections.

4.2 “Only as strong as the weakest link” – Effective ELL literacy support is a collaborative effort involving teachers, administration, parents, and students themselves

When asked about factors that influence effective support of ELL literacy, participants shared a number of common answers. According to participant answers, there are four major factors involved in ELL support: (1) Accessibility and quality of teacher training and resources, (2) Teacher cooperation, (3) Parental support, and (4) Child motivation.

Participants talked about three ways in which they would like to be supported: more time to plan and work with ELLs in smaller group settings, more practical classroom resources, and more hands-on professional development. Both Jenny and Erin mentioned that time was something of which they never seemed to have enough inside and outside the classroom. Both
participants agreed that they lacked planning time, meaning time to gather resources for lessons, create lessons, and mark work. Erin, however, felt that her biggest problem was the YDSB’s board-wide initiative to end ESL withdrawal blocks. Instead of having small group sessions with students for 40 minutes at a time, Erin now visited students in their classrooms and stayed for short sessions – sometimes as brief as ten minutes. In terms of supporting ELL literacy, this incurred major repercussions; ELL students who are only given ten minutes of support a day do not have enough time to read through a designated passage of text, let alone develop fluency or motivation to pursue reading further.

Erin attributed this push for integration and lack of planning time to dwindling school budget for ESL support. She admitted that if ESL teachers were allowed to ask for additional planning time, or one-on-one sessions with students, teachers in other special needs or extracurricular departments could demand the same. The problem then becomes a lack of funding, in that outside dire situations involving illness or unexpected circumstances, most schools cannot afford to frivolously hire supply teachers to fill in for regular teachers.

While time is an abstract resource that participants felt they were lacking, another more concrete resource that they were lacking was accessibility to ESL materials and quality professional development resources. Jenny said that around two years prior (to the time of her interview) she had gone to an ELL support training session and discovered an entire network of free online resource libraries openly available for teachers to access. The problem was that no one had informed her of the existence of these resource libraries, and Jenny expressed concern that there are likely teachers who are seeking additional ELL support resources, but do not know where to search because their school boards fail to inform them of what is available.
Despite coming from different school boards, both participants also seemed to be recipients of “trickle-down training,” where teachers receive ELL support training from lecturers who receive their training elsewhere. As a result, the educators who actually stand at the front of the classroom have the least amount of experience with hands-on ELL support, and often feel inadequate to teach ESL. Although both Jenny and Erin have had experience teaching ESL, both still wished to participate in hands-on professional development sessions, and would like to see effective strategies and training in practice before being expected to use them in the classroom.

4.2.1 – Teacher Cooperation

Related to lacking time and resources is the teacher cooperation factor in ELL support. Both participants spoke about the importance of teachers working together to support ELL students, commenting on the benefits of working with other teachers, as well as the challenges of finding time and willingness from other teachers to create a collaborative ESL program. Jenny often consulted other faculty members for translation or cultural advice, and found that it was helpful to have a staff body that is as diverse as the school’s student body. As a mainstream classroom teacher, Jenny relied on other staff members, such as the school librarian and teachers who spoke the same native language as her ELL students’ parents, to maximize the amount of learning resources students at their disposal. At the time of her interview, news had just surfaced that the TDSB would be implementing a new system for tracking ELL progress, and Jenny said that she appreciated that she would finally have a form of communication with the school’s full-time ESL teacher.

This year, Darwin Brown – he is the ESL teacher for the school […] He is going to have an extraction, so he'll take your kids out of the classroom run his own program, and the program has like, ELL IEPs. […] So next year, when [my student] goes to Darwin from September all the way to June […] Darwin has to
fill out a report for him. So let's say I got [my student] again in Grade Six or something like that. [...] Now I would have like, a report. About what he did, which books he did... So you see, there has to be support like that. There has to be a continuous database. So teachers can know... How far... (SL: You want communication?) Of course! Yeah!

More than the IEP system itself, Jenny valued the communication between herself and the other support figures that students work with in the school. In particular, she mentioned the benefits of this system for student literacy, as she could keep a record of what kinds of materials her students were working with in their withdrawal sessions.

Erin’s perspective on teacher cooperation was that there is often not enough of it, and the success of teacher collaboration is contingent on the individual teacher personalities, as well as the dynamic between staff. Erin mentioned that the ESL team at her school tried as best they could to program plan with homeroom teachers, but admitted that it was difficult to co-plan with teachers if they were not willing to “try new things.” She spoke briefly about why some teachers might not be willing to co-plan with ESL support staff.

And it's also a culture, like... Like, co-teaching is something not something everyone wants to do either. So it's a culture of the school, and especially if teachers have been there for like... "This is my 30th year here," Like, they know what they're doing, you know like they've done it over and over again, why do they need another person to come in and sit down with them and talk about when they're doing. It's a waste of time right. They don't have time for that, right? So it's hard. So it's really for me working with the adults is much harder than working with kids. It's hard to change adults.

Erin seemed to believe that seniority can foster stubbornness in some teachers, leading to an unwillingness to try new teaching methods or spend time creating new programs.

4.2.2 – Parental/Home Support

Both participants believed that the difference between a successful ELL student and a struggling one is having parents actively involved in their child’s learning. Active involvement in
student learning means constant communication with the student’s homeroom and ESL teachers, encouraging literacy practices such as reading and oral communication at home, and being readily available for emotional and academic support. Participants acknowledged that although parental/home involvement is essential to ELL English literacy development, the unfortunate reality is that many ELL students spend very little time discussing homework or learning at home, because immigrant parents are preoccupied finding employment or handling other practical living matters. To keep communication open with parents who are busy, Jenny suggested taking time to understand students’ home situations, and offer advice where possible. For example, families who have recently landed in Canada may need assistance in finding housing, work, acquiring a driver’s license, or other practical concerns, and as a way of supporting students and their families, Jenny tried to offer guidance about where to find certain services or complete certain tasks. Erin also recognized that parents often cannot help students with homework or reading in English because they themselves do not speak English, but in response to this, Erin recommended that families should read with their children in their first language, and help students develop basic literacy and critical thinking skills before attempting to do so in English. Erin believed that first language literacy informs second language literacy, because, “If [students] have a weak first language, they have nothing to take to their second language.”

4.2.3 – Nurturing Student Motivation

Access to resources/training, staff cooperation, and home support are meaningless if students themselves are not motivated to learn, and both Jenny and Erin felt that the first step to motivating students is creating a safe environment for learning. In response to an early question
about whether Chinese ELL students gravitate towards her because of her Chinese background, Erin gave a surprising answer.

I'm going to say they feel more comfortable with the teacher they've worked in a small setting. [...] in a small group setting [...] they tend to speak more, they tend to be more open, because it's a smaller group. [...] I've had a colleague who is Muslim and she doesn't speak Chinese and she works in small groups and they gravitate towards her just as much. I think it's more a safety feel. Because in a big group, they feel lost... [...] But in a small group, they're more willing to take risks, so it's a safer environment and I guess they associate it with the teacher. So if there's anything they might approach them. But I don't get approached any more than another teacher.

Erin also added that in a large classroom setting, ELL students “don't know what's going on [because] instructions aren't always clear, so they're shyer or they're less likely to speak out.”

Jenny used her background in psychology to elaborate on this sentiment.

The psychology of belonging is so important. Kids want to feel safe, but the next thing that you want after you feel safe is to feel like you belong somewhere. [...] It feels like a relationship with your environment. So... When you have belonging, you have ownership, you feel safe, that ... That's number one.

Students who are given attention in a smaller group setting are generally more inclined to participate, and by participating, students develop a sense of belonging and agency in the classroom. Recent studies have determined that “the ELL student’s self-confidence is improved in the smaller setting, as they tend to move at a quicker rate because they are being taught at their level” (Campbell, 2015, p. 133).

4.3 “By any means necessary” – Teachers believed that culturally relevant pedagogy means focusing on the whole child, and supporting learning through any means necessary

Participants also talked about supporting literacy and language acquisition using any and all strategies possible, meaning freely using first language, technology, and focusing on overall fluency based on individual student need.
4.3.1 Integration of Student’s First Language

Both participants advocated setting the foundations for literacy through the student’s first language, and then transferring those literacy skills to learning English. Jenny explained that students who come in with a strong literacy background in their first language will most likely experience quick success in learning English, because the “centre in the brain for language is already developed.”

Erin explained that the YDRSB openly encourages the use of first language, and that she agreed with this decision, because it shows respect for what students bring into the classroom (meaning their first language and their culture.) Dual language books, dictionaries, and dual language notices are all ways Erin’s school, with its predominantly Chinese student population, integrated Chinese into the literacy program and other school areas. She stressed the importance of nurturing first language literacy, not only because it increased motivation to read higher level texts, but because reading practices are often different in other cultures. Erin explained how students from a Chinese academic background might not be accustomed to the critical reading methods students learn in Canada.

Reading is thinking about what you read, it's about being able to predict, being able to infer, being able to talk about characters. And connecting it to your lives. So... We use their first language to help them with that piece, to try to hook them into the whole aspect of reading. Because, I don't know, maybe at least in the Chinese culture, I think reading is... A lot of times, they stand up they dictate, they memorize, right? So... It might be a different – it might be a shift in what they think is learning? [...] So then, eventually, when they have enough of the fluency, then they'll be more motivated to read on their own.

According to Erin, it is necessary to incorporate first language into a literacy program because it allows students to understand content, thereby engaging them in the act of reading; this is in line with research that shows bilingual programs usually improve students’ literacy in
both languages (Cheung & Slavin, 2004), and improved literacy leading to increased motivation to read (Cummins, 2000a; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998).

4.3.2 Technology as a Tool

Both participants recognized technology as a vital tool to ELL support. Jenny cited various technological literacy resources she uses to promote and facilitate reading in the classroom, such as BookFlix, an online library that offers picture books and other higher level texts, Google Apps for Education, and language dictionary apps on the iPad. Erin also used online dictionaries and online texts in her practice. Jenny and Erin expressed their appreciation for online resources, as they are able to easily find culturally relevant materials that are often also translated. Jenny added that technology itself can also become a motivator for students to learn, as they may not have much experience working with technology, and so are drawn to the novelty of it.

4.3.3 Focus on Overall Fluency

Outside of using technology to read, participants were also conscious of nurturing literacy by fostering fluency in other facets of English, such as speaking and listening. Participants nurtured speaking and listening skills by allowing students to listen to books on tape and YouTube, and actively engaging students in conversation about topics, both academic and non-academic.

4.4 Conclusion

Both Erin and Jenny understand that simply enacting CRP is not enough to support a student’s literacy and language acquisition. There are other factors that determine a child’s
success in school; in addition to the teacher’s personal practice, other school staff, parents, and students themselves need to work together in order to ensure students are progressing well academically, socially, and emotionally. However, whether a teacher invests in their ELL students at all (and whether they choose to enact CRP) seem to be a product of their own experiences in teaching and in their personal lives. Freeman & Freeman (2007) mention that “teachers who believe in their students often become advocates for them” (p. 355). Jenny and Erin believe in their students because “they are the ELLs.” As a result of experiencing the frustration and anxiety of not being able to speak the native language of the place in which they live, Erin and Jenny saw themselves reflected in their ELL students, and naturally felt inclined to support them. Although the sample group was small, it is likely that this idea of an instinctual protectiveness over non-English speaking students would be a common trend amongst other participants who have lived or taught abroad.
Chapter 5: Implications

5.0 Introduction

This chapter will review the overall findings of this study and their implications for the educational research community, as well as my own personal and professional identity and practice. Following these implications will be a list of recommendations for teacher education and practice, and potential areas of further research regarding this study and its findings.

5.1 Overview of key findings and their significance

Both Jenny and Erin cited personal background as a motivator in their commitment to ELL support. Both participants identify as cultural minorities, and speak multiple languages, which increases their empathy towards ELL students and the struggles that they face in navigating through new language and culture. Not only was personal background a factor in participant attitudes toward ELL support, but it was also evident that cross-cultural experiences fostered in them a greater appreciation for diversity, as well as knowledge of practical ELL support strategies. Having lived and taught in an environment linguistically and culturally different from their own, both participants recognized the value of their experiences abroad to their own pedagogies, and encouraged new or aspiring teachers to travel and put themselves in situations where they “become the language learner.” Participants also emphasized the importance of recognizing the cultural and linguistic demographics of a class, and using classroom materials that are culturally responsive to students’ backgrounds. For example, through her experience teaching in an international classroom in Barcelona, Erin realized using texts that related to Spanish culture was not only meaningful to the students who identified as Spanish, but also leads to class-wide discussions about diversity and cultural differences. In Toronto, Erin implemented a similar strategy in her classroom that is composed primarily of
recent immigrants, choosing literacy materials that discuss and represent the diversity within Canadian culture in an accessible way for her students.

When asked about factors in effective ELL support, the common responses from participants were accessibility and quality of teacher training and resources, teacher cooperation, parental support, and child motivation. Logistical hindrances include lack of funding for ESL departments, which results in less planning time and fewer one-on-one sessions with struggling students. Additionally, these teachers reported that many teachers are unaware of the resources and training that are available to them, and do not commonly pursue professional development for teaching ELL students. Those who do pursue professional development receive “trickle-down” training from educators in lecture-style workshops, which does not allow for hands-on practice teaching with ELL students.

Participants also mentioned the importance of supporting ELL literacy from multiple angles, meaning collaboration between all the staff who are involved in the student’s education, parents/guardians, and motivating the students themselves. Communication between staff ensures that there is consistency in what the student is learning, and what is being reinforced; communication between parent and teacher ensures that student literacy is being supported at home, in both English and their first language. Motivating the student requires a combination of understanding the level at which the student is performing academically, and understanding the student’s personal interests in order to make lessons engaging and relevant.

Both participants agreed that integration of first language is an effective and necessary strategy for instruction that nurtures student motivation to read. When students are instructed purely in English, they are not given the opportunity to demonstrate the skills and knowledge they already possess, and often become discouraged by their inability to participate in and
UNDERSTAND WHAT IS BEING TAUGHT. JENNY AND ERIN REPORTED USING DUAL-LANGUAGE MATERIALS AND TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS SUCH AS TRANSLATION APPS IN ORDER TO INTEGRATE FIRST LANGUAGE INTO STUDENT LEARNING. PARTICIPANTS ALSO MENTIONED UTILIZING OTHER MEANS OF INTRODUCING READING MATERIALS, SUCH AS AUDIOBOOKS, AND ONLINE LIBRARIES.

THROUGH CONVERSATIONS WITH A SMALL SAMPLE GROUP OF PRIMARY TEACHERS WHO ACTIVELY CHOOSE ENACT CRP IN THEIR CLASSROOMS, IT IS EVIDENT THAT A TEACHER’S TRAINING AND ATTITUDE NEED TO BE CONSIDERED DURING HIRING PROCESSES, AND CONSTANTLY RE-EVALUATED DURING A TEACHER’S CAREER, TO ENSURE THAT THE INDIVIDUAL STANDING AT THE FRONT OF THE CLASSROOM IS DEVOTED TO EQUITABLE EDUCATION FOR ALL STUDENTS, ELL AND OTHERWISE.

5.2 IMPLICATIONS

IN LIGHT OF THE FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY, THERE ARE A NUMBER OF IMPLICATIONS FOR THE LARGER EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH COMMUNITY, AS WELL AS FOR INDIVIDUAL TEACHERS, INCLUDING MYSELF. THIS SECTION WILL HIGHLIGHT THE MAIN CONSIDERATIONS FOR HOW TO BETTER PREPARE TEACHERS TO EFFECTIVELY SUPPORT ELL STUDENTS, AND HOW TEACHERS SHOULD PURSUE PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT IN ORDER TO REFINISH THEIR PRACTICE.

5.2.1 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH COMMUNITY

risks either overgeneralizing or being too case-specific; there is no student who will match exactly what the document purports to be “typical” of ELL students. The document seems self-aware of the risk of overgeneralizing, describing the ELL student population as “a richly heterogeneous group, [whose] paths […] to acquire a new language and to adjust to their new environment are also varied and in keeping with their unique needs and experiences” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). Erin alluded to this heterogeneity, mentioning that “not everyone learns the same […] One model doesn't work for everyone.” The Ministry of Education needs to address this diversity in its training of both mainstream and ELL support teachers:

Some sections of the document also sound rather idealistic, given what participants have said about the state of ESL support funding in their schools. In a section outlining a whole-school approach to ELL support, the document makes suggestions that are logical, but lofty; among them are, “Ensure that the planning of programs to support ELLs is coordinated by a person with expertise in ESL/ELD,” “Facilitate collaboration time to enrich and extend teachers’ repertoire of instructional and assessment strategies to meet the needs of English language learners,” and, “Work together to increase the capacity of the whole school in meeting the needs of English language learners” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). While these goals are indeed sensible and conducive to effective ELL support, one must ask whether these goals are practical enough to be achieved consistently in schools – according to participants, common obstacles include lack of funding, lack of access to/knowledge of resources, and resistance to teacher collaboration.

When asked about the most valuable assets in their “teaching arsenal,” participants were quick to attribute their determination and success in ELL support to their extensive experience working with non-native speakers of English. While neither participant explicitly mentioned the
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Ministry document, it was evident that their personal pedagogies were aligned with the Ministry’s goals. This suggests that more important than textbook knowledge of effective ELL strategies is actual experience working with ELLs, which provides teachers with the opportunity to apply teaching strategies that they have learned. Rather than simply providing strategies or suggestions for ELL modifications, school boards should consider allowing staff the opportunity to work hands-on with ELL students, in either a large group or one-on-one setting. In alignment with the Ministry document, this experience would be even more enriching if monitored by a designated ESL/ELL support specialist, who could then provide immediate feedback regarding the teacher’s behavior and performance. The same can be said for teacher education programs and their teacher candidates, who would highly benefit from supervised in-class experience with ELL students before being placed in charge of their own classroom.

The findings revealed another problem: teachers often do not know what is available to them in terms of professional development in ELL support. While it is no mystery that the Ministry of Education and its school boards are interested in and responsible for providing teachers with resources for effective ELL support, the problem lies in the accessibility and knowledge of said resources. When Jenny attended a professional development workshop on ELL support, she discovered that there had been free online libraries for support materials that were accessible to her as a teacher. Up until the workshop, she had had no knowledge of the existence of these resources. Instead of having teachers discovering what resources are available to them through serendipity or self-pursuit of help, school administration and other authorities on the upper echelons of the education system should ensure teachers are informed of what resources they have at their disposal, and actively utilizing these resources in their classroom as well.
5.2.2 Implications for Personal and Professional Identity and Practice

The idea of empathy as something that can be fostered through relevant experience holds a couple of implications for teachers aiming to enact culturally relevant pedagogy. Teachers who wish to effectively support ELL students should evaluate the extent of their experience with multiculturalism and diversity, and their attitude towards ELL students as multidimensional human beings, and ELL learners as a diverse, heterogeneous body.

Although both participants identify as cultural minorities, it is not necessarily their belonging to a cultural minority that raises their empathy towards ELL students. Rather, both Jenny and Erin empathize with ELL students because they themselves have experienced learning a second language, and struggling to overcome a language barrier. Jenny was born in Nairobi, raised to speak Urdu as a first language and English as a second, and globetrotted in her childhood before settling in Toronto, but when asked why she was passionate about culturally relevant pedagogy, she cited her teaching experience in Taiwan as the most significant factor. Erin’s scenario is similar, with her experience learning Spanish while teaching in Barcelona as a major contributor to why she chooses to focus on ELL support in her Canadian teaching career.

There is one other noteworthy trend in participants’ histories: while being raised as part of linguistic and cultural minorities did not seem to be the primary afferter in participants’ attitudes towards their ELL students’ learning, it may have contributed to their decision to teach abroad at all. This is significant; not to say that only people from linguistic/cultural minorities are comfortable working with people from cultures other than their own, but this commonality reaffirms the importance of open-mindedness to diversity and embracing difference instead of being intimidated by it. In response to a question about whether experience teaching or living abroad should be mandatory for a job in ELL support, Erin said that this was an unreasonable
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expectation, but it is important for all ELL support figures to respect and appreciate diversity in
and outside of the classroom. This respect for diversity seems to develop naturally into culturally
relevant pedagogy, as teachers with multicultural experience are more aware of the needs and
struggles of their ELL students, and utilize culturally responsive materials and strategies
accordingly to accommodate said students.

Attitude shapes pedagogy, and professional development in the field of ELL support
begins with shaping personal attitude towards diversity and multiculturalism; this can range from
simple practices such as staying informed about and keeping an open mind towards cultural
traditions and differences, to endeavors that require more commitment but have high impact on
personal growth, such as studying a foreign language or studying/teaching abroad. Formal
professional development involves engaging in hands-on practice and observation with teaching
ELL students, as well as attending professional workshops and conferences offered to teachers
seeking additional support. Attitude also determines what kind of materials teachers choose for
their classrooms, and it seems that teachers with multicultural experience understand the
importance of focusing on student overall literacy, as opposed to English literacy only. Nurturing
student literacy in their first language will lead to a better understanding of how language is
constructed, which will lend to a better understanding of English.

My own journey and motivations for conducting this study also reinforce its findings.
Like my participants, I was raised as part of a cultural and linguistic minority, but it was my
experience studying Japanese as a foreign language that solidified my decision to focus on ELL
support in my teaching practice. Learning Japanese, I discovered that strategies for learning
languages will vary in effectiveness depending on the learner, and studying abroad, I personally
encountered the discouragement of not being able to read proficiently in a language that was
necessary to my daily life. I see my own academic and personal pursuits reflected in the ELL students that I work with, and I am able to place myself in their position and identify with their struggle, which is definitive of empathy.

In terms of the practical implications these findings hold for my own teaching practice, I have recognized that it is not enough to possess diverse experience and open-mindedness; rather, augmenting my own teaching practice for supporting ELL literacy requires sharing my experience with other staff in the school, parents, and the students themselves, and encouraging open-mindedness in others. Although logistical factors such as lack of funding or resources may serve as hindrances to effective ELL support, this study has determined that the most powerful tool in the “arsenal” of an ELL support figure is their willingness to compromise personal comfort for the comfort of the student. Learning a foreign language, living in a foreign country, and bearing the social consequences of being a part of a linguistic/cultural minority are all uncomfortable experiences, but they contribute positively to my pedagogy, and remind me to always consider whether my classroom is a safe environment where students (ELL and otherwise) are set up for success.

In regards to how these findings should shape pedagogy specifically related to CRP and literacy, I am reminded to provide students with as much opportunity as possible to engage effectively with literacy materials, which means giving students access to technological, auditory, and any other means that may encourage interaction with literature. It is also crucial to scaffold and consolidate learning by constantly referring to vocabulary, grammar structure, and literary concepts from what students have read or learned. Students who can successfully make text-to-self connections should be taught to make text-to-world connections – this means being able to apply what they have read to real life scenarios.
5.3 Recommendations

In accordance with the aforementioned implications, the following section will list recommendations in regards to next steps educators can take to improve the current state of ELL support. This list will focus on how to ensure teachers are well-equipped to support ELL literacy, as opposed to how to foster an inclusive space for ELL students in schools, which the Ministry document already discusses at length.

*Ministry of Education, School Boards, Faculties of Education*

- It is important that the education system train and hire teachers who are representative of the linguistic and cultural demographics of the school
  - As much as possible, ensure that every ELL student is represented by at least one staff member in the school who can speak the same language as the student, or identifies with the same cultural background. If this proves to be unfeasible, ensure there are opportunities at schools for students and their families to share their cultures (such as multicultural days, language workshops, etc.)
- Ensure all staff are aware of and utilizing ELL support resources
  - Have accountability for staff in their ELL support knowledge, ideally through regular updates between teachers and principals to ensure teachers are referring to the ELL support document in their lesson planning
- Give both new and veteran teachers opportunities to work with ELL students, ideally with an experienced supervisor who can immediately provide feedback
- Prioritize teachers with experience teaching/living abroad, ability to speak additional languages when hiring ELL support figures
  - Provide ways for teachers to experience culture disparity/language barrier firsthand, such as specialized workshops or foreign language classes

*Teachers (ESL and Mainstream Classrooms)*

- Make literacy materials accessible to ELL students in all forms (technological, textual, auditory) and actively incorporate first language into the classroom
- Personally seek out opportunities to experience multiculturalism and diversity, such as attending community cultural events, learning a foreign language, travelling to foreign countries with the intention of learning about its culture, and/or teaching abroad.
- Use literacy materials that are culturally relevant and tailored to students’ reading levels
  - Make Canadian culture accessible by contrasting it with other cultures, so students can understand what is similar and what is different between their country and Canada
  - Be mindful that certain customs and practices in Canadian culture do not exist in others
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- Motivate students to read using literacy materials that interest them, and reinforce learning with positive language and encouragement
  - Implement a diagnostic survey of students’ interests and background upon their admittance into the class

5.4 Areas for further research

This study has concluded that teachers with diverse and multicultural experience are more inclined to enact culturally relevant pedagogy, and that teachers who have lived/taught abroad – or have experience being a part of a linguistic or cultural minority – are more empathic towards their ELL students. In light of these findings, there are several areas that can be further researched on the topic of using CRP to support ELL students in the classroom:

5.4.1 Examining different pedagogies depending on background

As this study was conducted only using participants who identify as POC with diverse experience, further research can be conducted to explore the results of students taught under a teacher who has never lived or taught abroad, and does not have experience being part of a linguistic or cultural minority. Qualitative research in this area would provide a clearer picture of what kinds of pre-requisite qualifications teachers should have in order to assume an ELL support role. Research can be developed to contrast this study, using teacher participants who do not identify as POC, have no experience living or teaching abroad, or do not speak a language other than English.

5.4.2 Reasons for becoming an ELL support figure

Erin said that her initial motivations for entering the teaching field were fueled by a passion for and desire to teach math, but her search for employment led her to a position in ELL support for the YRDSB. 73% of Ontario elementary schools have students “who require language support” (People for Education 2015), suggesting a high demand for teachers who are capable of – or at the very least, interested in – teaching English as a second language. Teachers such as
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Erin are the ideal candidates for an ELL support position: holding a range of experiences with diversity and multiculturalism, and passionate about teaching ELL (whether that passion was developed before or after employment an irrelevant fact). However, further research can be conducted on teachers who did not intend to pursue ELL support as their final career path, but were hired and remain in the school system as such. Both Erin and Jenny reported encounters with teachers in their schools who did not seem to value their ELL support position or hold it in high regard, and commented on this attitude manifesting in those teachers’ behaviors towards ELL students. Providing a safe learning environment for students, ELL or otherwise, begins with ensuring teachers are personally and genuinely invested in their practice, and not simply motivated by the prospect of stable employment. Shedding light on the current state of ELL support figures and their motivations for teaching would allow for potential re-evaluation of hiring processes, and inquiry into whether the most suitable candidates are being hired to teach in ESL and mainstream classrooms.

5.4.3 Demographics of teachers in schools compared to student populations

In relation to studying teacher motivations for teaching ESL and how this affects teacher-student dynamics in the classroom, quantitative research can also be conducted on the cultural and linguistic demographics of teachers in schools, and how these statistics compare to the cultural and linguistic demographics of students in their classes. This data would not serve to speak to the state of ELL support in schools, as Erin mentioned that student-teacher relationships are not necessarily strengthened by common linguistic or cultural background. Rather, the data would be indicative of whether the diversity of Ontario’s student population is being properly represented by Ontario school staff. Even more in-depth research could be conducted on
minority students’ perceptions of the educational system, and whether it adequately represents multiculturalism through its curriculum and through its staff.

5.5 Concluding Comments

This study was designed to determine how a sample of primary teachers is enacting culturally relevant pedagogy specifically to augment literacy and language acquisition for ELL students. What it has determined is that teachers who have experience with diversity and difference in their personal lives are more likely to adopt an open mind toward diversity and difference in their professional lives. Based on the findings of this study, it seems that teachers who have experience learning a foreign language tend to commit to culturally relevant literacy pedagogy, because with their experience comes the knowledge that first language literacy is crucial to acquisition of an additional language. Teachers with this kind of experience also understand that literacy materials must be meaningful to ELL students in order to motivate them to read; when students are motivated to read, they reach higher levels of literacy, ultimately achieving autonomy in their pursuit of language acquisition.

Jim Cummins (2000) says that, “As educators, we are committed to drawing out the potential of the students we teach; as language educators, we strive to increase students’ capacity to use language to fulfill their personal goals and contribute to their societies” (p. 539). Effective support of ELL literacy and language acquisition requires empathy, cooperation, and recognition that difference should be embraced, not disregarded. Teachers should not expect successful ELL support to look like the student assimilating into the culture of the classroom, but instead for the student’s culture to contribute positively to the class.
References


USING CRP IN ELL LITERACY SUPPORT


Appendix A: Letter of Consent

Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________.

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying how teachers enact culturally relevant pedagogy in supporting literacy in English Language Learner (ELL) students for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Angela MacDonald-Vemic. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 45-60 minute interview that will be video-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you.

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

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

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

I have read the letter provided to me by Sharon Lo and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ________________________________

Name (printed): ________________________________

Date: ________________________________
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The purpose of the study is to gain insight on the topic of how teachers effectively support literacy in English Language Learner (ELL) students using culturally relevant pedagogy. The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes, during which you will be asked a series of questions about your background in education, your personal pedagogy, and teaching practices you have implemented effectively in the classroom. Please feel free to elaborate and expand on questions as necessary, and you are free to refrain from answering any question. Do you have any questions before we begin? If not, I will begin with the first series of questions.

Section A: Background

1. How many years have you worked as a teacher, and where in the world have you taught (if applicable)? What age groups have you taught?
2. In what context are you currently working in a teaching capacity?
3. What is the extent of your experience working with English Language Learner (ELL) students?
4. What personal, professional, and educational experiences contributed to your developing an interest in supporting ELLs and to preparing you to be culturally responsive to their learning needs? Was it always your intention and/or passion to work with ELL students?
5. Do you have experience learning a second language yourself?
   a. What languages do you speak, and where/why did you learn?
   b. If so, would you say that experience has influenced your culturally relevant pedagogy in your work with ELLs?

Section C: Teacher Beliefs

1. In your view, what are some of the primary challenges teachers face in supporting ELLs? Do you feel that teachers are adequately supported and prepared in this area? Why/not?
2. What is your view on the idea that students should not be allowed to use their first language in the process of learning English?
3. In working with ELL students, what have you noticed about the relationship between first language literacy and how quickly students pick up English as their second language?
4. What, if any, are some practices that you believe are important for developing first language literacy of ELLs as a component of you ELL teaching?
5. What does culturally relevant pedagogy mean to you? What kinds of instructional practices and approaches do you associate with culturally relevant pedagogy?
6. Why do you believe that CRP is an important approach when supporting ELLs?
7. In your experience, what are some of the benefits you have observed from a culturally responsive approach to supporting students generally, and ELLs more specifically?
8. Why would you say it is important to have culturally relevant pedagogy when supporting an ELL student?
9. What effects does reading have on a child’s self-motivation in learning English as a second language?
10. What do you believe are the benefits of integrating cultural relevant literature, specifically, to support the literacy development of ELLs?
   a. Can you please describe an experience you’ve had in the classroom that affirmed these benefits?
   b. Has there been a time when this was not an effective tool for supporting ELLs?

Section B: Practices

11. How do you integrate culturally relevant literacy materials into your teaching of ELLs?
12. How do you choose which culturally relevant literacy materials to use?
   a. Can you give me some examples of those that you have used with an ELL in a mainstream classroom? Why these ones? How have students responded to these?
   b. Can you give me some examples of those that you have used to support English language development in an ELL classroom context? Why these ones? How have students responded to these?
13. What have you observed as outcomes when you integrate culturally relevant literature into your teaching practice with ELLs? What, if at all, are the outcomes for students writing, speaking, and listening skills?
14. Please demonstrate/explain a culturally relevant strategy you would use with an ELL student for improving:
   a. Reading skills
   b. Writing skills
15. Can you give me an example of how you integrated culturally relevant literacy materials for a specific student?
   • Who was this student? (where were they from, how long had they been in Canada, what grade)
   • What was your diagnostic assessment of their English language learning needs?
   • What were your learning goals for them?
   • How did you create opportunities to meet those goals? What resources did you use and why?
   • What outcomes did you observe from the student? What indicators of learning and/or engagement did you see?

Section D: Next Steps
16. What factors and resources support you in your commitment to enact culturally relevant pedagogy for your ELLs in their literacy development?

17. What challenges do you encounter doing this work? How do you respond to these challenges?
   a. How might the education system further support you in meeting these challenges?
   b. How might it further support the literacy development of ELLs?

18. What advice, if any, do you have for beginning teachers who are committed to enacting culturally relevant pedagogy to support the literacy development of ELLs?

Thank you for your time and participation.